

China's abandonment of Zero-COVID and imperialist hypocrisy

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A medical official from China's National Health Commission (NHC) reported Saturday that China had recorded nearly 60,000 fatalities linked to COVID-19 between December 8 and January 12, the month since the country completely lifted its strict "Zero-COVID" policy, accelerating an outbreak that is believed to have infected millions of people.

The disclosure by Jiao Yahui, head of the NHC's medical affairs department, was the first time the Chinese government provided an official measure of the COVID wave now sweeping the country.

By itself, the figure of 60,000 dead in a few weeks is a staggering sum, 30 times greater than the reported COVID-19 deaths for all of China since the start of the pandemic. However, the real death toll is likely to be much higher.

Reliable infection and fatality reporting in China has been abandoned over the past several months. Even the figure given by Jiao was broken down between those who died "with" and "from" COVID, a false distinction with no scientific medical basis pioneered by the far-right in the United States.

This death toll is an indictment of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) abandonment of its Zero-COVID policy, which had proven effective in suppressing the spread of the coronavirus. While most governments adopted a homicidal "let it rip" approach to the pandemic, resulting in more than 6.7 million reported deaths globally, the 1.4 billion people in China were able to live relatively free from the virus.

Now, reports of the virus ripping through workplaces, long lines at hospitals and overwhelmed morgues are spreading through social media. Health officials in Henan Province announced that 90 percent of the region's nearly 100 million residents had been infected as of January 6. With an expected 2.1 billion trips by travelers crisscrossing the country during the Chinese New Year

holiday, which begins on January 22, COVID-19 will rip through every neighborhood, city and village.

While the CCP bears responsibility for this disaster, the mass infection policy was implemented under the demands of the US and the other imperialist powers.

The underlying driving force behind the reopening was on display this week, with China's Vice Premier Liu He addressing the gathering of billionaires at the World Economic Forum in Davos, proclaiming the end of Zero-COVID and that China would be fully open for business. "China is pursuing common prosperity... opening up to entrepreneurs," he reassured his audience.

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Among the loudest in beating the drum for the abandonment of public health measures was the *Washington Post*, which published an editorial board statement in early November 2022 demanding that China abandon Zero-COVID, claiming, "It isn't working." Small middle-class protests later that month against COVID lockdowns trumpeted by the Western media were seized on by the CCP bureaucracy to do just that.

However, having adopted the mass infection policies demanded by global finance capital, the Chinese government is being further attacked and denounced by the US media. If President Xi Jinping and the CCP leadership thought their acquiescence would win them any breathing space, they were wrong.

The United States and a number of other countries have responded by placing new testing restrictions on travelers from China, even as they allow the more infectious XBB.1.5 subvariant of Omicron to spread unimpeded.

Dripping with hypocrisy, the same editorial board that demanded China let the virus rip now denounces Beijing for undercounting infections and deaths. The *Washington Post* wrote on Monday:

Dishonesty about the true breadth of the pandemic in China constitutes a threat to public health worldwide. Scientists need to know whether transmission patterns have changed, new variants have emerged or the incidence of long covid has increased. Epidemiologists must be able to assess whether the world should prepare for a new global outbreak. And the people of China deserve to know the true scale of the calamity descending on their country.

This entire paragraph would apply with even greater force if references to “China” were replaced with “United States.” Under the policy advocated by the *Washington Post* more than 1.1 million have unnecessarily died. It has resulted in an overwhelmed health care system with burned-out medical workers, bodies piling up in refrigerator trucks and a mass grave on New York City’s Hart Island.

The *Post* complains that China’s reported death toll under Zero-COVID of 5,200 was “absurdly low.” However, this low death toll, which was highly accurate until the abandonment of Zero-COVID, was the outcome of the comprehensive measures taken to prevent the population from becoming infected en masse with a deadly virus, something which was never attempted in the US or in much of the world.

The editorial board then declares that “zero covid could not go on indefinitely,” this despite its effectiveness and the policy’s popularity among the Chinese population.

In fact, the *Post* has played a critical role in promoting the policy of “forever COVID” pioneered in the US, which is now having such a devastating impact in China.

Just three days before their editorial denouncing China, the *Post* published an article by Dr. Leana Wen, a favorite of the Biden administration who paved the way for the premature reopening of schools and lifting of mask mandates. Wen’s article called for the US to count fewer deaths and cases, absurdly claiming that cases are being overcounted. In reality, only about 1 in 10 positive rapid test results are confirmed by PCR tests, which is the only way for an infection to be officially counted.

Last March, the *Post* endorsed the call for a “new normal” promoted by former Biden and Obama advisers, led by eugenics advocate Ezekiel Emanuel. Emanuel called for the dismantling of daily reporting of COVID-19 infections, a proposal that has been implemented over the subsequent year, with nearly all states and the federal

government switching to weekly reporting of infections and deaths.

Furthermore, the *Post* has played a key role in promoting the far-right conspiracy theory that the COVID-19 virus had been developed by scientists at a Wuhan laboratory from which it leaked, despite clear evidence that it first emerged in a food market in that city. The editorial board continues this campaign in its latest statement, darkly declaring that “the Chinese government has relied on secrecy, obfuscation, intimidation and fabrication to draw a veil over the origins of the virus.” It makes this claim in the face of international scientific investigations which have made clear the virus’ natural origin.

The 60,000 confirmed deaths in China are only the beginning. The policy of mass infection implemented by the CCP and demanded by finance capital has already produced a medical disaster whose real scope will become clearer with time. The infection of billions of people will inevitably produce new strains of COVID-19 which will spread globally.

The successful implementation of a Zero-COVID elimination strategy in China for the first three years of the pandemic makes clear that it is possible through widespread masking, testing and contact tracing, the temporary closure of schools and nonessential businesses, and mass vaccination to stop the pandemic in its tracks. However, the abandonment of Zero-COVID by the CCP and the continued spread of the virus underscore that there is no national solution to the pandemic.

The world capitalist system and its representatives in every national government stand in the way of humanity confronting the challenge posed by COVID. The main impediment to saving lives is not technological or medical, but political. Only a globally coordinated effort led by a united international working class armed with the information provided by principled scientists and medical professionals will finally eliminate COVID and put an end to the pandemic.



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