

Stop the witch-hunt against scientist Peter Daszak!

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On Monday, the *Washington Post* published an editorial falsely insinuating that Peter Daszak, a leading zoologist and expert on infectious diseases, helped create SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. The *Post* calls on Congress to subpoena Daszak to testify, openly embracing a demand advocated by the fascistic right.

In an editorial entitled, “Question Mr. Daszak: He might know what really happened in Wuhan,” the *Post* declares, “efforts must be made to discover whether a laboratory release or infection led to the pandemic.”

The *Post*’s embrace of the witch-hunt against Daszak is part of its promotion of the Wuhan lab libel, a right-wing hoax aimed at blaming China for the pandemic with the assertion that the disease was released—intentionally or accidentally—from the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

The *Post* writes, “The two major hypotheses for the virus origins are zoonotic spillover, from an animal to human perhaps with an intermediate host, or that it leaked or escaped from a laboratory accident in Wuhan.

“Zoonotic spillover is a plausible explanation based on historical experience, and scientists should pursue it vigorously. But similar efforts must be made to discover whether a laboratory release or infection led to the pandemic.”

No, there do not exist two “hypotheses” of the origins of COVID-19. One claim is a scientific theory, the other is a flat-out lie concocted by the fascistic right.

The scientific theory of zoonosis has accounted for every major outbreak of infectious disease known to man. The zoonotic origins of COVID-19 are constantly being substantiated by new discoveries, including of viruses whose receptor binding domains are only a few base pairs away from SARS-CoV-2.

Despite accepting that COVID-19 would be the first genetically engineered disease to ever kill a human, the advocates of the Wuhan lab conspiracy theory admit that there is no evidence, whether witnesses, documents or anything else, to indicate that SARS-CoV-2 was created, stored or released from the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

In two years, its proponents have discovered nothing beyond the free and public admission by scientists like Daszak that they were doing research. As an explanation of their failure to find any evidence, the conspiracy theorists allege a secret plot stretching from Beijing to Washington.

The *Post* accuses Daszak of asserting what was in fact the newspaper’s own position until May 2021. On February 17, the *Post* published an article entitled, “Tom Cotton keeps repeating a coronavirus conspiracy theory that was already debunked,” stating that “Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) repeated a fringe theory suggesting that the ongoing spread of a coronavirus is connected to research in the disease-ravaged epicenter of Wuhan, China.”

On April 30, the *Post* published a “correction” to the story, declaring, “The term ‘debunked’ and the *Post*’s use of ‘conspiracy theory’ have been removed.” To the extent that there is a “debate,” it is because the *Post* and other newspapers have created it by declaring, out of the blue, that the lab leak hoax is “credible.”

But the *Post* lets slip its real motivation in seeking to drag the scientist before a witch-finding panel: “Mr. Daszak has been particularly aggressive in promoting the zoonotic spillover hypothesis and attacking the laboratory leak as a ‘conspiracy theory.’”

In other words, Daszak is being targeted because he is defending scientific principles and opposing a concocted and deliberate lie that, were it to be believed by the public, would be used to justify a war between the United States and China, whose death toll could number in the hundreds of millions or even billions.

The *Post*’s witch-hunt against Daszak recalls the darkest days of McCarthyism and the House Un-American Activities Committee, with its unhinged allegations of a sweeping communist conspiracy going all the way up to the White House.

The stakes in assigning blame for the pandemic are high. The death toll in the United States, as estimated by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, stands at 1.1 million, as part of a global catastrophe that has killed over

15 million people.

The great mass of these deaths are the result of deliberate policies pursued by the United States and other governments, which claimed that the mass infection of the population would generate “herd immunity,” as an excuse to prematurely reopen schools and businesses.

Under these conditions, the US political establishment is using the well-known technique of finding a scapegoat. Just as the German ruling elite sought to scapegoat the Jews for the loss of two million German soldiers in the First World War, American capitalism is seeking to blame China for the massive loss of life from COVID-19.

Indeed, there must be hearings into the responsibility for the pandemic, but those who will be held to account will not be the scientists who warned the public about the dangers, but the governments that deliberately promoted the mass infection of their populations through the policy of “herd immunity.”

Scrutiny will be placed on media publications that, like the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, openly advocated mass infection. On May 18, 2020, the *Post* published an editorial entitled, “Did Sweden make the right call on limiting its lockdown?,” calling the so-called “Swedish model” of responding to the pandemic “appealing” and praising it for not carrying out “draconian” lockdowns.

At that point, 80,000 Americans had been killed by the pandemic, a figure that has risen more than ten-fold as a result of the government’s policies.

On Tuesday, the Brazilian Senate voted to recommend criminal charges against President Jair Bolsonaro, arguing that his promotion of the “herd immunity” policy of mass infection in response to COVID-19 helped lead to hundreds of thousands of preventable deaths in Brazil.

Bolsonaro repeatedly pointed to the so-called “Swedish model” as an example to follow, telling a meeting of Brazilian business leaders, “If it was up to me, almost nothing would have been closed, like Sweden.”

If Bolsonaro is guilty of “crimes against humanity,” so too are all of those who promoted the homicidal policy he embraced, from Trump in the United States to Johnson in the UK and Biden, who, after having pledged to “follow the science,” has only continued the policies of opening schools and businesses amid a raging pandemic.

Unlike the governments and media outlets that promoted mass infection, Daszak has devoted his life to raising awareness of the dangers of new infectious diseases, warning the public for years before 2020 about the way in which the next pandemic would emerge and spread unless society undertook a major program to track viruses, contain zoonotic spillovers and stop pandemics.

“With the growing interface between human populations

and wildlife species, and increases in globalization and air travel, it is likely that pandemic incidences will only become more frequent,” Daszak warned in 2016.

He called for “a global, coordinated strategy to thwart” the emergence of pandemics. He warned that “we are currently living in the age of pandemics,” prophetically cautioning, “act now or pay a significantly higher price later.”

The *Washington Post* is owned by Jeff Bezos, the main owner and founder of the retail monopoly Amazon. Since the start of the pandemic, Bezos’s personal wealth has increased by more than \$80 billion. This wealth was extracted by forcing Amazon workers into unsafe warehouses that are major hotbeds of the pandemic.

A lawsuit filed by the state of New York asserted in February that “Throughout the historic pandemic, Amazon has repeatedly and persistently failed to comply with its obligation to institute reasonable and adequate measures to protect its workers from the spread of the virus.”

It added, “Amazon’s flagrant disregard for health and safety requirements has threatened serious illness and grave harm to the thousands of workers in these facilities and poses a continued substantial and specific danger to the public health.”

The *Post*’s declaration that the lab leak theory is “credible” is part of a shift within the Democratic Party and political establishment toward conflict with China, in the process embracing policies long associated with the far right.

Perhaps the most dangerous element of the *Post*’s witch-hunt against Daszak is the encouragement and validation it will bring to the fascist movement around Donald Trump. For nearly two years, the fascist plotters responsible for the January 6 insurrection, including Steve Bannon and his co-conspirators, promoted the libel that SARS-CoV-2 was a man-made virus created at the Wuhan Institute of Virology. The fascist *National Pulse*, noting that it “called for Daszak to testify in front of Congress six months ago,” hailed the *Washington Post* op-ed as a validation.

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on all workers, students and professionals to oppose the US media’s efforts to scapegoat scientists and promote anti-Chinese xenophobia. The blame is not with scientists who sought to warn the public, but with governments who willfully disregarded science to carry out a policy of mass infection and death!



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