

SEP Summer School 2021 Lecture

## The Wuhan Lab lie: Who is to blame for the COVID-19 pandemic?

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*The following lecture was delivered at the Socialist Equality Party (US) 2021 summer school, held August 1 through August 6, by Andre Damon, a writer for the World Socialist Web Site. Damon has written extensively on the pandemic in the US and internationally. All of the major reports to the school are being published on the WSWS. The text of the speech follows below the video.*

### Introduction

The second debate in the 2020 US presidential election, which took place on October 22, 2020, was dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Democratic candidate Joe Biden excoriated Donald Trump's response to the disease in an unanswerable indictment of the sitting president.

"220,000 Americans dead. If you hear nothing else I say tonight, hear this... Anyone who is responsible for that many deaths should not remain as president of the United States of America."

"There are over 70,000 new cases per day," Biden continued. "The fact is that when we knew it was coming, when it hit, what happened? What did the president say? He said, 'Don't worry. It's going to go away. It'll be gone by Easter. Don't worry. Warm weather. Don't worry.'"

Biden added that Trump "says that we're learning to live with it. People are learning to die with it."

To this damning condemnation by Biden, Trump had only one response:

It's not my fault that it came here. It's China's fault. And you know what? It's not Joe's fault that it came here either. It's China's fault. They kept it from going into the rest of China for the most part, but they didn't keep it from coming out to the world, including Europe and ourselves.

Trump's claim that China was to blame for the pandemic was coupled with the insistence that nothing would be done to stop the spread of the disease. "No, we're not going to shut down."

While Biden said that any president who presided over 220,000 deaths did not deserve to remain president, under his watch a further 203,000 people have died. And the daily case rate has far exceeded what it was at the time of the debate, with the United States routinely logging over 150,000 daily cases.

Biden, like Trump, has sought to declare the pandemic over, discouraged mask-wearing and demanded the full reopening of businesses

and schools.

On May 13, Biden said America was nearing the "finish line" of the pandemic. One month later, he said: "America is headed into the summer dramatically different from last year's summer: a summer of freedom, a summer of joy, a summer of get-togethers and celebrations. An all-American summer that this country deserves after a long, long, dark winter that we've all endured."

"Take your mask off, you've earned the right," Biden proclaimed.

Just as Biden has embraced Trump's efforts to wish away COVID-19, he has likewise accepted the corollary: that China is to blame for the massive number of deaths that ensue from the ruling class's policies of "herd immunity."

Following the First World War, the question of "war guilt" dominated every issue in global politics, from the Versailles Treaty, to the Ruhr crisis of 1923, to the rise of the Nazis. Who bore responsibility for the 20 million people who died in the First World War? The ruling class of every country sought to blame its rivals to distract attention from its own predatory war aims and its own war profiteers.

So, today, the American ruling class seeks to project its own guilt for an act of mass social murder onto an external enemy. After the First World War, there was an element of truth in all of these accusations, because all of the belligerents in the imperialist war participated to secure their own predatory interests.

Today, the claim that China is responsible for the pandemic is nothing but a shameless lie.

This lecture will review the question raised in the title of Alexander Herzen's famous Russian novel of the 1840s: *Who Is to Blame?* It will review the response to the pandemic both in China and the United States—the true story of the pandemic—and refute the myth of China's responsibility for the massive death toll in the United States, placing the blame where it belongs: squarely on the shoulders of American capitalism.

### The response to the pandemic in China

On January 20, 2020, a World Health Organization (WHO) delegation conducted a field visit to Wuhan to learn about the response to the pandemic. The findings explain how China was able to largely suppress the pandemic through a massive program to contain COVID-19. To date, fewer than 4,636 people have died in China from the pandemic—roughly the number who succumbed to COVID-19 in the US on January 12, 2021.

The report stated:

In the face of a previously unknown virus, China has rolled out perhaps the most ambitious, agile and aggressive disease containment effort in history...

Achieving China's exceptional coverage with and adherence to these containment measures has only been possible due to the deep commitment of the Chinese people to collective action in the face of this common threat.

At the individual level, the Chinese people have reacted to this outbreak with courage and conviction. They have accepted and adhered to the starker of containment measures—whether the suspension of public gatherings, the month-long “stay at home” advisories or prohibitions on travel. Throughout an intensive 9 days of site visits across China, in frank discussions from the level of local community mobilizers and frontline health care providers to top scientists, Governors and Mayors, the Joint Mission was struck by the sincerity and dedication that each brings to this COVID-19 response.

China's bold approach to contain the rapid spread of this new respiratory pathogen has changed the course of a rapidly escalating and deadly epidemic... The decline in COVID-19 cases across China is real.

The Joint Mission estimates that this truly all-of-Government and all-of-society approach that has been taken in China has averted or at least delayed hundreds of thousands of COVID-19 cases in the country. By extension, the reduction that has been achieved in the force of COVID-19 infection in China has also played a significant role in protecting the global community and creating a stronger first line of defense against international spread.

But the report went on to warn:

Much of the global community is not yet ready, in mindset and materially, to implement the measures that have been employed to contain COVID-19 in China. These are the only measures that are currently proven to interrupt or minimize transmission chains in humans. Fundamental to these measures is extremely proactive surveillance to immediately detect cases, very rapid diagnosis and immediate case isolation, rigorous tracking and quarantine of close contacts, and an exceptionally high degree of population understanding and acceptance of these measures.

### The US response to the pandemic

On January 24, 2020, the Senate Health Committee and Senate Foreign Relations Committee held a closed-door briefing, open to all senators, on the COVID-19 outbreak. Committee staffers told the WSWS that no public records were kept of the content or attendance at the meeting. However, media reports indicate that Senate Intelligence Chairman Richard Burr and Senator Kelly Loeffler attended.

Emerging from the hearing, Dr. Anthony Fauci told reporters, “I don't think this is something that the United States public should be worried or frightened about.” He added, “I think the risk is very low right now for the United States.”

Whatever was said in private at the hearing, Loeffler did not get the same message as Fauci communicated publicly. Beginning immediately after the hearing, Loeffler began selling stock in the first of 29 stock

transactions lasting several weeks. While she dumped stocks that lost value, she purchased shares in the online meeting firm Citrix—which makes Gotomeeting and Gotowebinar—whose business boomed during the pandemic.

On February 27, Burr secretly told a group of affluent Washington insiders at a private club known as the Tar Heel Circle, who paid as much as \$10,000 per year for membership, that the pandemic would be much more severe than the public was being told. “There's one thing that I can tell you about this: It is much more aggressive in its transmission than anything that we have seen in recent history,” he said, according to a secret recording of the remarks obtained by National Public Radio. “It is probably more akin to the 1918 pandemic.”

These statements flatly contradicted the tone of a public op-ed Burr wrote just three days earlier, in which he declared that the US was “better prepared than ever before” to respond to a pandemic. Burr would subsequently resign as chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee in response to allegations that he sold stocks based on the insider information he received.

The *Washington Post* reported that lawmakers were repeatedly and extensively briefed about the danger posed by the pandemic throughout the first two months of 2020.

US intelligence agencies were issuing ominous, classified warnings in January and February about the global danger posed by the coronavirus while President Trump and lawmakers played down the threat and failed to take action that might have slowed the spread of the pathogen.

The article continued:

Taken together, the reports and warnings painted an early picture of a virus that showed the characteristics of a globe-encircling pandemic that could require governments to take swift actions to contain it. But despite that constant flow of reporting, Trump continued publicly and privately to play down the threat the virus posed to Americans. Lawmakers, too, did not grapple with the virus in earnest until this month [that is, March]...

Between January 31 and February 18, Dianne Feinstein, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, sold between \$1.5 million and \$6 million worth of stock.

Throughout the month of January, the number of new COVID-19 cases in the Chinese province of Hubei grew steadily, reaching a peak at the end of the month. The city of Wuhan, with its hospital system totally overrun, was put under lockdown, with residents allowed out only to buy groceries.

In early February, US President Donald Trump told Bob Woodward that he had just had a conversation with Chinese President Xi Jinping, who had provided the American president with a clear and blunt assessment of the dangers posed by the pandemic. “This is deadly stuff,” Trump said. “It's also more deadly than ... even your strenuous flus ... this is five percent [case fatality rate] versus one percent and less than one percent.”

Eschewing the antiscientific demagogery of his public statements, Trump demonstrated a clear and precise understanding of the disease in his discussion with Woodward. “It goes through air, Bob. That's always tougher than the touch,” Trump said, an appraisal fully in line with the current scientific consensus.

As demonstrated by Trump's description of his phone call with Chinese President Xi Jinping, Chinese authorities were as transparent with US

officials as they were with the public health community, precisely explaining the disease's method of transmission, its fatality rate and the measures necessary to contain it.

We now know that widespread community transmission was already occurring in the United States by early January. But despite the availability of a COVID-19 test from the World Health Organization, virtually no tests were conducted in the US during the entire month of January and almost all of February, according to figures from the COVID Tracking Project.

The decision not to test the population in the first two months of the pandemic has never been convincingly explained. As the *Financial Times* noted, Jared Kushner, who organized the White House's pandemic response behind the scenes "had been arguing that testing too many people, or ordering too many ventilators, would spook the markets and so we just shouldn't do it."

Pointing to the low number of officially recognized cases, the Trump administration claimed that the danger was low, while discouraging the public from taking vital social distancing measures that could have halted the spread of the pandemic.

By contrast, the *World Socialist Web Site* was issuing the starker warnings. We wrote on February 28:

The International Committee of the Fourth International calls for a globally coordinated emergency response to the spreading coronavirus pandemic. The working class must demand that governments make available the resources required to contain the spread of the disease, treat and care for those who are infected, and secure the livelihoods of the hundreds of millions of people who will be affected by the economic fallout.

As the senators were dumping their stock, there was still no testing occurring, even with widespread community transmission in the US. The first batch of COVID-19 tests occurred on February 29.

Throughout the months of January and February, leading figures within the Democratic Party observed an airtight silence on the pandemic. This was in line with the posture of the *New York Times*, which did not write a single editorial on the subject between January 29 and February 29.

By mid-March, with the pandemic totally overwhelming Italy and rapidly spreading in New York, it became impossible to keep up this charade. Once the US finally began testing people who showed symptoms of COVID-19, it became undeniable that there was widespread community transmission all over the country.

On March 19, Trump told journalist Bob Woodward that he was deliberately misleading the American public about the danger. Trump said, "I wanted to always play it down. I still like playing it down, because I don't want to create a panic."

On March 14, the Socialist Equality Party published a statement titled, "Shut down the auto industry to halt the spread of coronavirus!" The statement was circulated widely inside the auto plants of the American Midwest.

Over the following week, a series of wildcat strikes forced the shutdown of the entire US auto industry, with Fiat Chrysler announcing suspension of production on March 18. Trump's interview with Woodward occurred the next day, when the financial markets were near their lows for the year, after the Dow Jones Industrial Average had dropped close to 10,000 points.

The first procedural vote on what would become the CARES Act took place on March 22. After that vote failed, the Dow futures hit their downward limit. Another procedural vote failed on March 23, after which the markets reached their low for the year.

On March 25, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell announced an agreement on the CARES Act. The Senate unanimously passed the bill that evening and the House followed with an unrecorded voice vote. The bill was signed by Trump within just five days of the first procedural vote.

Something like \$6 trillion had been conjured up overnight to rescue the financial markets, including approximately \$4 trillion from the Federal Reserve.

On the same day as the first procedural vote for the CARES Act, and within just a week of the beginning of widespread lockdowns, *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman published "A Plan to Get America Back to Work," arguing for letting the virus run rampant through the population and a policy of "herd immunity."

Within a matter of days, Trump began to advocate for the abandonment of basic containment measures under the slogan, coined by Friedman, that "The cure can't be worse than the disease." This campaign led the White House to release a set of guidelines titled "Opening Up America Again."

While these guidelines nominally set out a set of criteria for states to reopen nonessential businesses, they in fact sent a political signal that all measures to contain the disease were to be abandoned. Governors in every state proceeded to reopen in violation of the Trump administrations' own guidelines, including states with Democratic governors where cases continued to surge.

Deborah Birx, Trump's White House coronavirus response coordinator, recently acknowledged that the response of the states was to "completely ignore the opening criteria." She added, "I didn't see coming that no one would follow really the gating criteria ... so when Memorial Day came, it was—it was shocking."

But the states' actions did not come as a surprise to the *World Socialist Web Site*. Just days after the release of the guidelines, the WSWS wrote:

The Trump administration's cynical announcement of a set of fraudulent "guidelines" that will serve to legitimize a rapid reopening of businesses and a forced return to work, in unsafe conditions, brings to an end any public pretense of a systematic and coordinated effort within the United States to prioritize health and to protect human life in combating the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

One year later, not a word of this analysis needs to be changed. With the announcement of the reopening criteria, Birx and Fauci were largely sidelined, going weeks without speaking to Trump, replaced with the right-wing ideologue and herd immunity proponent Scott Atlas.

As Trump's "testing tsar" Brett P. Giroir told CNN: "Dr. Atlas's position is that we should just sort of let it go in the healthy population to create herd immunity." Giroir added that Atlas and his co-thinkers believed any measures to contain the disease were "compromising the American economy, the American lifestyle. In their mind, all of those things outweighed the fatalities."

Or, as one White House staffer put it, "We want them infected."

In an interview with CNN, Birx admitted that nearly half a million deaths in the United States were preventable. As she put it: "The first time, we have an excuse, there were about 100,000 deaths that came from that original search; all of the rest of them, in my mind, could have been mitigated or decreased substantially."

## Biden and the pandemic

For months, Biden has used the claim that vaccinated people are fully protected from COVID-19 to justify the abandonment of masking and social distancing requirements, despite the fact that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) had access to data definitively proving the opposite. “Take your mask off, you’ve earned the right,” Biden said in June.

On May 13, the CDC reversed its guidance on mask-wearing, urging vaccinated people to stop wearing masks and socially distancing in crowded areas. “Anyone who is fully vaccinated can participate in indoor and outdoor activities, large or small, without wearing a mask or physical distancing,” CDC Director Rochelle Walensky declared.

The CDC’s statements prompted the near-total abandonment of mask-wearing in the United States. Within days, businesses stopped enforcing mask mandates, while the vaccinated public, misinformed by the CDC, went maskless and reduced social distancing.

At the same time, the CDC stopped monitoring breakthrough infections among vaccinated people in an action that epidemiologist Eric Feigl-Ding called “neglectful & derelict in their duty.”

The deliberate promotion of false advice by US health authorities helped drive a massive resurgence of the pandemic, with cases now surging 50 percent per week.

## Evaluating the US response to the pandemic

On February of this year, the *BMJ* (formerly, *British Medical Journal*) published an editorial accusing the world’s governments of “social murder” in their collective response to the pandemic.

“Murder,” the editorial begins, “is an emotive word. In law, it requires premeditation. Death must be deemed to be unlawful. How could ‘murder’ apply to failures of a pandemic response?” The *BMJ* then goes on to argue that the term is entirely appropriate:

When politicians and experts say that they are willing to allow tens of thousands of premature deaths for the sake of population immunity or in the hope of propping up the economy, is that not premeditated and reckless indifference to human life? If policy failures lead to recurrent and mistimed lockdowns, who is responsible for the resulting non-COVID excess deaths? When politicians willfully neglect scientific advice, international and historical experience, and their own alarming statistics and modelling because to act goes against their political strategy, is that lawful? Is inaction, action?

“At the very least,” the *BMJ* writes, “COVID-19 might be classified as ‘social murder,’” pointing to the use of the term by the socialist leader Friedrich Engels in “describing the political and social power held by the ruling elite over the working classes in 19th century England.”

This is the reality of the pandemic, which carries the inevitable conclusion that the ruling class is guilty of an enormous crime against the population. It is this guilt that compels the falsification of the history of the pandemic.

## The genesis of the Wuhan lab lie

The “Wuhan Lab” conspiracy theory was originated in January 2020 by the fascist Steve Bannon—CEO of Trump’s 2016 election campaign and former chief White House strategist—and Bannon’s allies among right-wing Chinese expatriates such as Miles Guo, who claimed, in the words of Trump adviser Peter Navarro, that COVID-19 was a “weaponized” virus.

In mid-January 2020, the US-based Chinese “dissident” Wang Dinggang, who broadcasts in Mandarin as Lude, appears to have originated the claim that COVID-19 “had been deliberately released by the Chinese Communist Party,” according to the *New York Times*. Wang Dinggang is an associate of Steve Bannon, Miles Guo and former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani.

On January 25, 2020, “G News,” the news site operated by Miles Guo, the business partner of Bannon, published an article asserting that “the real source of the coronavirus is from ‘a lab in Wuhan’ linked to its covert biological weapons programs.” By all indications, this post is the first categorical assertion of this claim available in English.

Also on January 25, 2020, Bannon launched the “War Room” pandemic podcast, which would become a cornerstone of the fascist movement around Trump.

In the first episode of the podcast, taped on January 25, Bannon invited *Washington Times* columnist Bill Gertz to speak on the “Wuhan lab” theory. Bannon asks him, “Bill, could you briefly summarize the article you did yesterday,” implying that Bannon had advance knowledge of Gertz’s article two days before it was published.

On January 26, 2020, Gertz published in the *Washington Times* the report he had described to Bannon, citing Lt. Col. Dany Shoham, an Israeli intelligence officer.

On January 31, 2020, the far-right *Epoch Times*, associated with the Falun Gong religious movement, published an article titled “Did China’s Plan to Destroy the United States Backfire?” The article declared that the Chinese Communist Party considered biological weapons to be the most important weapons for accomplishing its goal of “cleaning up America.” It concluded: “It’s highly probable that the 2019-nCoV organism is a weaponized version of the NCoV discovered by Saudi doctors in 2012.”

On May 3, 2020, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo declared there was “enormous evidence” that the virus originated in a Wuhan laboratory, adding, “Remember, China has a history of infecting the world.”

In a separate interview the same day, White House adviser Navarro declared that China “seeded the world with what became the pandemic.” Navarro called COVID-19 a “weaponized virus.”

On April 14, 2020, *Washington Post* columnist Josh Rogin published an op-ed giving the newspaper’s imprimatur to the Trump administration’s false claims that COVID-19 emerged from a laboratory. Up to that point dismissed as a right-wing conspiracy theory, Rogin’s piece established the Wuhan lab lie as part of the official political discourse in the United States.

Under the headline, “State Department cables warned of safety issues at Wuhan lab studying bat coronaviruses,” Rogin wrote, “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.”

Tellingly, 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.” Any reading of the cable makes clear that it says nothing like Rogin’s interpretation.

On May 5, 2021, the theory was refined and given a pseudo-scientific presentation by Nicholas Wade, who, in an article published in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, presented a narrative in which US and Chinese scientists created SARS-CoV-2 through “gain of function” experiments at the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

Wade’s narrative was embraced by the *New York Times*, *Washington*

*Post* and *Wall Street Journal*, all of which published editorials or major op-eds citing Wade without explaining his background. According to Wade, leading US, Chinese and other international scientists secretly collaborated on “gain of function” research, released the virus, then covered up the incident so effectively that no evidence of the conspiracy can be found to this day.

Then, on May 23, 2021, the *Wall Street Journal* published an article titled “Intelligence on Sick Staff at Wuhan Lab Fuels Debate on COVID-19 Origin.” Citing unnamed “current and former officials,” it claimed that researchers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology “went to hospital in November 2019, shortly before confirmed outbreak” of COVID-19.

On May 25, 2021, the *Washington Post* published a “fact checker” column by Glenn Kessler headlined, “How the Wuhan lab-leak theory suddenly became credible.” The article sought to present the US media’s embrace of a right-wing conspiracy theory as reasonable and logical.

Within days, on May 26, President Joe Biden called on the Intelligence Community to investigate whether COVID-19 arose “from a laboratory accident” and “report back to me in 90 days.”

### Anti-Asian racism and the Wuhan lab lie

Nicholas Wade, the leading ideologue of the Wuhan lab “theory,” is a racist ideologue, who has argued that the “Jews are adapted to capitalism.” Wade’s earlier writings have been embraced by the neo-fascist Nick Fuentes and former KKK Grand Wizard David Duke.

There is a profoundly racist undercurrent to the entire narrative.

Kevin Kumashiro, PhD, the former dean of the University of San Francisco School of Education, notes:

Associating disease with a particular country or race has serious consequences. From the early 1800s through the early 1900s, Chinese—and, at times, Japanese—immigrants to the U.S. were accused of bringing and spreading bubonic plague, cholera, smallpox, syphilis, trachoma, and even sexual deviance. The results of such beliefs were school segregation, systematic destruction of homes and property, and immigration restrictions.

Now, fear of the Yellow Peril has taken shape in the form of allegations that China is engaged in germ warfare by intentionally spreading COVID-19 to weaken the economies of other nations, particularly that of the U.S.

Attacking China and people of Asian descent by conjuring the long histories of racialized disease serves effectively to detract attention from the failures of the Trump administration in addressing this current pandemic.

Now the demonization of China by the media and Trump over its alleged responsibility for the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted a wave of violence against Asian Americans.

On March 11, 2021, the House Judiciary Committee held a hearing on “Discrimination and Violence Against Asian Americans.”

The hearing noted that 80 percent of Asian Americans said violence against them is rising. One third feared someone might threaten or physically attack them, one quarter were subjected to racial slurs or jokes, and one sixth were told they should go back to their home country or that they were to blame for the pandemic.

The opening statement to the hearing by the ranking Republican on the

committee, Texas Representative Chip Roy, was a racist diatribe and open incitement to violence. Referring to the Chinese as “Chi-Coms,” a racist slur, Roy declared, “I think they’re the bad guys.”

He added, “That’s the reality of what I tend to refer to as the Chi-Coms. And I’m not going to be ashamed of saying I oppose the Chi-Coms.” He favorably invoked the legacy of lynch law in America, declaring, “There’s old sayings in Texas about find all the rope in Texas and get a tall Oak tree.”

Last month, the fascist congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene openly called for ethnic cleansing, declaring, “I would kick out every single Chinese in this country that is loyal to the CCP. They would be gone. I do not care who they are.”

This type of racism is not confined to the Republicans. In September 2019, a *Washington Post* editorial endorsed a report by the Hoover Institution agitating for the exclusion of ethnic Chinese students and professors. The Hoover Institution wrote: “Officials from Beijing have stated clearly that they do not view overseas Chinese as simply citizens of foreign countries,” but rather as “overseas compatriots,” who have both historical connections and responsibilities as “sons and daughters of the Yellow Emperor.”

### Scientists refute the lie

The Wuhan Lab lie flies in the face of everything that is known of the origins of COVID-19. Dan Samorodnitsky, a biochemist and senior editor at Massive Science, compared the natural origin versus the lab leak “theory” as follows:

One hypothesis requires a colossal cover-up and the silent, unswerving, leak-proof compliance of a vast network of scientists, civilians, and government officials for over a year. The other requires only for biology to behave as it always has, for a family of viruses that have done this before to do it again. The zoonotic spillover hypothesis is simple and explains everything. It’s scientific malpractice to pretend that one idea is equally as meritorious as the other. The lab-leak hypothesis is a scientific *deus ex machina*, a narrative shortcut that points a finger at a specific set of bad actors.

To date, the most succinct response to the narrative promoted by Nicholas Wade is a paper published by Edward Holmes from the University of Sydney and professor Andrew Rambaut from the University of Edinburgh. Among the co-authors are Georgetown University virologist Dr. Angela Rasmussen and Kristian G. Andersen, director of Infectious Disease Genomics at Scripps Research Translational Institute.

The paper begins by noting that the transfer of animal diseases to humans has been definitively shown to have caused nearly all previous pandemics:

SARS-CoV-2 is the ninth documented coronavirus that infects humans and the seventh identified in the last 20 years. All previous human coronaviruses have zoonotic origins, as have the vast majority of human viruses.

The paper adds:

The emergence of SARS-CoV-2 bears several signatures of these prior zoonotic events. It displays clear similarities to SARS-CoV that spilled over into humans in Foshan, Guangdong province, China in November 2002, and again in Guangzhou, Guangdong province in 2003.

"Our careful and critical analysis of the currently available data provided no evidence for the idea that SARS-CoV-2 originated in a laboratory," Holmes said. Rather, he and his fellow authors argue that "there is a substantial body of scientific evidence supporting a zoonotic origin for SARS-CoV-2."

The paper also states:

There is no evidence that any early cases had any connection to the Wuhan Institute of Virology [WIV] in contrast to the clear epidemiological links to animal markets in Wuhan, nor evidence that the WIV possessed or worked on a progenitor of SARS-CoV-2 prior to the pandemic.

The authors further note that the SARS-CoV-2 virus does not resemble any virus that could theoretically be used as a "backbone" to create a new virus.

Their paper explains, "Under any laboratory escape scenario SARS-CoV-2 would have to have been present in a laboratory prior to the pandemic, yet no evidence exists to support such a notion and no sequence has been identified that could have served as a precursor."

The scientists further note that while "gain of function" research is typically carried out in laboratory mice, the virus is not well adapted to rodents, indicating that "SARS-CoV-2 is highly unlikely to have been acquired by laboratory workers in the course of viral pathogenesis or gain-of-function experiments."

Their paper adds that "since its emergence, SARS-CoV-2 has experienced repeated sweeps of mutations that have increased viral fitness," refuting the claim that COVID-19 was somehow originally optimized to infect humans. "Combined, these findings show that no specific human 'pre' adaptation was required for the emergence or early spread of SARS-CoV-2, and the claim that the virus was already highly adapted to the human host ... is without validity."

On March 30, 2021, the World Health Organization issued its interim report on the origins of COVID-19. It dismissed out of hand the claim that COVID-19 was developed as a biological weapon, concluding that this "has been ruled out by other scientists following analyses of the genome."

The WHO considered the possibility of a laboratory leak. But it dismissed this possibility as "extremely unlikely," declaring, "There is no record of viruses closely related to SARS-CoV-2 in any laboratory before December 2019, or genomes that in combination could provide a SARS-CoV-2 genome."

### **The WSWS exposes the Wuhan Lab lie**

While the leading role in exposing the pseudo-science prompted by Wade was played by the WHO team investigating the origins of COVID-19, including Peter Dazak and Ralph Baric, and scientists such as Kristian G. Andersen and Angela Rasmussen, the *World Socialist Web Site* played a critical role in exposing the lies presented in the major US media outlets to promote it.

The WSWS was the only publication that exposed the role of Steve Bannon and Miles Guo following the *Washington Post's* declaration that the lab leak theory was "credible." Peter Dazak, the leading target of the Wuhan lab conspiracy theory, thanked the WSWS for its coverage of this issue. When Dazak came under attack for his statements, he declared, "Last time I checked we'd moved beyond McCarthy in the US!"

While the corporate media presentation of the Wuhan lab theory was entirely uncritical of Nicholas Wade, the WSWS exposed the role of Wade as a serial falsifier and racist ideologue. Since the publication of our article, Wade has not been cited a single time by the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* or *Wall Street Journal*.

The WSWS exposed the fact that Michael Gordon, the author of the above-cited May 2021 *Wall Street Journal* article claiming that Wuhan Institute of Virology researchers had been hospitalized shortly before the outbreak of COVID-19, was the co-author with Judith Miller of the September 2002 *New York Times* article falsely claiming that Saddam Hussein was seeking to obtain aluminum tubes for creating nuclear weapons. Our article was shared by Dazak, as well as by reporters for *Nature News*, *Forbes*, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Wire (India)* and over a dozen other news outlets.

It was tweeted by China's deputy minister of propaganda, the deputy director of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Information Department (three times), and by the former head of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the Russian State Duma.

Our refutation of the Wuhan lab lie was cited extensively by the Xinhua news agency, which quoted the WSWS as saying, "More than one year into the pandemic, these baseless theories are propounded throughout the corporate press as part of a coordinated international campaign to deflect the burden of blame for the pandemic from the ruling elites' disastrous response against the contagion and thrust it onto the heads of the Chinese government and Chinese scientists."

### **The censorship of the WSWS**

The WSWS's refutation of the Wuhan Lab lie prompted one of the most heavy-handed acts of censorship yet against our movement.

On February 25, 2021, Facebook blocked its users from sharing the *World Socialist Web Site* Perspective column, "Washington Post's 'Wuhan Lab' conspiracy theory stands exposed."

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."

Multiple writers and readers of the WSWS either received warnings or had their accounts suspended.

On May 1, 2021, Facebook notified users that the same WSWS article, "Washington Post's 'Wuhan Lab' conspiracy theory stands exposed," had been inappropriately censored, without providing any serious explanation.

We remain censored on Reddit's coronavirus forum as well as Reddit's world news and politics section. And Google continues its intervention to bury the WSWS and other left-wing publications in search results.

### **The role of the pseudo-left**

The entirety of the middle-class "left" was silent on the WSWS's censorship by Facebook over its refutation of the Wuhan lab lie. But with

the publication of Michael Gordon's May 2021 article in the *Wall Street Journal*, significant sections of the middle-class "left" moved to openly embrace the lie.

The most prominent advocate for this conspiracy theory among figures previously associated with the "left" was Glenn Greenwald, who worked to obscure the parallels between the Wuhan Lab lie and the Bush administration's lies about "weapons of mass destruction."

He wrote, "There seems to be a fear, especially on the left, that the lab-leak theory is militaristic or anti-China. Not true for several reasons: The US funded joint research in Wuhan. ... Truth is truth."

*Jacobin* writer Branko Marcetic demanded that this conspiracy theory be treated as legitimate. "The dismissal of calls to take the lab-leak theory seriously on the basis that it's a US govt conspiracy to undermine China doesn't make much sense," Marcetic wrote. "Also not convinced the theory being true would be like the Iraqi WMDs."

Greenwald hailed Jon Stewart, the onetime opponent of the Iraq War, when he declared on live TV that the COVID-19 pandemic was "caused by science." He raved: "There's a novel respiratory coronavirus overtaking Wuhan, China. What do we do? Oh, you know, who we could ask? The Wuhan novel respiratory coronavirus lab. The disease is the same name as the lab."

Stewart and Greenwald express a broader social trend. Critical of certain aspects of imperialist policy, their outrage over the Iraq War was never rooted in an orientation to the working class and the struggle against the capitalist system. Their outlook was, fundamentally, one of middle-class rage.

As we wrote after Jon Stewart's rant:

Marxists have long pointed to the phenomenon of the "enraged petty bourgeois," who can in certain historical periods swing violently and sharply to the right.

Now Stewart, [Bill] Maher and Greenwald and the social layer they speak for have been swept up by powerful right-wing currents in contemporary politics, unmoored by a vast social crisis all around them, which they do not understand and for which they are politically unprepared.

## The social purpose of the lie

The promotion of this unsubstantiated theory by the US media can be explained only on the basis of the socioeconomic interests driving it. As the *World Socialist Web Site* International Editorial Board wrote in its May 28, 2021 statement, The Wuhan lab conspiracy theory: American capitalism's "big lie":

First, it aims to divert attention from the actions of the US and other governments in implementing policies that led to deaths on a massive scale. As the public begins to recover from the overwhelming shock of the pandemic, there will be demands for explanations for why so many people died, along with accountability for those responsible ...

The campaign is aimed at threatening, bullying and intimidating scientists into keeping silent as the United States abandons all the measures necessary to contain the pandemic, even as cases surge to record levels.

To the extent that Anthony Fauci and other scientists have criticized the removal of restrictions and made warnings about the extreme danger of the pandemic, they have become a central target of the fascistic right.

The WSWS International Editorial Board statement continued:

Second, the Wuhan lab lie seeks to drum up nationalist hatred to support the Biden administration's central strategic aim: the preparation for economic and potentially military conflict with China.

In November, Bloomberg News made the following warning:

There is one other factor that people are loathe to discuss (with one exception). Yes, the U.S. has botched its response to COVID-19. At the same time, its experience shows that America as a nation can in fact tolerate casualties, too many in fact. It had long been standard Chinese doctrine that Americans are "soft" and unwilling to take on much risk. If you were a Chinese war game planner, might you now reconsider that assumption?

## Conclusion

This is a portrait of a sick social order. Consciously and knowingly, the political representatives of the American financial oligarchy have taken actions that have led to the deaths of over 600,000 people in America. A ruling class capable of such actions is capable of any crime.

We must call things by their real name. The Biden administration, like the Trump administration, is pursuing a policy of herd immunity through mass infection. This is a policy that the *BMJ* has correctly termed "social murder."

The proverbial "vexed questions" of Russian history and literature are "Who is to Blame?"—the title of Herzen's novel—and "What Is To Be Done"—the title of the works by Chernyshevsky and Lenin.

In the pandemic, as in all great historical questions, the two questions are intimately linked. He who says that China is to blame for the pandemic absolves American capitalism of its sins, both past and future. The advocates of the Wuhan lab lie are the advocates of "herd immunity" and "learning to live with the virus."

A year and a half into a pandemic that goes only from bad to worse, it is possible to draw certain definite and concrete conclusions.

"Who is to blame?" Capitalism.

"What is to be done?" Capitalism must be abolished.

The conclusions are the ones we drew in our first International Committee statement on the pandemic, one-and-a-half years ago:

The present crisis demonstrates again that capitalism is an outmoded economic system and barrier to human progress. The danger posed by this pandemic and the catastrophic implications of global warming prove that the capitalist system must give way to world socialism.



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