As a result of the criminal dismantling of Zero-COVID

An estimated 250 million Chinese people were infected with COVID-19 through December 20

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The immense scale of the social crime unfolding across China as a result of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) abandoning its Zero-COVID policy is increasingly coming into focus. According to a leaked report presented by Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention Deputy Director Sun Yang at a closed-door health briefing last Wednesday, roughly 250 million people were infected with COVID-19 across China within just the first 20 days of December.

This massive number of infections amounts to 18 percent of China's 1.4 billion people and starkly contrasts with official figures of the National Health Commission (NHC), which reported 62,592 symptomatic cases over the same 20-day period. Sun estimated that on a single day, Tuesday, December 20, roughly 37 million people were infected.

Sun's private estimates coincide with public approximations made last week by two individual cities, Qingdao and Dongguan. The head of Qingdao's health commission, Bo Tao, estimated that there were about 490,000-530,000 new infections in the city each day as of Friday, and he expected an increase of 10 percent to those numbers on Saturday and Sunday based on modeling data.

In Dongguan, the city commission's computer modeling and experts estimated Friday that there are now roughly 250,000-300,000 infections per day throughout the city. This figure, as well as infection levels throughout the country, are expected to increase massively over the next month due to the Lunar New Year holiday season.

The abandonment of regular testing and even the reporting of cases by the NHC has resulted in vast undercounts of infections and deaths, prompting a hypocritical response from the imperialist powers and other countries which have overseen mass infection policies throughout the pandemic.

In a recent phone call between US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Blinken stressed the need for "transparency" regarding COVID-19. The World Health Organization (WHO) and officials in India have also expressed concerns over Beijing's lack of accurate case reporting.

One need only recall the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) blatant distortion of infection data to discourage masking last February, or the mass funeral pyres in India during the devastating outbreak of the Delta variant last year, to recognize the hypocrisy of these figures' supposed concern for human life.

In essence, the CCP is repeating the same process pioneered by the United States, India and other countries of minimizing the effects of COVID-19, manipulating the criteria for cause of death, undercounting cases and pushing propaganda through the media.

The scenes in Chinese hospitals as described by doctors, nurses and patients testify to the number of cases surging through major cities, where most of China's 267 million citizens over the age of 60 live. Elderly patients are flooding the hospitals, which are running out of portable beds, oxygen hookups and places to put sick patients. Many doctors are too sick to carry on working, and others are working while infected.

A neurologist at Beijing Friendship Hospital told the *Financial Times* in a recent interview, "All the doctors are laid up, we don't have anywhere to send patients because other departments do not have enough doctors, the ER is clogged with patients—it is taking us much longer to move them onwards." The neurologist interviewed was herself recovering from COVID-19 and visibly coughing through her face mask.

Ambulances are backed up and cannot get patients off of their stretchers. In the city of Hangzhou, volunteer drivers are being recruited to meet the demand for emergency ambulance services. State-run funeral services are suspending burials due to a high volume of corpses. Specially-built emergency facilities, such as Beijing Chaoyang Integrative Medicine, have rooms that have been converted into makeshift morgues.

Other signs indicate that people are dying at home in large

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numbers. The demand for oxygen machines for at-home use is soaring. There is a shortage of cough medicine and other drugs. In Yunnan, officials have limited the sale of ibuprofen to one box per buyer and the sale of antigen tests to six tests per week. Sales of oximeters, a device to measure pulse rates and oxygen saturation, have skyrocketed. Production of these devices, which are useful to determine heart and lung health, is being boosted to meet demand.

Just days after Sun's estimates were leaked, on Sunday the NHS released a statement saying it would no longer report COVID-19 cases whatsoever. Provocatively, the agency has also narrowed the definition of a COVID-19 death solely to "respiratory failure," excluding other related issues, underscoring that the official numbers of infections and deaths are now completely unreliable.

There have been at least three recent high profile deaths in Beijing presumed to be from COVID-19. In the case of 67-year-old Wu Guanying, a lead designer of the 2008 Beijing Olympics mascot, the media reported his death as the result of a "severe cold," prompting opposition on social media. Footballer Wang Ruoji of the Shenyang Jinde team died at the age of 37 of "diabetes complications" believed to be caused by COVID-19 infection. Opera singer Chu Lanlan, 40, died shortly after contracting the virus.

The highly infectious nature of the current dominant variant in China, the Omicron BF.7 subvariant, has made it particularly dangerous to a population who have mostly never been exposed to the virus. The overall vaccination rate is above 90 percent, but only 57.9 percent of adults have had a booster shot, and the booster rate for those above 80 years old is only 42.3 percent.

Vaccination rates alone, however, are not to blame for this unraveling catastrophe. It is the scrapping of the Zero-COVID elimination strategy by the CCP, under continuous pressure from the imperialist powers, that is endangering and killing masses of Chinese citizens.

The direct pressure of major corporations such as Nike and Apple, which in November threatened to move their businesses elsewhere if supply chain and labor-related shortages continued, prompted the rapid lifting of Zero-COVID. China is expected to be the world's cheap labor sweatshop, and the CCP is forcing the working class back into dangerous conditions that will lead to their sickness, disability and death.

With the Lunar New Year festivities approaching, the loosening of travel restrictions poses a major threat to the rural provinces, where hundreds of millions of workers are expected to travel in the coming weeks. Having fully embraced the "forever COVID" policy, the CCP is doing everything it can to open up the country to travel with no restrictions on borders or public gatherings.

On Saturday, the Ministry of Education ensured that 4.74 million students took national postgraduate admissions exams in-person. Even those who tested positive for COVID-19 were expected to take the exams in-person, in a separate room from those who tested negative.

These policies are giving COVID-19 a new lease on life. Unleashing this highly infectious disease on such a massive population so suddenly and without any real attempt to isolate people or implement basic mitigation measures greatly accelerates the evolutionary path towards new and potentially more dangerous variants.

A recent article in *Nature* warned, "China is likely to discover what other countries with limited previous exposure to the virus have found over the past year: that there won't be a single 'exit' wave to mark the lifting of pandemic restrictions. Further waves of infection and death are likely to follow, either from new variants that arise in the population, or from variants imported as the country opens its borders to visitors."

The scrapping of Zero-COVID measures, motivated by the class interests of China's national bourgeoisie under pressures from global finance capital, is as shortsighted as it is criminal. There are plenty of examples around the world of what will happen to the population, but they are being purposefully ignored by the Chinese ruling class. An estimation from the health data firm Airfinity states that 1.3-2.1 million people could die in China from the current surge alone.

While the bourgeoisie of the imperialist powers and within China have lifted Zero-COVID in a pragmatic attempt to fully resume capitalist production and restore stability to global supply chains, in actuality, this reckless policy will further destabilize the entire world economy.

In the short term, the center of world production is now engulfed in a massive social crisis of sickness and death. In the long term, potentially tens of millions of Chinese workers will join the ranks of those disabled by Long COVID. In the US alone, an estimated 4 million people have been so disabled by Long COVID that they have dropped out of the workforce.

The lies and the cover-up of cases and deaths by the CCP will be exposed and further show the Chinese working class the criminal nature of global capitalism. The response of the Chinese and international working class to this social crime will be immense, but it must be organized consciously. Workers everywhere must coordinate their struggles to implement socialist policies to end the deliberate spread of preventable diseases and put in place policies based on science and the preservation of the human race.

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