

US and international media demand China end “zero-COVID” strategy

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A slew of articles and comments has appeared over the last week or so in the US and international media—the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Guardian* and the *South China Morning Post* among others—on the same theme: Why is China the last to adopt the criminal policy of “living with the virus” of other governments around the world?

The aim of this media campaign is to wind up the pressure on the Chinese government to fall into line. As children are being driven into unsafe schools and workers are forced to labour in unsafe factories to boost corporate profits in the US, Europe and Asia, leading to continuing infections and deaths, the demand is that China must do the same.

The *New York Times* article was headlined, “Why China Is the World’s Last ‘Zero Covid’ Holdout.” Citing so-called experts, it warned that “the approach is unsustainable. China may find itself increasingly isolated, diplomatically and economically, at a time when global public opinion is hardening against it.”

Significantly, all the articles acknowledge the success of China’s policy in suppressing COVID-19 when it first broke out in the city of Wuhan and eliminating further outbreaks through a combination of mass testing and contact tracing, quarantining and lockdowns, as well as mass vaccination once vaccines became available.

The figures themselves are an irrefutable indictment of the policies pursued by governments internationally and an indisputable answer to all those “experts” who claim that it is impossible to eliminate COVID-19.

According to the latest World Health Organisation (WHO) statistics, the United States has had more than 45 million cases and 736,801 deaths and the United Kingdom nearly 9 million cases and 140,206 deaths. By comparison, China has had just 125,810 cases and

5,696 deaths.

The raw figures alone do not take into account the huge differences in population. China’s population of 1.4 billion is more than four times that of the United States and nearly 21 times that of the UK. If COVID-19 had torn through China as it was allowed to do in the US, China’s people would have experienced more than 180 million cases and nearly 3 million deaths.

The real question is not why China is the “Last ‘Zero Covid’ holdout,” but why other governments have pursued murderous policies that have caused, and continue to cause, infections and deaths on a mass scale. The *New York Times* makes no mention of the fact that the “living with the virus” policy of the Biden administration is responsible for thousands of deaths each week, while British people are experiencing hundreds of deaths as the UK government follows Prime Minister Johnson’s edict—“let the bodies pile high.”

The disastrous policy of “opening up” has been dictated by the financial and corporate elites, for whom profits and soaring share prices come before the health and lives of workers and their families. Opposition is rising in the working class. The obvious question arises for workers: If it is possible to suppress the virus in the world’s most populous country, then why not here and internationally?

This points to the political motivation behind the media campaign to pressure China to end its elimination policy.

The *World Socialist Web Site* holds no brief for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), but the Beijing government has implemented a scientifically-based policy that has minimised the death and suffering caused by the pandemic. Moreover, it responded rapidly to an unknown, highly infectious disease,

identified its source and developed methods to contain and suppress it. Other governments could have drawn on this experience, but most did not.

The *New York Times* seizes on the case of prominent infectious disease expert Zhang Wenhong, claiming that he suggested “that China learn to live with the virus” and was “attacked viciously online as a lackey of foreigners.” Far from being an opponent of the elimination policy, Zhang has been a vigorous and popular advocate of it. As the WWS pointed out in August, he came under fire not because he called on China to learn to live with the virus, but because his ambiguous comments in a July 29 social media post were latched onto as evidence of opposition.

In fact, grumbling in China about the government’s policy has been largely confined to an upper-middle class layer. There has been widespread support for the policy. As the *Times* grudgingly conceded: “At least for now, the elimination strategy appears to enjoy public support. While residents in locked-down areas have complained about seemingly arbitrary or overly harsh restrictions on social media, travel is relatively unconstrained in areas without cases.”

A comment in the *South China Morning Post* entitled “Can China afford to stay isolated as world abandons ‘zero COVID’?” goes even further and identifies the real obstacle as being not so much the CCP regime but the broad popular support for elimination. As it states: “When China eventually accepts that COVID-19 cannot be eliminated, its population is unlikely to welcome the world with open arms. On the contrary, they will view the rest of the world as forcing the disease on them.”

The comment points to the underlying reason for the Chinese government’s adoption and continuation of the elimination strategy: its fear of opposition, particularly in the working class, that would arise if it embraced Johnson’s policy of “herd immunity” in the name of the economy and profits.

The CCP is well aware of the immense social tensions that exist as a result of the huge disparities between rich and poor that have arisen from its restoration of capitalism. It is also conscious that the legacy of the 1949 Chinese Revolution remains strong among broad layers of the population, who think that collective social interests should prevail over the private profit interests of the super-wealthy few.

Economics is also a powerful factor in the campaign to pressure China into reopening. The disruption of global supply chains has been a growing feature in the global business media, which has pushed for Southeast Asian countries, such as Vietnam, Malaysia and Singapore, to end their public health restrictions so as to facilitate supplies of everything from semi-conductor chips to palm oil.

Not surprisingly, the *Wall Street Journal* and Bloomberg News have voiced the same demands in relation to China—the world’s second largest economy and largest manufacturer. Alicia García-Herrero, chief economist for Asia-Pacific at French bank Natixis, told the *Journal*: “The fact that China is at the center of most global value chains and with such draconian zero case policies, does have a bearing on the dysfunctional global supply chains.”

For the working class, China demonstrates that the policy of elimination is both possible and absolutely necessary. Continuous sporadic outbreaks of COVID-19 in China make clear that elimination is only possible on a global scale. The social force that is capable of carrying that out is the unified struggle of workers—in China, the US and around the world—on the basis of the abolition of capitalism and the implementation of socialist policies.

The scientific basis for the policy of elimination and the need for the working class to fight for it was elaborated at the October 24 webinar with scientists and workers entitled, “How to End the Pandemic” held by the WWS and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.



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