



# China: Facing the failure of Zero-Covid?

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For years, China's Zero-Covid strategy appeared to be a successful and life-saving alternative to the prevailing pandemic policy in the West. To date, only a few thousand people have died of corona there, while in the USA almost one million have now died (as of 19.4.22: 989,331). In the United States, the per capita death rate is 300 per 100,000, in Germany it is 160.1, in China it is just 1.0.

Paradoxically, however, if we follow the tenor of Western public opinion, it is China's policy that appears to have failed. Here, by contrast, we have finally regained our freedom and are "living with the pandemic", that is, tacitly accepting further waves and more deaths.

There are several reasons for this, but it is becoming clear, against the background of the situation on the world market, economic problems at home and the authoritarian character of the bureaucracy's pandemic policy, that the Chinese strategy, including its draconian measures, has reached its limits.

Yet that policy was successful for months, even years, at the beginning of the pandemic. The number of dead and infected was kept at a comparatively low level. While countries like Germany zigged and zagged from lockdown to lockdown and now compulsory vaccination or masks are taken for granted, in China "everything seemed to be back to normal" very quickly. If the country had adopted a policy comparable to that of the USA or even Germany, not thousands but millions of Chinese would have died.

In reality, what is happening confirms that global problems like a pandemic can only be solved globally. China's isolationist policy and insistence on its own vaccine have only delayed the outbreak, but the outbreak itself was provoked by the lack of effective action and the resulting mutations in other countries. The current outbreak of the omicron variant is now hitting a society that is only partially immunised, prompting the CCP to enforce brutal lockdowns so that it can stick to its narrative of the superior strategy.

## Limits of the strategy

The Chinese corona strategy was also important in the ideological struggle with "the West". Superiority was suggested at home and abroad. But now cities with millions of inhabitants, such as Shanghai, Beijing or Shenzhen, are in lockdown - a lockdown that is unparalleled in its nature. Daily life in these cities now means empty streets, sealed-off neighbourhoods, even sealed-off flats, from which exit is only allowed after government-mandated corona tests, and surveillance on a scale that surpasses even that of the past.

People's supplies are in danger. In the affected areas, residents complain about poor state provisioning, even food shortages. It is almost impossible to do one's own shopping. In addition, the omicron wave is also hitting a strained and probably soon overburdened health system. Besides Chinese traditional medicine, another of its characteristics is the lack of family doctors. If you are sick, you go to hospital. Many collateral deaths are to be expected here: people who would not have had to die if there were enough doctors and facilities, or if they had enough money for special treatment. In Western media, one now reads of dramatic scenes in which people are turned away or infected infants are separated from their parents. The socially explosive power of the situation is tangible. On Shanghai's streets, the military is already being deployed to deal with the situation and the resentment.

Right now, it looks like the virus could be one of the most serious attacks that Chinese imperialism has yet seen.

Meanwhile, the propaganda continues. The struggle to redivide the world is being fought not only via economics and trade, armaments and militarisation, but also as a cultural struggle - both within China and beyond. An important target for the propaganda is the strong popular orientation towards the West, especially the USA. For years now, wealthier Chinese families have tried to ensure their children are either born in the USA or complete their education at Western universities. Both should guarantee better living conditions for the children later on.

Since the adoption of the policy of "opening to the world" after Mao's death, and at the latest after Xi Jinping came to power, China has presented itself as a country on the upswing. The state has certainly gained power internationally and the economy has obviously grown massively. That is only one part of the picture, however. For the majority of the Chinese population, that is, the masses of workers and peasants, this was largely not the case. Outside the trendy inner-city districts of large cities, the picture is quite different. Even in cities like Beijing, poorer people are discriminated against. Above all, the hukou (the residential registration licence) which states who is allowed to stay and settle where, provides an important element of control.

Technically, those who have a rural hukou cannot become urban residents. For them, illegal underground work is the only option. Now the economy is at a standstill in many places and even commuters cannot get to work. Under lockdowns, food is rationed and brought to quarantined neighbourhoods. But how are people expected to survive when they are not supposed to be there? Even going to hospital is made more difficult. Poor people suffer the most, because no exit from an estate means no work, no work means no wages and no wages mean no food.

In addition, due to the rapid spread of Omicron, not only the number of people infected, but also the number of cities and regions and thus the number of people affected by lockdowns, is much higher than in previous waves. If the government does not intervene, there is a threat not only of further unrest but also of a self-inflicted hunger crisis if the numbers continue to rise and the only solution is more lockdowns.

The government has made it clear in recent years how it will tackle protests and dissenters. The military has been strengthened and surveillance expanded. Their relevance to a supposed social peace has been demonstrated above all in Hong Kong and Xinjiang, where the bureaucracy's policy also borders on an extermination measure, whether intentional or not. Wherever protest arises, people disappear and end up in "prisons" that are more reminiscent of torture camps.

Nevertheless, in recent years there have always been individuals and groups who have withstood this, for example in the context of the #MeToo protests. Now there are more and more videos in the so-called social networks showing protests. These are often followed by arrest and conviction. Freedom for all political prisoners!

Both in China and in this country, the last months and years have shown very clearly that the capitalist economy and imperialist striving for power cannot bring social peace, cannot bring prosperity for all and cannot solve global conflicts. On the contrary, the failure in the fight against the corona pandemic has once again shown that the subordination of the health of the population to short-term profit interests costs millions of lives.

### Crisis and resistance

At a time of crisis and growing economic difficulties, the Chinese government's corona policy itself is reaching its limits - and with it the resentment of millions. They are probably already looking at the CCP's policies from a different perspective. Action, including spontaneous protest actions by desperate people, can follow from this realisation. At the same time, massive repression is to be expected.

However, if discontent and protests are not to remain isolated episodes or be brutally crushed, they need clear social and political demands. These must include securing provisions and healthcare for all, that is, including people without valid papers, the poor and the homeless. Where there is a shortage of resources, these must be distributed according to need, not privileges in society. In order to ensure any rational supply at all, disclosure of all existing resources as well as the real status of the pandemic must be demanded. Platforms like Weibo (a Chinese microblogging service similar to Facebook and Twitter) should be used for this purpose.

Such demands effectively challenge the control of the bureaucracy. In order to ensure the allocation of goods, committees to organise and control this work should be elected by the population in factories, health facilities, in housing blocks and neighbourhoods. It will be crucial for these structures to be rooted in the workplaces and to be able to lend weight to their demands through action.

Regions like Shanghai are now centres not only of the Chinese but of the world economy. In view of the pandemic, it would also be essential to build such structures not only in the regions under lockdown, but also to call on workers in other parts of the country to support them. The pandemic will not stop at anyone and the alternative to bureaucratic-authoritarian lockdown is not opening up to capital, but lockdown under the control of the working class and peasants.

Any such working class policy will certainly meet with resistance from the CCP leadership and the capitalists in the country. The movement will certainly have to resist repression but, more than that, its most politically advanced sections must also make a conscious political break with the Communist Party, which is actually the political instrument of a bureaucratic caste that advances the imperialist interests of Chinese capital. What is needed in China is a new, revolutionary workers' party that can be built under conditions of dictatorship and oppression. The current crisis of corona politics, China's economic problems and possible mass protests and actions can create the conditions in which such a party can emerge.

Around the world, the priority must be international solidarity, support for every step towards the formation of a workers' movement independent of the bureaucracy on the one hand, and the struggle against imperialist propaganda on all sides on the other. For us, this also means breaking away from the chauvinist and racist rhetoric about the Chinese, as well as from the Western imperialist narrative that China should have opted for a policy of opening up during the pandemic so that its production for the world market would not falter.

The problem with China's corona policy is not that the country has done "too much", but that it has been bureaucratic and repressive, and that the pandemic has not been tackled in an internationally coordinated way.

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