

Federal agents seize Indiana University lab: Witch-hunt against Chinese scientists targets senior US faculty

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On the evening of May 7, agents operating under the direction of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), together with university police, barred researchers from entering six rooms in a biology laboratory at Indiana University (IU) Bloomington, halting ongoing experiments and establishing a de facto police occupation of the facility.

The primary target was the laboratory of Distinguished Professor of Biology Roger Innes. A member of the National Academy of Sciences, Innes has pioneered research on plant immune systems that holds the potential of increasing global crop yields and mitigating the need for toxic agricultural chemicals. The sudden closure of his workspace is the latest escalation in a campaign of terror against scientists of Chinese descent. The police state operation is no longer limited to international researchers. It is now directed as well at senior American-born faculty.

This campaign is aimed at whipping up anti-Chinese sentiment in preparation for war against US imperialism's greatest economic rival, a nuclear power, intensifying the war against immigrants and imposing a fascistic, America-first ideology on university campuses.

The IU administration has not defended Innes. A memorandum issued by IU Vice President for Research Russell J. Mumper stated the university was “notified by the US Department of Agriculture that they will be engaging in activity in a laboratory” and that “the actions taking place are being directed by federal authorities, and the university is cooperating as required.”

The government has targeted this laboratory because Professor Innes has taken a principled and courageous stand against the persecution of Chinese scientists. When the FBI and the Department of Justice began manufacturing “agroterrorism” cases against Chinese researchers, Innes intervened to expose the scientific

fraud underpinning the prosecutions.

Yunqing Jian, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Michigan (U-M), was arrested in June 2025 for allegedly smuggling the crop fungus *Fusarium graminearum* into the US. Innes submitted a letter to the court on Jian's behalf, explaining that the fungus is endemic to the United States and poses “no risk to US farmers, or anyone else.” Jian was held for over four months, coerced into a plea deal, sentenced in November 2025 to time served and deported to China.

The immediate pretext for sealing the Innes laboratory is its connection to his own postdoc researcher Youhuang Xiang, arrested and charged with conspiracy and smuggling in November, days after Jian's sentencing. The “dangerous materials” in question were completely non-pathogenic, standard laboratory *E. coli* strains used as hosts for plasmid DNA, routine tools of molecular biology. FBI Director Kash Patel blatantly lied, characterizing the transportation of standard research plasmids as a “global threat to our economy and food supply.”

Innes offered himself to the court as a third-party custodian to secure Xiang's release on bail. The government blocked this arrangement, arguing that Innes himself was a material witness to Xiang's “smuggling.” Innes has stated that Xiang's arrest was “100 percent politically motivated.” For his unwavering defense of international solidarity and academic freedom, Innes has been targeted by the federal witch-hunt.

Facing a potential 25-year prison sentence, Xiang was coerced into a plea deal. He was sentenced to time served on April 7 and deported to China. The IU-Bloomington chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) issued a statement condemning the “mischaracterization of a common and routine method”

and criticized the IU administration, declaring it is the administration's responsibility to "defend the reputation of those wrongly accused." The AAUP has not commented on the lockdown of Innes's lab.

The USDA inspected the Innes lab following Xiang's initial arrest and certified it as fully compliant. On April 27, the USDA suddenly reversed course, declaring that the earlier notice was "issued in error," leading directly to the May 7 lockdown.

The template for Xiang's persecution was established at the University of Michigan (U-M), where the FBI manufactured a series of "agrorterrorism" cases. Days after Yunqing Jian's arrest last June, doctoral student Chengxuan Han was arrested at the Detroit Metropolitan Airport, interrogated without a lawyer, prosecuted for "smuggling" *C. elegans*, a harmless roundworm, and deported after three months of detention. Three more U-M researchers, Xu Bai, Fengfan Zhang, and Zhiyong Zhang, were jailed on charges related to Han's case and held for over three months until prosecutors quietly dismissed all charges in February.

On March 19 of this year, the anti-Chinese purge claimed a life. Danhao Wang, a 30-year-old Chinese postdoctoral researcher at U-M's Electrical and Computer Engineering Department, jumped from an upper floor within the George G. Brown Building the day after interrogation by federal agents. The U-M administration has not even issued a statement to the university community about Wang's tragic death.

A week after Wang's suicide, U-M President Domenico Grasso boasted to the House Committee on Education and the Workforce about U-M's close collaboration with federal intelligence agencies. He declared, "Safety and security is a *team* effort, and at Michigan we know how important it is to be a *team player*." [Grasso's emphasis]

Indiana University is deeply integrated into the military-industrial complex through agreements with Naval Support Activity (NSA) Crane and the Naval Surface Warfare Center (NSWC) Crane Division, the third largest naval installation globally. IU President Pamela Whitten recently renewed an Educational Partnership Agreement with NSA Crane, establishing shared technology spaces on campus. IU has committed \$53.5 million to expand research partnerships with defense applications, focusing on artificial intelligence and microelectronics funded by the Department of Defense.

The militarization of campus life is an institutional expression of Washington's preparations for a catastrophic war. American imperialism must purge

scientists with ties to China in order to convert universities into secure nodes of the military-industrial complex.

In July 2025, Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins announced a sweeping "National Agriculture Security Action Plan," framing American agriculture as a theater of war against China. When asked about the prosecuted U-M researchers, Rollins said, "We're tracking and very well aware of the Michigan case, but there are others as well."

A mass political mobilization is required to halt this war-mongering assault on democratic rights. We call on students, faculty, staff and the broader working class to unconditionally defend Professor Innes and advance the following demands:

- **The USDA lockdown must be ended immediately. Professor Innes and his research team must be granted full, unrestricted access to their laboratories and equipment.**

- **All visa revocations, deportations and fabricated investigations targeting Chinese scholars must cease immediately. The US government must vacate coerced convictions and provide full reparations to all Chinese scientists whose careers have been destroyed by the witch-hunt.**

- **For a full, independent investigation into the tragic suicide of Danhao Wang and the federal harassment that precipitated it.**

- **All secret research agreements and funding pipelines connecting universities to the military-industrial complex must be severed.**

What is unfolding at IU and U-M is a concentrated expression of the terminal crisis of American capitalism. The ruling class can no longer tolerate free scientific inquiry and international collaboration and is herding the population toward a catastrophic war against China. This operation can be stopped only through the independent political mobilization of the working class and the building of an international anti-war movement rooted in the working class and based on a socialist program.



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