

Accomplices to social murder

The international pseudo-left and the lifting of Zero-COVID in China: Part 2

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This is the second part of a two-part article. Part one can be read here.

Amid mass infection and death, Pabloites step up denunciations of Zero-COVID

On December 7, 2022, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) lifted the last remaining major public health measures associated with Zero-COVID, aside from foreign travel restrictions, which would be fully lifted on January 8.

Less than two weeks later, the horrific reality of the COVID-19 surge was clearly apparent. Chinese social media quickly became dominated by posts reporting that people's entire families and social networks were infected with COVID-19, alongside photos and videos of overflowing hospitals unable to treat patients and morgues unable to process the deceased.

Amid this growing spiral of mass infection and death, which deepened with the Lunar New Year travel season in January, the pseudo-left has largely remained silent, again giving their tacit approval to the criminal policies implemented by the CCP on behalf of global finance capital.

One notable exception was *International Viewpoint*, the publication of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (Usec)^[1], which posted an article on December 21 titled, "Solidarity with the mass movement for democracy in China." It endorsed the scrapping of Zero-COVID in China, while parroting the talking points of the US military-intelligence apparatus in its drive to war with Beijing.

The Pabloites' December 21 statement was authored by their leading body, referred to as the "Fourth International Bureau." By the time it was published, the dire public health crisis in China was already very clear and reported on widely in the international press, including, of course, in the WSWS.

In their statement, the Pabloites repeated and deepened all the lies and propaganda of the Western media, while framing the Ürümqi fire as a state-sanctioned act of violence against China's Muslim Uyghur population, writing, "Socialists should strongly support the calls to self-determination by Uyghurs and others who demand it, even if Western imperialists seek to co-opt such demands."

This was a backhanded acknowledgment that they were copying the line of the US corporate media, dictated by the US State Department, which seek to foment divisions within China in order to facilitate the imperialist carve-up of the country.

The Pabloites' statement went on to denounce "wasteful and anti-democratic testing and lockdown protocols" and praised the fact that the

protests prompted the lifting of Zero-COVID, writing, "The massive struggle across China forced the regime to back down from its years-long pandemic policies—in other words, it is important to acknowledge that the people have won their first battle. But the work is far from over."

By stating that "the work is far from over," the Pabloites effectively demanded even further mass suffering and death within China.

After hailing "the efforts of feminists and other marginalized groups," as well as "the struggles of Uyghurs and other non-Han ethnic groups," the Pabloites' statement concluded with a list of reactionary demands that amount to a total repudiation of public health, most of which had already been implemented by the CCP in early December.

These included: "Abolish lockdowns"; "Abolish forced PCR testing for COVID-19"; "Allow those who are infected to isolate at home, while those with severe symptoms have the right to treatment in the hospital"; "cancel forcible transfer and isolation of infected and non-infected individuals in mobile cabin 'hospitals'"; "Call for nation-wide mourning of the deaths of those caused by irresponsible lockdown measures"; "Ensure the resignation of bureaucrats responsible for pandemic mismanagement"; and more.

All of these demands would be welcomed by far-right political tendencies throughout the world, which spearheaded the movement against lockdowns in 2020 and have continuously demanded the lifting of all public health measures that slow the spread of COVID-19.

The Western media and pseudo-left concoct an alibi

By mid-December, the Western corporate media was forced to acknowledge the devastation wrought by the lifting of Zero-COVID in China. In doing so, they attempted to provide themselves with an alibi for the fact that they had advocated this brutal policy, by foisting responsibility solely onto Xi Jinping and the CCP. The same false and subjective narrative was pushed by sections of the pseudo-left, again parroting the line of the capitalist press.

This found its most cynical and hypocritical expression in the writings of the International Marxist Tendency (IMT)^[2]. In late November, the IMT endorsed the "white paper" protests and opposition to lockdowns, which writer Bu Aidao described as "draconian," "brutal," "harsh," "frantic," "rigid" and "severe." He stated, "Marxists fully support the masses' struggle against the draconian lockdown imposed by the CCP."

On December 9, the IMT published another piece by Aidao titled, "China: regime relents on lockdown in face of pressure from below." In the article, Aidao wrote that Zero-COVID "had largely been attributed to

Xi Jinping, who has maintained the lockdowns to preserve the regime's prestige." In fact, Zero-COVID required the active support of broad masses of the Chinese working class.

Not once in any of their coverage does the IMT even mention the role of the Western imperialist powers or the major corporations which exerted unrelenting pressure on China to lift Zero-COVID.

In a December 29 article written by Li Qiye, the IMT placed exclusive blame on Xi and the CCP for the public health catastrophe that resulted from the lifting of Zero-COVID. The article, titled, "China: capitalist regime hastily abandons lockdown amid turmoil," characterized the lifting of Zero-COVID as "a panicky retreat from the state's previous measures," after "the regime had painted itself into a corner with its Zero COVID policy," adding, "the rapid unlocking was always going to result in a massive surge in infections."

Qiye concluded, "The present situation is a condemnation of the capitalist system, and the bureaucratic mismanagement of the so-called Chinese 'Communist' Party (CCP), which have contributed to this escalating disaster."

After describing in detail the horrific reality of the aftermath of lifting Zero-COVID, which the IMT had repeatedly advocated, Qiye wrote:

The 'Communist' Party proclaims that it puts 'people first, lives first'. But considering the scenes detailed above, this is a hollow, bankrupt proclamation. In essence, the CCP puts the Party and capitalist market interests first. For the first couple of years of the pandemic, the regime bragged about the effectiveness of its Zero COVID policy, which kept deaths far lower than in most of the west and (most importantly) allowed China's economy to recover relatively quickly from the initial shock.

In a casual dismissal of the horrifying impacts of lifting this policy, Qiye wrote, "But things tend to turn into their opposite."

Most recently, on January 19, the IMT published an article by Dref Easton, titled, "China: as lockdowns end, class struggle rises," which reiterated the same condemnation of the CCP while absolving the Western powers and themselves.

After noting that the majority of the Chinese population had already been infected with COVID-19, the IMT stated, incredibly, "It can be inferred from such figures that the peak of this current wave of the pandemic has now passed in China," which has supposedly reached "the end of the acute phase of the pandemic." This lie, first issued by the CCP itself, is totally divorced from the global reality of recurring waves of mass infection with new variants of SARS-CoV-2.

The same line was advanced by International Socialist Alternative on December 20 in an article written by Vincent Kolo, the author of the ISA's November 29 article first praising the "white paper" protests, detailed above. Three weeks later, Kolo wrote cynically, "In response to a wave of anti-government protests in late November the Chinese dictatorship (CCP) has pivoted abruptly from its deeply unpopular Zero COVID regime. But for the Chinese masses this is a case of out of the frying pan into the fire."

After again praising the "white paper" protests as "historic," Kolo wrote, "The timing and manner of the dictatorship's abandonment of its Zero COVID controls defies all logic unless we understand it as a panic reaction to these protests and the fear of even more protests if it did nothing." Omitting all reference to the pressure exerted by the imperialist powers and his own advocacy for the scrapping of Zero-COVID, Kolo writes that "Xi's regime has substituted one disastrous policy for another."

On January 16, the ISA published a statement written by their Chinese,

Hong Kong and Taiwan sections, titled, "From Zero to Max COVID." They began by noting that China "is experiencing an explosive spread of the virus after suddenly abandoning its three-year Zero COVID policy of hardline controls," which "has been replaced by a chaotic 'laissez-faire' position of minimal state intervention and everyone fending for themselves."

They described the catastrophe in China as "one of the most shocking and sickening episodes in the history of the pandemic," attributable solely to "Dictator Xi Jinping, the architect of the current crisis."

Without recognizing the inherent contradictions in their support for the reactionary "white paper" protests and their supposed concern over the results of these protests, the ISA wrote, "The so-called Communist Party (CCP) dictatorship has completely lost control over its pandemic management policies. This has happened due to the pressure of a worsening long-term economic crisis and then—crucially—the most significant anti-government protests seen in China for three decades."

The ISA claims that these protests caused the CCP to "panic" and implement a "Zero COVID u-turn, or rather implosion." The piece concludes:

The likely horrors that await the Chinese people as waves of the pandemic sweep the country will intensify the mass anger against Xi's regime. This anger now has a point of reference that was missing before the November protests, a starting point for working out ideas of how to organise against dictatorship.

A similar, albeit slightly more nuanced, attempt to foist responsibility solely onto the CCP came from *Red Flag*, the publication of Socialist Alternative, the largest pseudo-left group in Australia, which is not affiliated with ISA or another international tendency.

A January 21 article by Robert Narai, titled, "From crisis to catastrophe: COVID-19 engulfs China," reiterated *Red Flag's* prior support for the "white paper" protests, while seeking to absolve the protesters and themselves for providing the CCP with justification to lift Zero-COVID. After describing in detail the dire situation in China, Narai claimed that "the demands and aims of the November protests must be separated from the current wave of infections and deaths."

Narai concluded his piece by endorsing Hong Kong-based author Au Loong Yu, who stated, "This crisis further exposes that the CCP is corrupted to its core... And one thing is increasingly clear to larger numbers of the population: Xi Jinping and the CCP are the biggest threat to the health of the Chinese people."

In his article, Narai also advanced the false claim that the spring 2022 lockdown in Shanghai was deeply unpopular and caused more deaths than COVID-19 itself. In reality, the two-month lockdown, which was only so lengthy because local CCP officials initially delayed implementing a citywide lockdown, successfully suppressed the outbreak and reaffirmed the viability of Zero-COVID.

Pleading the 5th: The silence of the pseudo-left amid mass infection

Over the past three months, almost every international pseudo-left tendency has gone silent on the social catastrophe in China caused by the lifting of Zero-COVID.

After cheering the late November anti-Zero-COVID protests, *Izquierda Diario* has published only one article on China since December 1, a brief posting on December 27, titled, "China lifts quarantine requirement to

enter the country as Covid cases soar.” This article approvingly stated that China “lifted on December 7 the obligation for infected people or close contacts to stay in quarantine centers,” which “is one more step in its ‘zero covid’ policy change, after the huge protests against the confinements.”

The only article published by IWLfi amid the catastrophe in China was a January 2 piece by Fabio Bosco, titled, “The Awakening of the Chinese Proletariat?” The piece was unique in that it made no mention whatsoever of the mass infection and death that had clearly swept across China by that point.

The Coordinating Committee for the Refoundation of the Fourth International (CRFI) has published no international statement on the lifting of Zero-COVID in China. Its leading section, the Partido Obrero (PO) in Argentina, has published two articles in its publication, *Prensa Obrera*, on December 5 and January 2. Both articles were largely cribbed from the coverage of the WSWS and refrained from openly denouncing Zero-COVID, but did not support this policy or call for its extension globally.

Further, PO has not criticized its international collaborators in CRFI, who have almost entirely refrained from commenting on the lifting of Zero-COVID in China. On December 14, the Turkish section of CRFI, the Revolutionist Workers’ Party (Devrimci ??çi Partisi, D?P), published an article titled, “China: The ghost of Tienanmen returns,” which repeated the same lies as other tendencies regarding the Foxconn protests, the fire at Ürümqi, and the “white paper” protests.

The IST has not published an international statement on developments in China, and only its British, Turkish, Australian and Irish national sections have published short articles on this immense world event. After the initial articles by Alex Callinicos and Yuri Prasad described above, the SWP in Britain, the IST’s main section, published one more piece on December 5 and then went silent.

The most recent article from an IST-affiliated group was published by the Turkish group Devrimci Sosyalist ??çi Partisi (DS?P) in their publication *marksist.org* on December 12 as part of a “Current Developments in the World” roundup article. Supporting the late November protests and the lifting of Zero-COVID, it repeated the same reactionary anti-public health tropes that this policy involved “harsh shutdown measures” against the Chinese population, “depriving them of many social rights such as basic nutrition.”

Various national pseudo-left tendencies, including Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain and others, have issued no statements on the lifting of Zero-COVID in China.

The response of *Jacobin* and the DSA

Particular mention must be made of *Jacobin* and the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), which present themselves as socialist and play a critical social function in disorientating youth in the United States, channeling anti-capitalist sentiment back into the Democratic Party.

True to their nationalist and pro-capitalist roots, over the past four months the DSA has not issued a single party statement on the lifting of Zero-COVID in China. None of their leading lights in the “Squad” of Democratic members of the House of Representatives, including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Tlaib, Jamaal Bowman and Cori Bush, have uttered a word publicly about this major world event. As trusted political agents of the Democratic Party, they have been preoccupied supporting the war in Ukraine and suppressing a rail strike in the US.

The only official comment from any DSA-affiliated organization was a

December 2 statement from its youth group, the YDSA. Fully endorsing the “white paper” protests, the statement falsely stated that they involved “hundreds of thousands of students everywhere.” Layering on further falsifications, the statement claimed, “The Ürümchi building that caught on fire was barricaded by zero-COVID authorities and fire escapes were padlocked, as is standard practice for lockdowns.”

In an apparent reference to the right-wing protests then being planned by their collaborators in Socialist Alternative, the YDSA wrote, “Inspired by mobilizations back home, Chinese students abroad are organizing against the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Many are engaging with Hong Kong, Tibetan, Uyghur, and Taiwanese activists through a new lens.”

The YDSA urged its members “to offer experience and resources to support these new organizers,” as this would supposedly “establish cross-border solidarity and strengthen our understanding of what the fight for socialism means.”

For its part, *Jacobin*, the unofficial journal of the DSA, published two articles in December supporting the lifting of Zero-COVID in China, both of which praised the “white paper” protests and repeated the same unsubstantiated claims about the Ürümqi fire. The outlet has gone silent since December 17, taking no notice of the mass infection and death that has befallen the Chinese population.

It must be recalled that in September 2020, *Jacobin* provided a “left-wing” platform to Martin Kulldorff, one of the co-authors of the Great Barrington Declaration, which provided ideological justification for the Trump administration’s murderous “herd immunity” policy of mass infection. Since then, *Jacobin* has been largely silent on the pandemic. Now, over two years later, they have once again openly embraced the implementation of “herd immunity,” this time in China.

The broader significance of the pseudo-left’s response to the pandemic

At the same time as they provided political support for the lifting of Zero-COVID in China, the entire pseudo-left remained silent on the ongoing public health crisis in the US, Britain, Brazil, Germany, Turkey, Australia and throughout the world as the fourth year of the pandemic begins. This is in keeping with their overall indifference towards this world-historic event.

These experiences reveal certain critical features of the pseudo-left today.

Most fundamentally, all of these organizations have nothing to do with the working class or socialism. Their hostility to Zero-COVID and the most basic principles of public health are expressions of their anti-Marxist and pro-capitalist politics.

The Zero-COVID public health strategy is, in itself, not even a revolutionary policy, as shown by the experience in China, New Zealand and other countries. However, as Leon Trotsky made clear in his exposition of the theory of permanent revolution, in the modern imperialist epoch all social and democratic problems can be fundamentally resolved only through world socialist revolution.

The central tenet of socialism is that global economic and social planning, democratically controlled by the international working class, will raise humanity to new heights of economic, cultural and social progress. This will include a massive expansion of resources for health care and public health, leading to the elimination of numerous pathogens and increased life expectancy globally, as well as the ability to prevent the development of future pandemics

Under a world socialist society, the Zero-COVID policy would be refined and broadened by the working class. The pseudo-left’s vitriolic

hostility to Zero-COVID and the basic principles of public health makes clear that they are bitter opponents of social planning and Marxism in general.

Second, the pseudo-left's hailing of the lifting of Zero-COVID reaffirms that they function in the service of world imperialism. When one reads the above articles, they appear to have been drafted straight out of the State Department. The political line advanced is such that if these organizations were being paid directly by the state, they would not be writing differently.

The CCP's abandonment of Zero-COVID was a major concession to the imperialist powers, which the CCP mistakenly thought would ease geopolitical tensions. In fact, American imperialism is only pressing ahead with its war plotting against China, with a recent leaked memo by Air Force General Michael Minihan predicting that the US will be at war with China over Taiwan by 2025. The pseudo-left's promotion of the lifting of Zero-COVID has only facilitated this process.

Over the past quarter-century, the pseudo-left has become ever more openly pro-imperialist, reaching a climax during the past year since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. They have systematically covered up the historical roots of this war, which was preceded by decades of US-NATO imperialist wars throughout the world, the eastward expansion of NATO and the 2014 far-right Maidan coup.

Almost every pseudo-left tendency has lined up behind US-NATO imperialism in its backing of the far-right Ukrainian regime, while the rest have supported the reactionary invasion of Ukraine by the Putin regime in Russia. None of them have advanced an internationalist anti-war position calling for the unity of Ukrainian, Russian, American and all workers to overthrow imperialism and put an end to war.

These central features of the pseudo-left—their hostility to the working class and socialism, and their pro-imperialist politics—have found concrete political expression in the actions of the pseudo-left party Podemos in Spain, which has been in power throughout the pandemic in a coalition government with PSOE.

Following in the footsteps of Syriza, which implemented the austerity dictates of the European Central Bank and massively expanded Greece's military, Podemos came to power in 2019 on the basis of lies that they would oppose austerity and represent the interests of the working class. Instead, Podemos has enforced a "herd immunity" policy of mass infection and death, deepened austerity, covered up the threat of fascism, and escalated the resurgence of Spanish imperialism.

The experiences of Syriza and Podemos illustrate the right-wing, pro-capitalist character of the pseudo-left. Wherever they come to power, these parties will implement the same anti-working class policies of austerity and militarism, while viciously opposing the principles of public health.

Conclusion

While the pandemic and the lifting of Zero-COVID in China have further exposed the anti-socialist character of the pseudo-left, at the same time these experiences have further clarified that the only genuine Marxist and Trotskyist political tendency in the world is the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Over the past four months, the WSWS has published 30 articles focused on the lifting of Zero-COVID in China, which have been written by eight different authors from throughout the world, including eight Perspective statements. Each article has analyzed the latest developments, provided a Marxist political explanation for this reversal in public health policy, and

sharply opposed the lifting of Zero-COVID, calling instead for this elimination strategy to be adopted globally.

In November 2021, the WSWS launched the Global Workers' Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic, the only independent investigation into the pandemic, whose aim is to "expose the political and economic forces and interests that drove the policies that allowed the uncontrolled transmission of the virus and its development into a catastrophic pandemic that has killed millions worldwide."

After one year, the Inquest has gathered a large body of testimony, which will continue to expand going forward. The record of the pseudo-left outlined above, which clearly implicates them in the massive social crime which has unfolded in China, is a contribution to this investigation.

Lessons must be drawn from this experience. It is critical that the reactionary character of these organizations be established. These are not left-wing tendencies. The primary social function of the pseudo-left is to serve as agents of imperialism by disorienting radicalized workers and youth and channeling their opposition back into the confines of capitalist politics. These efforts must be relentlessly exposed by genuine socialists.

The abandonment of Zero-COVID in China was a monumental social crime for which the CCP, imperialism and the pseudo-left are culpable. The ongoing global social, health and economic disaster wrought by the pandemic must be stopped. In order to put an end to the COVID-19 pandemic and prepare for future pandemics, the Chinese and international working class must take up the struggle to implement this elimination strategy globally towards COVID-19 and as many infectious diseases as possible, as part of the fight for world socialism.

[1] USec was formed in 1963 as a result of the unprincipled reunification of sections of the Fourth International based on agreement with the liquidationist political conceptions of Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel. The ICFI determined struggle against this reunification and has defended the foundational principles of Trotskyism to the present. For decades, the Pabloites promoted illusions in Maoism and the CCP, which they claimed represented a progressive variant of Stalinism and supposedly proved that socialism could be established without the independent intervention of the working class. Following the restoration of capitalism in China and the Soviet Union, the Pabloites have turned ever further to the right, endorsing the wars waged by US imperialism up to the present US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and preparations for war with China.

[2] Founded by Ted Grant and his supporters in 1992 after a split from CWI, the IMT maintained essentially a Pabloite line throughout the 20th century, promoting illusions in the progressive character of Stalinism, Maoism and later the Chavez regime in Venezuela. Following Grant's death in 2006, Alan Woods has been the main editor of the party's website *In Defence of Marxism*.



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