

At the behest of world capitalism, Chinese Communist Party opens China to COVID-19

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With extraordinary rapidity the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), led by Xi Jinping, is lifting every aspect of its “dynamic Zero-COVID” policy at the behest of international finance capital. After more than two years in which China has maintained by far the lowest death toll of any major country, the coming weeks and months could see mass suffering and death as a result of this criminal policy change.

The process of lifting Zero-COVID clearly began on November 11 with the issuing of the “20 Articles” that eased guidelines for mass testing, quarantining, border management, lockdowns and more, under conditions in which COVID-19 cases were surging throughout the country.

On Wednesday, China’s National Health Commission announced a 10-point program that drastically further removed Zero-COVID restrictions. The program put an end to mass testing, moved from regulated isolation to a policy of voluntary seven-day home quarantine for infected people, and announced that there would no longer be any large-scale lockdowns. The state-run *Global Times* summarized the new COVID-19 policies as being crafted to “not restrict the flow of people and shall not suspend work, production or business activity.”

The guidelines issued Wednesday followed a meeting Tuesday of the CCP Politburo, which agreed that the top priority going forward should not be saving lives but rather to “strongly boost market confidence” and “promote a high level of opening up to the outside world and make greater efforts to attract and utilize foreign investment,” according to a memo published by Xinhua.

The leading representatives of world capitalism—the heads of the World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organization (WTO)—have assembled in China this week for their “1+6 summit,” where the CCP has officially pledged that China is reopening for business and will no longer impose lockdowns or other public health measures to stop the spread of COVID-19.

The Chinese government presents its changes in the country’s COVID-19 policy as a scientific recalibration. It is

nothing of the sort. The CCP is scrapping mass testing and lifting regulated quarantine restrictions. It is very rapidly moving towards the “herd immunity” policy that now predominates globally, in which capitalist governments have deliberately infected masses of people by lifting all mitigation measures and demanding that society “learn to live with the virus.”

The Western media presents the lifting of Zero-COVID in China as a response to recent anti-lockdown protests, which were centered among layers of the affluent middle class at universities. The CCP, the Western propagandists claim, frightened by the specter of mass opposition to its deeply unpopular COVID-19 policy, is at long last lifting its draconian controls. Not a word of this narrative is true.

A survey conducted in Shanghai in October and November and published by the China Data Lab at UC San Diego found that only 11.9 percent of the population favored “large-scale adjustment” of the country’s Zero-COVID policy. More than twice this number, 24.4 percent, stated that Zero-COVID “must be upheld without adjustment.” The majority of those surveyed, 58.5 percent, stated that Zero-COVID needed “adjustment on specifics” but did not call for “large-scale adjustment.” The policy of Zero-COVID retains immense popular support, and fully 83 percent of those surveyed want it to be continued.

The fact that the China Data Lab survey was conducted in Shanghai is particularly significant. A city of 25 million people, economically vital and with a mass working class population, Shanghai lived through multiple extended lockdowns over the past two-and-a-half years. If one believed the accounts in the Western media, no city would have more widespread anti-Zero-COVID sentiment than Shanghai. Yet when popular opinion is scientifically surveyed, one finds overwhelming support for the continuation of the necessary public health measures to prevent the spread of the pandemic.

The protests cited by the Western media were small, numbering in the hundreds in a nation of 1.4 billion people, and based almost exclusively among upper-middle class

students at the country's elite universities. The protests were staged not with an eye to rousing the sentiment of the broad Chinese population, but to providing photo ops for Western journalists. The protesters issued invitations to all the major international news outlets, who photographed the blank pieces of paper held up at the rallies and wrote ecstatic editorials on the birth of "freedom" in China.

As the WSWS has documented, the moves by the CCP to scrap Zero-COVID predate the protests. In the final analysis, the protests served the social function of legitimizing the policies adopted by the CCP, presenting the opening to the pandemic as an outgrowth of popular demand, as if the Chinese people were clamoring to be infected.

The demand for mass infection in China comes not from the Chinese people but from world capitalism. The *Wall Street Journal* wrote today that "disruptions to businesses [are] threatening the country's status as the world's factory floor." Terry Guo, the founder of Foxconn Technology Group, the company responsible for the mass production of Apple's iPhone in China, which is now facing a shortage of workers in the Foxconn assembly plants, wrote a letter at the beginning of November to the CCP government warning that "strict COVID controls would threaten China's central position in global supply chains." Apple signaled that it was thinking of moving production elsewhere. There were similar rumblings from Samsung, Nike, Volkswagen and other major international firms.

China's Zero-COVID policy saved millions of lives and prevented the virus from ravaging the country. It was not a top-down imposition on society, but the planned and coordinated mobilization of vast collective efforts. The Chinese people sacrificed and worked together to ensure the nation's public health.

The policy was successful, but it was costly. China just reported its November trade data, revealing the worst monthly figures in two-and-a-half years, a result, the *South China Morning Post* declared, of the "harsh toll" the "zero-COVID policy has taken on the economy this year." Mass testing, lockdowns, and the repeated incursion of new variants incubated outside China combined as an immense drain on the resources of the state. The isolation required in order to sustain public health measures in a world where every other government had scrapped all COVID-19 safety protocols compounded the economic dangers. Against the will of the population, the CCP leadership is moving to open up the country in order to restore full-scale production of capitalist profits.

The CCP scrambled to inform investors that China was open for business and the era of lockdowns was over. On Tuesday, Qin Gang, China's ambassador to the United States, delivered a speech to the influential US-China

Business Council assuring it that China was making "dynamic adjustments" to its zero-COVID policy to "smooth commercial exchanges with the United States." His audience included representatives of Amazon, Apple, General Motors, Pepsi, Boeing, Nike, JP Morgan Chase, Dow, Abbot and Pfizer. The message was clear. The Chinese Communist Party assured American big business that access to the Chinese working class would be interrupted no longer.

Similar assurances were delivered in Europe and the UK. The head of the European Chamber of Commerce issued a statement: "The chamber definitely welcomes this sudden shift in policy which, for the first time, indicates an exit strategy [from Zero-COVID]—that's very important." It was, he stated, "most welcome for European business."

On Thursday, David Malpass, president of the World Bank; Kristalina Georgieva, managing director of the IMF; Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, director general of the WTO; Gilbert Hounbo, director general of the International Labor Organization (ILO); Mathias Cormann, secretary general of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); and Klaas Knot, chair of the Financial Stability Board—effectively the general council of world capitalism—all assembled in Huangshan, China for a "1+6 roundtable discussion."

China's Premier Li Keqiang welcomed them and spoke to them of China's economy. He pledged an end to lockdowns and expressed "China's commitment to energizing the world economy through deepening reform and opening-up." "We'll better coordinate pandemic control and social development," he promised, "and maintain a good order for production."

Capitalism brings death in its wake. The real victor in the lifting of China's Zero-COVID policy is the virus. An immunologically naive population of 1.4 billion people is being exposed to infection. China's elderly are substantially under-vaccinated and likely to die in very high numbers. Abruptly given open access to an unexposed fifth of the planet's inhabitants, COVID-19 will spread and mutate, developing new and more virulent strains.



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