

# Who is responsible for China's COVID catastrophe?

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A tragedy of monumental proportions is unfolding across China as a result of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) lifting its Zero-COVID policy and embracing the “forever COVID” policy demanded by the US and European imperialist powers.

It is still very early, but reports coming in from all over the country indicate that China is in the throes of an unprecedented crisis. Hospitals are being overrun with patients and bodies are piling up at morgues with extraordinary speed. At the insistence of world finance capital, the CCP has effectively dropped the pandemic bomb on their own country.

In the span of just one month, beginning on November 11, the CCP scrapped every aspect of Zero-COVID, including mass testing, contact tracing, lockdowns and the quarantining of people exposed to others infected with COVID-19. On Monday, the local government in Chongqing, home to 32 million people, announced that public sector employees who test positive for COVID-19 can continue working “as normal.”

The rapidity with which Zero-COVID has been abandoned and the Chinese population subjected to mass infection is staggering. Official infection and death figures are now entirely inaccurate, but the reality of the deepening crisis is impossible to conceal as scenes reminiscent of Wuhan in February 2020 and New York City in March 2020 become ubiquitous throughout China.

Chinese social media platforms are now dominated by discussion of this medical and social catastrophe, with millions sharing stories of their loved ones, colleagues and neighbors being infected, experiencing high fevers and other symptoms, becoming hospitalized or dying at home. Photos showing overcrowded hospitals, including with patients dying on the floor, are being widely circulated.

In numerous posts, individuals estimate that at least 50 percent of their coworkers are currently infected. Pharmacies in multiple cities have sold out of fever medicine and rapid COVID tests. Funeral homes are already being inundated with deceased patients, with some reporting more than

quadruple their normal number of bodies and wait times upwards of 10 days.

The elderly population in China is the least vaccinated and most at risk of severe disease and death from COVID-19, but there have also been numerous reports of pediatric hospitals exceeding capacity and children of all ages dying in the past week alone.

In cities throughout the country, streets are empty due to masses of people either being infected or staying home out of fear of infection. Numerous people have caught COVID in their apartments despite taking precautions, effectively unable to escape the virus. This is due to the highly infectious character of the Omicron BF.7 subvariant now spreading in China, combined with the antiquated character of most housing in the country, which facilitates airborne transmission between apartments.

On Saturday, Wu Zunyou, the chief epidemiologist at the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, stated that the current surge will likely continue from now until mid-January, followed by two more waves between late January and mid-March as a result of mass travel for the Lunar New Year. Multiple studies and models published in recent weeks estimate that well over 1 million people could die from COVID-19 in China in the coming months.

The CCP government abandoned Zero-COVID knowing full well that this would result in hundreds of millions of infections and upwards of 1 million deaths. They are guilty of a monumental social crime and are thoroughly discrediting themselves.

However, it must be understood that the instigators and principal agents responsible for this calamity are the governments, corporations and media of the imperialist powers, above all the United States. Having let COVID run rampant in their own countries, they encircled China in a web of unending mass infection which has produced increasingly immune-resistant and infectious variants. Maintaining Zero-COVID on a nationalist basis was always impossible, but the reckless and criminal policies pursued outside China hastened the demise of this policy

everywhere.

For over two years, the imperialist powers have demanded that China accept mass infection in order to advance their corporate, financial and geopolitical interests. A major precipitating factor in the lifting of Zero-COVID was threats from Apple, Nike, and other corporations to move production elsewhere. Wall Street and the financial oligarchs refused to tolerate any further disruptions to capitalist production within China, the nucleus of global supply chains.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has commented on numerous times, the Western powers and their media have continuously advocated for the rapid and total lifting of Zero-COVID in China. Most recently, a deluge of propaganda in the entire Western press celebrated the reactionary anti-Zero-COVID protests that took place across China in late November, which prompted the final lifting of all mitigation measures.

Typical are the *New York Times* and the *Financial Times*, two of the central mouthpieces of Wall Street and the City of London, respectively.

On December 3, the *New York Times* Editorial Board praised “the remarkable protests across China against the government’s strict ‘dynamic zero Covid’ policy” and supported their call “to lift onerous Covid restrictions.” They gleefully quoted a protester from Shanghai stating, “We were all very happy last night. We started to picture how life would be after the whole country’s restrictions are loosened.”

For its part, the *Financial Times* published an article on November 27, “China rocked by protests as zero-Covid anger spreads.” The article hailed the protesters, who “complained about a lack of freedom and what they said was the unscientific nature of China’s Covid policies, which aim to eliminate the virus through mass testing, quarantine and lockdowns.”

On Monday, both outlets responded to the escalating health crisis in China by publishing prominent articles which amount to alibis intended to provide cover for their prior promotion of mass infection. Well aware of their responsibility for the looming wave of mass death in China, they seek to absolve themselves and shift all blame onto Xi Jinping and the CCP.

In an Editorial Board statement titled, “China’s botched Covid reopening,” the *Financial Times* questioned “the capacity of China’s administration to make wise and timely decisions,” stating, “the current rushed and poorly coordinated transition from ‘zero-Covid’ towards living with the virus is undermining China’s own claims to ‘put people first.’”

In their lead article Monday, the *New York Times* wrote,

“China suddenly abandoned the ‘zero Covid’ strategy on which Mr. Xi had staked his reputation. Now the country faces a surge of infections, and Mr. Xi has left officials scrambling to manage the disarray and uncertainty.”

They added, “Mr. Xi’s own formula for beating back Covid may have inadvertently set China up for this jolting and potentially devastating turn... For two years, his Covid war enjoyed widespread public acceptance, but eventually the effort exhausted staff, strained local finances, and appeared to drown out attempts to discuss, let alone devise, a measured transition.”

The level of cynicism and hypocrisy of these statements is breathtaking. Just days after vociferously demanding an end to Zero-COVID, these propagandists attempt to wash their hands of any responsibility for the consequences.

What is unfolding in China is the final extension of the policy of “forever COVID” enforced by capitalist governments throughout the world since the emergence of the Omicron variant in late 2021. It is a social crime of monumental dimensions, which will have the most far-reaching consequences within China and internationally.

The opening up of one-sixth of the world’s population to infection is giving the coronavirus a new lease on life, allowing it to mutate and evolve into even more dangerous variants that will ricochet throughout the globe. The imperialist powers and their media have sought to destabilize China by fomenting this crisis, but in doing so they will further destabilize the entire world economically, medically and socially. A whole new chapter and stage of the pandemic is now opening.

Political lessons must be drawn from this experience. Behind all their threadbare lies about “democracy” and “human rights,” this is the real face of capitalism. When it comes to defending profits and the accumulation of wealth, there is no crime which the imperialist powers will not commit.

Those responsible for the perpetuation of the pandemic and its extension into every corner of the globe must be held accountable. In the coming year, the WSWS Global Workers’ Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic, which is uncovering the lies and misinformation which have guided pandemic policy, will deepen its efforts to investigate and expose all those responsible for this ongoing catastrophe.



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