

Chinese vice premier signals shift from Zero-COVID based on lie that Omicron is mild

Benjamin Mateus
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In the most explicit official acknowledgment that China is lifting its “dynamic Zero-COVID” policy, during a symposium Wednesday at the National Health Commission (NHC), Chinese Vice Premier Sun Chunlan remarked, “The country is facing a new situation, and new tasks in epidemic prevention and control as the pathogenicity of the Omicron virus weakens, more people are vaccinated, and experience in containing the virus is accumulated.”

Sun, who has been overseeing pandemic efforts, added, “The Party central committee and the State Council have always put people’s health and safety first, and optimized and improved prevention and control measures according to the time and situation ... taking small steps continuously.”

It is worth recalling that Sun, who had been present during the initial phase of the partial lockdowns in Shanghai last March, had insisted at the time on the continuation of the Zero-COVID policy even against Omicron. Absent in her statement on Wednesday was any reference to the dynamic application of Zero-COVID.

Instead, Sun said that “preventing the epidemic” would take place through vaccination, especially of the elderly, making medical resources available, and preparing therapeutics, all the while “stabilizing the economy.” Disturbingly, she also said that a critical component of the new approach to COVID will be “traditional Chinese medicine.”

The essence of all this is the turn from a comprehensive elimination strategy aimed at stopping viral transmission to a mitigationist strategy, which accepts an unspecified level of COVID-19. Every country or region that has shifted from elimination to mitigation, including New Zealand, Hong Kong, Vietnam and more countries, has seen rapid, massive

surges of infections and deaths.

According to Chinese health authorities, there were over 36,000 COVID-19 infections across mainland China on Wednesday which appears to have plateaued compared to recent days. However, in the capital city of Beijing, there was a record-setting 5,000-plus cases, while Guangzhou and Chongqing both continued to report over 6,000 cases.

Despite these high figures, Beijing, Chengdu, Chongqing and Guangzhou have lifted their limited lockdown measures and allowed the resumption of businesses at shopping malls, including indoor dining services. Some cities now allow close contacts to quarantine at home and forgo testing for some groups. These shifts only cloud the scope of the surge in new cases where the epidemiological portrait had previously been sharp and exact.

In response to Sun’s comments, Yanzhong Huang, a senior fellow for global health at the Council on Foreign Relations, warned, “In the absence of a road map for an orderly transition, her remarks might trigger unintended responses at the local level that make a rapid, nationwide surge of cases more likely.”

Even *The Atlantic*, a leading purveyor of pandemic misinformation, soberly acknowledged the potential for immense public health casualties in China if measures are loosened quickly and the virus is allowed to exploit the immunologically naive population during the cold winter months, when nearly everyone is sheltered indoors. The article noted that “a massive wave of new Omicron infections could overwhelm critical-care units and leave 1.55 million people dead.”

The claim that Omicron is “milder” and, therefore, pandemic measures may be loosened entirely is a relative matter compared to the Alpha and Delta phases of the pandemic. But it is a dangerous proposition in

the face of an immune-evading and highly contagious pathogen that remains quite lethal and continues to kill more people globally than tuberculosis.

Since the first Omicron wave ended in late February, the US has tallied another 120,000 COVID-19 deaths in the last nine months, a figure far higher than the deadliest flu season in the previous two decades. By late February, population seroprevalence from prior SARS-CoV-2 infection had reached nearly 60 percent and large percentages of the population had been vaccinated and boosted with mRNA vaccines.

For Sun Chunlan to suggest that Omicron's pathogenicity is much lower is a ruse that the Chinese working class must not accept. A population entirely naive to infections and an elderly population that has barely been boosted makes for a dangerous public health threat, especially for workers who will be crammed into factories to ensure Apple iPhones and other commodities are made available for purchase in time for the holiday shopping season.

A compilation of the *World Socialist Web Site's* coverage of this global crisis, available in epub and print formats.

The change in tone by Sun and the CCP, increasingly acknowledging the end of Zero-COVID, is also their response to the series of protests across China which took place over the weekend. These protests were centered among affluent middle class layers demanding an end to lockdowns and mass testing, which they perceive as impediments to their lifestyles.

The torrent of propaganda unleashed by the Western media in response to these protests has attempted to lump them together with far different protests staged by migrant workers in Guangzhou this week and Foxconn workers in Zhengzhou last week against unsafe conditions.

The recent protests among migrant workers in Guangzhou took place after garment factory workers exposed or infected with COVID-19 were removed from their apartments and placed in quarantine hospitals. Motivated by cost-cutting efforts justified by the "Twenty Articles" released November 11, which initiated the lifting of Zero-COVID, the local government kicked the workers out of the hospitals based on the new diminished time frames.

These migrant workers were then sent back to their remote villages and older cities, where strict anti-

COVID measures remain, but were not granted travel passes out of fear of spreading infections to their communities.

These workers are thus waiting in limbo, unable to return home and banned from the factories, while having to take refuge under bridges because they lack the necessary travel passes. Many do not wish to go "home," concerned about bringing the infection back to their families and elders but are being provided with no shelter to safely quarantine.

In their angry demonstrations, the occasional use of the slogan, "No lockdowns!" does not have the same meaning as the "freedom" slogans of the middle class students. Indeed, these demonstrations by workers will be the primary targets for repression by the CCP as the social crisis deepens in China with the lifting of Zero-COVID.



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