

Scientific health policies contain delta variant outbreak in China

Alex Lantier**20 August 2021**

In a devastating exposure of anti-scientific policies pursued by Washington and the European powers that have led to millions of COVID-19 infections and deaths, mass implementation of scientific public health policies in China is containing the latest delta variant outbreak there. This highlights the potential for a global campaign of eradication of the virus to end the pandemic, if the resistance of the ruling class internationally to a scientific policy can be smashed.

Last month, after a vast public health mobilization ended the epidemic inside China last year, a new outbreak emerged at the Nanjing airport. The delta variant brought aboard Air China flight CA910 from Moscow infected vaccinated maintenance workers at the airport and rapidly spread across China. Detected on July 20, the outbreak had sickened 381 people by the end of July in over a dozen provinces. While the outbreak at its peak infected over 140 people a day, this number is now falling significantly; broad areas of China are reporting no new cases.

Overall, there were 29 COVID-19 cases reported across China yesterday. Jiangsu province, where Nanjing is located and which was the outbreak's initial epicenter, reported only three new cases. Nearby Shanghai recorded two and the southern border province of Yunnan, the next worst-hit in this outbreak after Jiangsu, eight. The southern industrial hub of Guangdong province reported nine. Hunan province, initially badly hit when tourists from Nanjing brought the delta variant there, reported no new cases.

While the situation in China remains dangerous, this initial success testifies to the enormous power of scientific methods against even the virulent delta variant. Vaccination and lockdowns of affected city districts—together with mass testing of entire cities, including Nanjing, Wuhan and Yangzhou, to find, isolate and rapidly treat the sick—are stopping a virus that is exploding out of control elsewhere around the world.

This comes after the success of the lock-down imposed at the beginning of the pandemic in Wuhan and across Hubei province, from January 23 to April 8 of last year. This strict

lockdown, lifted only after new cases of the virus stopped appearing, ended transmission of the coronavirus inside China except for outbreaks imported from outside China's borders.

In the imperialist countries and most of the rest of the world, however, governments pursued a diametrically opposed strategy. They rejected strict lockdowns or, when forced to implement them by wildcat strikes as in Italy and the United States, lifted them before transmission of the virus was over and programs for mass testing and to track-and-trace new cases were in place.

The resulting difference in health outcomes is staggering. Fewer than 5,000 died of COVID-19 in China, but over 643,000 died in the United States and 1,155,000 in Europe. The contrast is even sharper in the period since the lifting of lockdowns in the spring of 2020.

Since May 1, 2020, after the Wuhan lockdown, two people have died of COVID-19 in China, over 500,000 died in the United States, and over 950,000 in Europe. In India, whose population is similar in size to China's, somewhere between 2.9 and 5.8 million have died, according to demographers' estimates, and mostly left uncounted.

Fighting and ending the pandemic requires an international strategy, however. The Nanjing outbreak underscores yet again the impossibility of ending the pandemic with a national policy. Scientific policies must be employed to eradicate the virus on a global scale—otherwise, given the rapidly-mutating, highly contagious nature of the virus, new variants inevitably develop and spread back to areas where the virus has been eradicated.

The main obstacle is the refusal of the imperialist financial aristocracy in North America and Europe to implement a scientific policy. Instead, they gorged themselves on trillions of dollars, euros and pounds in bank and corporate bailouts and demanded that lives be sacrificed so workers could stay at work to generate profits. As millions died needlessly, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson infamously said: "No more f***ing lockdowns, let the bodies pile high in their thousands!"

Now, as the delta variant is set to provoke record losses worldwide, US and European media are launching a campaign to discredit Chinese health policies. It is more or less apparent that their target is not only China, but opposition in the working class internationally to policies of needless mass death.

In its report “China’s Delta outbreak shows signs of slowing,” CNN demanded Beijing stop trying to limit contagion. While admitting that a “zero transmission” model ... has so far proved broadly effective in curbing widespread transmission,” it said: “However, this approach requires punishing, oppressive measures that many argue are simply not sustainable in the long term, especially as new variants spread and other countries open back up. Experts say fortress territories will eventually have to shift away from this strategy—they can’t stay shut off from the world forever.”

Imperialist media are also trying to exploit the political crisis caused by the pandemic in China itself to discredit a scientific policy of saving lives. In France, the conservative daily *Le Figaro* claimed that Chinese scientists and doctors themselves reject Beijing’s policy and want to adopt President Emmanuel Macron’s call to “live with the virus.” *Le Figaro* cited the recent controversy in China over statements by leading virologist Dr. Zhang Wenhong.

Le Figaro claimed: “Zhang Wenhong, the well-known expert in infectious diseases in Shanghai, expressed doubts in late July about China’s zero-Covid strategy, calling on them to ‘learn to live with the virus.’” It added that this comment “put in question the viability of China’s pandemic management” and “had provoked bitter debate in the country.”

In reality, Zhang is not a supporter of European governments’ politically-criminal approach to the pandemic, and attempts to portray him as such are a fraud. In his latest post on the Weibo internet platform, Zhang unambiguously endorsed China’s health policy: “The international anti-epidemic situation is still very serious and China still faces enormous epidemic challenges. But we must have the firm conviction that our country’s anti-pandemic strategy is currently the best strategy for ourselves. ‘You tell whether a shoe fits by wearing it.’”

Le Figaro was citing a July 29 Weibo post by Zhang that was criticized in China. After this, his employer, Fudan University in Shanghai, began an investigation of potential plagiarism in Zhang’s PhD thesis. In a distorted echo of the imperialist press campaign itself, there were nationalist criticisms of Zhang on Chinese social media for supporting Western culture.

In the earlier July 29 post, Zhang had written: “As to how the world co-exists with the virus, each country gives its

own response. China has given a beautiful response. After the Nanjing outbreak, we will certainly learn more. China must build a shared future with the world, arrive at communication with the rest of the world and return to normal life, while protecting its citizens from fear of the virus. China should have such wisdom.”

Zhang’s statement is ambiguous, because it avoids directly condemning the politically-criminal pandemic policies adopted by the imperialist countries and their allies. This ambiguity is not, however, simply an issue of Zhang’s individual opinions. Zhang, who is a physician and not a politician, is speaking under constraints imposed by his membership in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), a bureaucratic Stalinist party that restored capitalism in China in 1989 and now has deep economic and financial links to world imperialism.

Enmeshed in capitalist relations, and increasingly afraid of the working class at home, the CCP has largely avoided openly denouncing the health policies of imperialist countries. However, the CCP has not prevented Zhang and other Chinese medical and health workers from implementing policies that saved millions of lives in China.

Two important conclusions flow from this. Firstly, Zhang and other Chinese scientists working to eradicate COVID-19 are neither supporters of the imperialist powers’ reactionary pandemic policy nor agents of “the West” against China. The work that they and the working people of China have done is a great service to workers internationally: it shows that science and collective mobilization can end the pandemic.

Moreover, ending the pandemic requires a conscious, international mobilization of the working class, for socialism and against both imperialism and Stalinism, aiming to take power out of the hands of the capitalist financial aristocracy and impose a scientific policy to save lives.



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