

Facebook reverses censorship of WSWS article debunking “Wuhan Lab” conspiracy theory

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On Friday, Facebook notified users that the *World Socialist Web Site* article “Washington Post’s ‘Wuhan Lab’ conspiracy theory stands exposed” had been inappropriately censored.

The WSWS article reported the backhanded admission by the *Washington Post* that the US government had presented no evidence that COVID-19 was created by a biological weapon, despite the promotion of this debunked conspiracy theory by the *Post* itself.

Beginning on February 25, Facebook blocked anyone from sharing the WSWS article, claiming that it “goes against our community standards,” declaring that the article included “false information that has been repeatedly debunked.”

Any individual or group who attempted to share the article received a warning, and some individuals, including WSWS reporters themselves, received temporary suspensions for posting the article.

But after two months of muzzling anyone who attempted to share the article, Facebook sent messages to users declaring, “we’re sorry we got this wrong. We reviewed your post again and it does follow our community standards.”

The Trump administration’s claim that COVID-19 was a “weaponized virus” was central to its racist incitement against Asians and Asian-Americans, embodied in Trump’s declaration that COVID-19 was a “Chinese virus” and “Kung-flu.”

On March 29, the World Health Organization (WHO) published a report tearing the US government’s claims about a “weaponized” virus to shreds, declaring the claims that COVID-19 was created as a weapon not even worth discussing, and an accidental lab leak

“extremely unlikely” and not worth further investigation.

Facebook’s admission raises burning questions. Who made the decision to suppress the WSWS article in the first place, and on what grounds? Did the *Washington Post* or its owner Jeff Bezos demand that the article be removed? And why did it take two whole months for Facebook reverse its incorrect decision?

The article indicts the *Washington Post* for deliberately promoting a false, discredited, and dangerous conspiracy theory, whose circulation would clearly violate Facebook’s own policies on COVID-19 disinformation, and whose effect is to promote racist hatred of Asians and Asian-Americans.

After what was apparently a meticulous, two-month-long review, Facebook’s fact checkers found nothing wrong with the WSWS’s claims.

Moreover, why was the WSWS, which sought to publicize the WHO’s position on the Wuhan Lab conspiracy theory, censored, while no action was taken against the *Washington Post*, which promoted a discredited and racist conspiracy theory peddled by the Trump administration?

To cite only one example, on April 14, 2020, the *Washington Post* published a column by Josh Rogin entitled “State Department cables warned of safety issues at Wuhan lab studying bat coronaviruses,” which quoted an unnamed Trump administration official as saying, “Right now, the ledger on the side of it leaking from the lab is packed with bullet points and there’s almost nothing on the other side.”

Rogin’s article declares “One senior administration official told me that the cables provide one more piece of evidence to support the possibility that the pandemic

is the result of a lab accident in Wuhan.”

But when the full diplomatic cable referenced by Rogin was released in July, the *Post* itself concluded, “The full cable does not strengthen the claim that an accident at the lab caused the virus to escape.” Contrary to Rogin’s claims, the cables did not indicate any breaches of safety protocols at the laboratory: rather, it noted that manpower shortages were keeping the lab from operating at full capacity.

The conclusion is that either Rogin and the *Washington Post* served as a conduit for the Trump administration’s racist conspiracy theory without reading the documents they cite as proof, or, worse, they had access to the documents but lied about their contents. To this day, the *Post* has not issued a retraction of Rogin’s piece.

The promotion of the “Wuhan Lab” lie by the *Washington Post* extended beyond Rogin. On February 5, the *Post* published an editorial embracing the position of the Trump State Department that “a laboratory accident or leak” represents a “plausible” explanation for the pandemic.

But just a few weeks later, the *Post* made a damning admission. Writing in an editorial, the *Post* declared, “Full transparency is needed from China but also from the United States. The intelligence behind Mr. Pompeo’s statements should be declassified, with proper protection for sources and methods. The truth matters, and the United States should not hide any relevant evidence.”

The WSWS article censored by Facebook noted, “This seemingly even-handed presentation conceals a damning admission. It is a tacit acknowledgment that the *Post* does not possess a shred of evidence to back up its previous claims that the release of the virus is a ‘plausible’ scenario.”

The WHO’s report on the origins of COVID-19 presented a damning setback for the US government’s efforts to demonize the Chinese government—and thereby the Chinese people and Chinese-Americans—by claiming they bear responsibility for the deaths of three million people.

But these lies have already had their effect. As March’s hearing on “Discrimination and Violence Against Asian Americans” by the House Judiciary committee made clear, the claim that China is responsible for COVID-19 was directly involved in

countless violent attacks on Asian-Americans, some of which have been fatal.

Facebook’s suppression of the WSWS article debunking the “Wuhan Lab” conspiracy theory incident makes clear one fundamental reality: the central target of the censorship dragnet created by the social media companies is not the far-right advocates of racist conspiracy theories, but left-wing opponents of war and militarism.

This point was driven home in November of last year, when Google CEO Sundar Pichai was asked in a congressional hearing to name a “high profile person or entity from a liberal ideology who you have censored.” The Google CEO replied by citing the WSWS.

Google’s censorship of the WSWS continues. A search for “1619 project,” the work of historical falsification by the *New York Times*, first debunked by America’s leading historians on the pages of the *World Socialist Web Site*, does not link to the WSWS until the sixth page.



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