

# Chinese Communist Party moves towards “herd immunity” policy

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Under the guise of recalibrating China’s dynamic Zero-COVID policy, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), led by Xi Jinping, is moving rapidly to adopt a policy of “herd immunity,” another term for the mass infection of the population. Confronting economic crisis at home and under the conjoined pressures of international finance capital and the military provocations of US imperialism, the Xi government is scrapping China’s Zero-COVID policy that has saved millions of lives.

The lifting of Zero-COVID measures in China will inflict death on a massive scale upon the country’s population. There is no uncertainty as to the outcome of “living with the virus” in China. The past three years have demonstrated the enormity of suffering and death such a policy inevitably entails: overflowing hospitals, freezers for the storage of corpses, mass burials, and a surviving population wracked by grief and Long COVID. Over 1.1 million dead Americans, over 20 million excess deaths worldwide—these figures reveal what opening a nation of 1.4 billion people to the ravages of the pandemic portends.

A report in Reuters over the weekend, “How many people might die if China loosens COVID restrictions,” offered three scientific estimates in answer to the question posed by its chilling headline. The estimated death toll ranged from somewhere between 1.3 and 2.1 million people.

For over two years, international finance capital has demanded that China lift Zero-COVID, seeking to resume the full-scale exploitation of the Chinese working class and restore access to the vast consumer markets of China. A day after the article warning of a death toll in the millions, Reuters published a financial piece, “Investors bet China’s rally on easing COVID-19 curbs will be furious but fleeting.”

Vast sums of money are flooding into speculative investments in China’s consumer markets, anticipating “furious” growth with the lifting of Zero-COVID. Such growth, however, will not last. The medical chaos and death toll from the mass infection policy will produce a sharp economic contraction. After the initial consumer bonanza, investors would do wisely, the Reuters piece noted, to shift their money to firms producing antigen tests. Capitalism finds nothing quite so lucrative as human misery.

In its justification for lifting Zero-COVID, the CCP follows the playbook of the Western powers and in particular the United States. The Chinese government repeats the lying claim, trumpeted in the Western media, that Omicron is a “mild” variant. It presents pseudoscience as science, promoting traditional Chinese medicine as a cure, in place of Trump’s Ivermectin and bleach. Driven by economic imperatives, without any regard for public health, it presses for a full return to regular work and commerce.

The moves by the CCP bureaucracy toward lifting Zero-COVID predate the recent protests, which have been universally hailed in the Western media. The protests were small, with rallies numbering in the hundreds, drawn almost exclusively from upper-middle class student layers at the country’s elite universities. Their blank-paper signs and slogans—demanding an end to mass testing, presenting public health measures as antithetical to “freedom”—reflect more than mere confusion. They express the interests and frustrations of privileged social layers that find themselves unable to enjoy their affluent lifestyles.

This social stratum is a key constituency of the CCP bureaucracy. Many are members, or aspire to be members, of the party, which is a critical path for their social advancement, but they view Zero-COVID measures as an intolerable infringement.

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In their social content and development thus far, the blank-paper protests in China resemble the right-wing anti-mask, anti-vaccine protests staged in the United States, Europe and Canada in 2020 and 2021. The CCP is responding in a similar fashion, using them as a pretext for further moves toward a policy of mass infection.

Looking to reintegrate China with the world capitalist economy, the Xi government first undermined popular support for the Zero-COVID policy and then adopted measures to lift it. In May 2022, the government cut national insurance funding for mass COVID testing, shunting the financial burden, in the billions of dollars, onto heavily impacted municipalities of the country’s border regions. Many of these cities and regions in turn made the expense of testing the responsibility of the

individuals tested.

With political power fully consolidated in the hands of Xi Jinping at the 20th Party Congress in October, the CCP set about to implement a set of measures for the removal of Zero-COVID restrictions on the country's economic life.

On November 11, the party launched its "Twenty Articles," which eased every component of Zero-COVID and included stockpiling medicines to brace the country for the mass infection that would ensue. These steps were taken immediately before the G20 summit, at which Xi symbolically participated without wearing a mask. The CCP signaled to world capitalism that China was reopening for business.

The CCP is now scrapping Zero-COVID with alarming rapidity. Every few days sees a new announcement—reduced quarantines, an end to mass testing, discouraging people from testing—that signals that even basic mitigation measures are being abandoned.

Regular mass testing is the bedrock of Zero-COVID. Without a scientific assessment of infection rates and community transmission, it is no longer possible to be confident in the numbers coming out of China. Both infections and deaths are now doubtless significantly underreported.

The ongoing policy shift in Beijing was demanded by the imperialist powers and world financial centers for over two years. Using the language of war, they spoke of China's public health measures as mass atrocities, human rights violations and totalitarianism. The *New York Times* ran a piece in January of this year comparing China's white uniformed health workers to Nazis. In a manner that bears startling resemblance to the Opium Wars of the 19th century, in which the imperialist powers opened China at gunpoint to the sale of drugs, US imperialism insisted China open itself to dollars and disease.

The Western media has latched onto the anti-Zero-COVID protests with alacrity, celebrating them as a vindication of "freedom." The *Times* published an editorial statement on Sunday speaking of their "moral obligation" to support the protests, but it made no mention of the death toll that will ensue as the protesters' demands are acted upon. China is teetering on the brink of catastrophe and a festival atmosphere fills the pages of the Western media. They are the cheerleaders of apocalypse.

For the forces in the Pentagon and the White House, the lifting of Zero-COVID means more than just a restoration of supply chains and a much needed source of profit. They see in the unrestrained spread of the pandemic in China, and the millions that it will kill, a means of fomenting intense social crisis and destabilizing the CCP regime. Washington's insistence, dressed in the language of human rights, that COVID cannot—must not—be contained constitutes a form of biological warfare, a preparation for open military conflict that is every bit as important as the new B-21 bomber.

The experience of China's Zero-COVID policy over the past three years is irrefutable proof of two principles. First, it is

possible through coordinated social planning to eliminate the coronavirus and prevent mass death. Second, it is impossible to carry out such a policy on a national basis.

The CCP bureaucracy is, to its core, nationalist. It was the nationalism of Stalinism that drove every one of the CCP's betrayals of the working class in the 20th century. It is impossible to either build socialism or end a pandemic in the confines of a single country. The CCP apparatus has no way forward and is looking to protect its power and privileges as it capitulates to world capitalism. Just as it opened the country's economy to global capitalist exploitation in 1980s and 90s, today it is opening China to disease and mass death.

The "herd immunity" policy being adopted by the CCP will result in the deaths of millions. The spread of the virus in China, moreover, will propel the evolution of new variants that will rebound on the entire world. This catastrophe, however, is not inevitable.

There are growing protests among the Chinese working class, particularly in the southern manufacturing cities, which are of an entirely different character from the blank-paper protests of the upper-middle class. Tens of thousands of workers at the Foxconn iPhone factory and in the garment industry in Guangzhou have come into open conflict with the state. They are fighting against exploitative working conditions, withheld pay, and the fact that they are not adequately protected in the factories from the spread of COVID-19.

The protesting Chinese workers represent a social force that is capable of halting the imminent catastrophe. The most urgent task is the building of an organized opposition to the lifting of Zero-COVID with an internationalist and socialist perspective. Capitalism sees profit in plague and will do nothing to stop the deaths of millions of workers, but the working class around the globe has everything at stake in preventing the pandemic from ravaging China. They must give every aid to the Chinese working class in building a political movement against the lifting of Zero-COVID.



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