

Stop the witch-hunt against vaccinologist Peter Hotez!

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On Sunday, as he was getting a cake for his father on Father's Day, vaccinologist Dr. Peter Hotez was stalked at his home by two fascists, who followed him to the door of his house while shouting accusations that he was "injuring" the population with vaccines.

This incident is part of an escalating campaign, spearheaded by the fascist right, against experts who specialize in COVID-19 research and are fighting for a scientific response to the pandemic, aimed at terrorizing them into silence.

Dr. Hotez regularly receives threats, along with antisemitic hate speech. He is not alone. One prominent scientist who spoke to the WSWS described receiving repeated death threats targeting himself and his children and being sent an envelope of white powder in the mail.

In America, the "land of the free," scientists fighting deadly infectious diseases must do their work under siege. For these scientists, publicly advocating basic scientific truths means placing one's life in danger.

More than 1.1 million Americans have died from COVID-19. Throughout the course of the pandemic, scientists like Hotez have urged measures to reduce the spread and severity of COVID-19, including vaccines, masking and social distancing, to save countless lives.

Hotez is a Nobel Prize-nominated scientist, who led efforts to develop a low-cost, patent-free vaccine for COVID-19. For years, he has been a prominent public opponent of right-wing pseudoscience. He accurately labeled advocates of anti-vaccine propaganda as "neofascist" and correctly referred to the Wuhan lab conspiracy theory, which claims that scientists created COVID-19, as a "witch-hunt."

Hotez condemned the promotion of pseudoscience by leading American newspapers, accusing the *Washington Post* editorial board of engaging in "old school Hearst-Pulitzer yellow or tabloid journalism."

These courageous statements have made him a target.

Over the past week, leading figures of the fascist right, including Stephen Bannon, the oligarch Elon Musk, podcaster Joe Rogan and anti-vaccination conspiracy theorist Robert F. Kennedy Jr., have intensified their campaign to vilify, threaten and harass Dr. Hotez.

On June 12, Bannon posted on the Gettr social media network, "Hotez is a criminal," prompting an outpouring of overtly antisemitic responses from his supporters and a wave of denunciations of Hotez from the entire fascist right.

Scientists who are merely stating basic truths are vilified and threatened, even having to fear for their very lives. What is the environment that has made this possible? The extreme right feels emboldened under conditions in which the entire political establishment and the media have legitimized and promoted the most extreme and unfounded claims.

Even as the virus continues to spread and evolve new strains, the Biden administration has abandoned all measures to fight the pandemic and has systematically downplayed the threat posed by COVID-19.

On May 11, the Biden administration ended the national COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE). This triggered the move by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to end reporting of COVID-19 cases, meaning there is no official data about the prevalence of the disease in the population. According to wastewater data, the level of COVID-19 infection remains higher than that during most of 2020.

The Biden administration has ended federal funding for COVID-19 vaccines and tests, meaning uninsured individuals will now have to pay out of pocket for these life-saving treatments. Biden has encouraged the population not to wear masks, declaring in May 2021,

“Take your mask off. You’ve earned the right.”

The Biden administration has also promoted the Wuhan lab conspiracy theory, which was invented by fascist ideologue Steve Bannon. FBI Director Christopher Wray falsely claimed in February that COVID-19 “most likely” originated from a lab incident in Wuhan, China.

In other words, the Biden administration has embraced all elements of Donald Trump’s COVID-19 policy, from Trump’s call to “slow the testing down” to the claim that the virus originated from the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

The legitimization of this fascist COVID-19 conspiracy theory has been aided and abetted by leading media outlets in the United States, including the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, which have deemed Bannon’s Wuhan lab lie “credible.”

The *Intercept* and *Jacobin* magazine have also promoted this conspiracy theory. The day after Bannon called Hotez a “criminal,” Michael Shellenberger and Matt Taibbi published an unsourced article in the *Intercept* advancing the Wuhan Lab conspiracy theory, prompting follow-on reports on Fox News and in *Forbes*.

Shellenberger and Taibbi claimed that three leading coronavirus researchers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology—Ben Hu, Yu Ping and Yan Zhu—got COVID-19 in November 2019, citing only anonymous sources within the US government.

Amid the torrent of lies and misinformation emanating from the government and media, the lunatic fringe is setting the tone. The fascist right is thriving in the muck created in the broader political climate, in which every form of anti-scientific backwardness can flourish.

Confronted by the growth of opposition in the working class, the American ruling elite is promoting every form of ignorance, backwardness and bigotry.

In concluding the *World Socialist Web Site*’s October 24, 2021 webinar with leading scientists, WSWS Editorial Board Chairman David North declared the appreciation of the socialist movement for “all the scientists, those who are here with us today and the many others working in the background, who are trying desperately to come up with answers to this crisis. But in the final analysis, science cannot stand alone. It requires the support of a powerful social force, and that

is the working class.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on all workers, students and professionals to oppose the efforts of the fascist right, the US media and political establishment to promote anti-scientific bigotry and take a stand in defense of scientists. The blame for the horrendous toll of the pandemic lies not with scientists, who have sought to warn the public, but with governments that willfully disregard science to implement a policy of mass infection and death.



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