

Oppose Trump administration's witch-hunt against Chinese scientists at University of Michigan

International Youth and Students for Social Equality
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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality at the University of Michigan unequivocally condemns the Trump administration's witch-hunt against Chinese scientists at our university. The attacks on Chengxuan Han and Yunqing Jian are not just personal injustices. They are an assault on free scientific inquiry, democratic rights and the fundamental dignity of all international students and workers. The IYSSE is the only organization on campus fighting this frame-up. We urge every student, educator and worker in Michigan and the region to join us in opposition.

Han, a doctoral student from Wuhan, and Jian, a postdoctoral fellow, face prosecution on federal charges that carry sentences of up to 25 years in prison. Han's sentencing hearing is scheduled for September 10, while Jian faces her preliminary hearing on September 18. They have been held without bond since June, following an orchestrated campaign by federal authorities that paints routine scientific research as "agroterrorism."

Their supposed crime? Sending harmless, common biological materials—*C. elegans* roundworms, plasmids and *fusarium graminearum* fungus—to collaborators at the university.

These materials are nonhazardous, widely used in laboratories nationwide and absolutely no threat to public safety. Across the scientific community, the consensus is clear: at worst, the alleged infractions merit a minor administrative fine. To mete out such severe punishment is a grotesque abuse of state power.

The prosecution has been marked by unconstitutional conduct. Customs and Border Protection interrogated Han for hours without Miranda warnings, continued questioning after she requested a lawyer and manipulated her understanding of her rights through deliberate mistranslation.

This attack is intimately linked to the Trump administration's broader war on students, immigrants and the working class. The climate of fear manufactured in this case echoes the intensifying crackdowns on student protesters, in particular the University of Michigan's own disciplinary campaign against members of the TAHRIR Coalition and other students opposing the genocide in Gaza. FBI raids and disciplinary hearings have become mechanisms to intimidate and silence dissent on

campuses nationwide.

The demonization of Chinese researchers and false characterization of routine scientific materials as "agroterrorism" are directly tied to US imperialism's drive to war with China. FBI Director Kash Patel claimed the case shows how "the CCP is working around the clock to deploy operatives and researchers to infiltrate American institutions and target our food supply," transforming minor customs violations into alleged biological warfare.

The attacks on Chinese researchers are also a direct outgrowth of the "Wuhan Lab Lie," a racist conspiracy theory originally cultivated by fascist Steve Bannon and the Trump administration to deflect blame for their catastrophic mishandling of the COVID pandemic. Trump and his allies invented this lie to shift responsibility away from their refusal to follow China's scientifically sound zero-COVID elimination strategy, which saved millions of lives in China and could have stopped the pandemic in its tracks if implemented globally.

While China's initial approach protected public health through aggressive contact tracing, testing and isolation measures, the Trump administration promoted mass infection policies that have resulted in over 1.5 million excess deaths in the United States since 2020, with millions more suffering from Long COVID. When Biden took office, rather than reversing course, his administration normalized the ongoing pandemic and adopted the Wuhan Lab Lie to justify its abandonment of public health protections.

This conspiracy theory has been weaponized in fascistic attacks on principled scientists like Dr. Peter Daszak, who spent decades warning about the dangers of zoonotic spillovers. Daszak was subjected to congressional witch-hunts, fired from his position and saw his organization EcoHealth Alliance dismantled, all based on fabricated allegations concocted by the far right and amplified by both parties and the corporate media.

Not a single major institution at the University of Michigan has defended the Chinese graduate students targeted by this witch-hunt. The university administration has openly sided with federal authorities, issuing statements that "strongly condemn any actions that seek to cause harm or threaten national

security,” and pledging continued cooperation with law enforcement.

The main campus unions—GEO, LEO and AFSCME—and Democratic Party figures, including Governor Whitmer and senators Stevens and Slotkin, have been completely silent. Rather than offering support, these organizations and politicians have either explicitly backed or refused to oppose the government’s attack.

These attacks on Chinese scholars and students must be understood as part of a war on the entire working class, especially immigrant workers. The same administration in Washington that is responsible for this academic witch-hunt is leading mass deportations, workplace raids and unprecedented assaults on the rights and security of immigrants nationwide. Universities, workplaces and homes have become battlegrounds in this campaign to consolidate power, suppress dissent and discipline labor.

The frame-ups at Michigan occur as the Trump administration launches full-blown attacks on science and public health. The firing of Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Director Susan Monarez and the resignation of four high-level public health officials represent the latest casualties in this war on expertise. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is moving to eliminate access to COVID-19 vaccines for children and adults, has terminated over 20,000 federal public health workers, systematically purged vaccine advisory committees and canceled \$500 million in mRNA vaccine research. These attacks are part of the ruling elite’s deliberate effort to lower life expectancy and abandon any policy of protecting public health.

The persecution of Han and Jian unfolds within the broader context of Trump’s deepening coup against democratic rights. In August, Trump deployed National Guard troops, including from multiple Republican-controlled states, to occupy Washington D.C., with over 1,500 soldiers patrolling the capital under military command. The Pentagon has developed plans for a “Domestic Civil Disturbance Quick Reaction Force” to rapidly deploy 600 National Guard troops to any American city facing protests or unrest. Trump has threatened to expand this military occupation to Chicago and other major cities, declaring his intention to exercise dictatorial power.

The real danger lies not in harmless roundworms or common fungi, but in a government escalating to authoritarian rule and war. The maximum penalty for what Han and Jian are accused of is, at most, a minor fine—never prison, certainly not decades behind bars. Every credible scientist agrees: these materials are found in classrooms and labs everywhere, and are exchanged as a matter of routine.

The IYSSE declares:

Michigan students and workers must unite to halt these attacks. The defense of democratic rights cannot be left to the campus administration, the Democrats or the trade union bureaucracy, all of whom are complicit. In unifying students

and workers to fight for the freedom of Han and Jian, we advance the following demands:

- For the immediate release of Chengxuan Han and Yunqing Jian and the dropping of all charges!
- Stop all federal harassment of international scientists and students!
- Restore all research partnerships with Chinese institutions and defend scientific collaboration!
- Withdraw campus disciplinary and legal actions against all student protesters!
- Fully fund public health, education and social programs—oppose war and militarization!

The defense of Han and Jian signifies a rejection of the xenophobic poison that feeds fascism, war and genocide. The same forces persecuting Chinese students today are supporting Israel’s genocide of the Palestinians, the militarization of our campuses and the preparations for world war.

University of Michigan students have a central responsibility to take up this fight, not merely as a matter of campus solidarity, but as part of the global struggle against imperialism and fascist reaction. We must defend our fellow students because their persecution today paves the way for attacks on all of us tomorrow.

The fight for international scientific collaboration and democratic rights cannot be separated from the fight against capitalism itself, which breeds nationalism, war and oppression. This is why we call on every student to reject the manufactured hatred that the ruling class uses to divide us. Our future lies not in submission to its wars and repression, but in unity with workers and students worldwide in the struggle for socialism.

We call on students and workers throughout the region to join and help build the International Youth and Students for Social Equality at the University of Michigan, and to take up the fight for socialism!



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