

Fauci adviser David Morens pleads guilty, as Trump escalates war on science

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For the first time, the American state has obtained a criminal conviction against a scientist for defending the truth about the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic. David M. Morens, 78, a former senior adviser at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), pleaded guilty Tuesday in federal court in Greenbelt, Maryland, to conspiracy to defraud the United States. He faces up to five years in prison and will be sentenced on November 12.

The prosecution of Morens is the reactionary outcome of years of an anti-science campaign spearheaded by the Trump administration and fascist Republicans, such as Senator Rand Paul, sustained with Democratic votes at every stage, and whose object is to beat the scientific community into silence.

The charges are a complete fraud. The “crime” supposedly committed by Morens was to route emails through a personal account. That is the whole of it. But the Justice Department’s announcement states that this was somehow part of a conspiracy to “counter the narrative that COVID-19 leaked from a lab.” The official act named in the accompanying bribery count is a scientific paper, a commentary Morens wrote arguing that SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, had natural origins. The government has written a scientific conclusion into a criminal indictment and called it corruption.

More than 1.5 million people have died of COVID-19 in the United States, and some 30 million worldwide, according to excess death estimates. Not one of those actually responsible for this mass death has been charged with any crime. These include Trump himself, who spearheaded the reopening of workplaces and schools as bodies were stacked in refrigerated trucks; Elon Musk, who called stay-at-home orders “fascist” and reopened his Fremont Tesla plant in defiance of county health authorities; Thomas Friedman, who supplied the reopening slogan in the *New York Times*, writing that the “cure cannot be worse than the disease;” Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who built a career on vaccine disinformation and now runs the Department of Health and Human Services; and Jay Bhattacharya, co-author of the Great Barrington Declaration’s demand for mass infection, who now directs the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The one person convicted is a scientist who used his personal email account.

The scientists now being hunted are those who worked to tell people the truth about a disease that was killing them. In defending the scientific record, they defended the lives of workers, who were driven into unsafe factories, warehouses, schools and hospitals and

told there was nothing to fear. Their defense is now a question for the working class. Workers must take up the fight against this witch-hunt as their own, because the persecution of scientists clears the way for the next mass killing.

The Wuhan lab conspiracy theory has no scientific basis. Writing in *Science* in 2022, Michael Worobey, Jonathan Pekar and their colleagues traced the earliest cases to the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market in Wuhan and found two genetically distinct forms of the virus circulating there, meaning it crossed into humans at that market at least twice, which no laboratory accident can explain. In *Cell* in 2024, Alexander Crits-Christoph and colleagues found the virus and the DNA of raccoon dogs and other animals known to carry it in the same swabs, from the wildlife stalls in one corner of that market. Pekar and colleagues reported in *Cell* in 2025 that the nearest known bat relatives of both SARS-CoV-1 and SARS-CoV-2 were found far from the cities where each outbreak began, the same pattern seen in the 2002 epidemic whose natural origin no one disputes. No agency claiming a laboratory origin has ever produced evidence for it.

Where, then, did this “theory” come from? It was manufactured in early 2020 by the fascist Steve Bannon, Trump’s former chief strategist, and Miles Guo, an exiled Chinese billionaire, who took up a Hong Kong virologist, Li-Meng Yan, installed her in a safe house, hired her lawyers and a media coach, and commissioned papers claiming the virus was an engineered Chinese bioweapon. The papers, never peer reviewed, listed two Bannon-Guo outfits where a scientific affiliation belongs, and the virologists who examined them found the central claims unsupported, but Yan was booked onto Fox News and the claim entered the American media.

When Joe Biden took office, the Democratic Party and the corporate media took up the conspiracy manufactured by the far right. In May 2021, Biden ordered the intelligence agencies to report within 90 days, giving the Wuhan lab lie official standing. In February 2023, the Energy Department and the FBI announced they favored a laboratory origin, the former with low confidence and the latter with moderate confidence, and neither citing new evidence, and the press gave them front-page coverage. Congress then passed the COVID-19 Origin Act, which cleared the Senate by unanimous consent and the House by 419 to 0 before Biden signed it. The select subcommittee endorsed the lab leak findings with Democratic votes in December 2024, and in April 2025 the second Trump administration replaced covid.gov’s public health resources with a page headed, “Lab Leak: The True Origins of

COVID-19.”

Why did a career scientist begin routing his correspondence around the records system? Consider what was being done to scientists in the spring of 2020. Asked at a White House briefing on April 17 about the NIAID grant held by EcoHealth Alliance, on the basis of a false claim then circulating in the right-wing press, Trump replied, “We will end that grant very quickly.” Seven days later the NIH terminated the award, which its own reviewers had renewed in 2019 with a high priority score, giving no scientific reason. Seventy-seven Nobel laureates demanded a review, and the department’s inspector general later found the termination improper. It was already plain that the Wuhan lab lie would be wielded as a weapon against scientists, and it was that month that Morens began using his personal account.

Prosecutors say this violated the Federal Records Act. Set against a million and a half deaths, that is the charge: A scientist kept his emails in the wrong place. Invoking a records statute against a man defending the truth in the middle of a mass killing is like charging a fireman with breaking and entering. Morens was hiding nothing from the public. He was shielding his correspondence from an operation run out of the White House to manufacture a scapegoat for a pandemic the fascistic Trump administration refused to fight. The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) had become that operation’s discovery arm. The state produced the conduct it then prosecuted.

The persecution of Morens is part of a broader war on scientists, including Peter Daszak, who was debarred and defunded for five years in January 2025. The government released the private Slack messages of Kristian Andersen and his co-authors on the “Proximal Origin” paper and demanded criminal referrals, the offense being that scientists had weighed a hypothesis in private and rejected it on the evidence. It arrested NIH virologist Vincent Munster and a research fellow in June over deactivated mpox samples carried back from an outbreak in the Republic of the Congo and jailed Chinese researchers at the University of Michigan over shipments sent without customs paperwork, dismissing the charges against three of them in February.

On July 29, Anthony Fauci was hauled before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee for what was in substance a show trial against science, and on August 6, the committee voted 8 to 7 on party lines to hold him in contempt, on a resolution drafted to bypass the full Senate. Twelve days later came Morens’ plea, and Paul posted on X asking whether it might implicate Fauci.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has been unsparing in its criticism of both Morens and Fauci. On March 31, 2022, with COVID-19 killing thousands of Americans every week, Morens, Gregory Folkers and Fauci published a perspective in the *Journal of Infectious Diseases* holding that elimination of the virus was almost certainly unattainable and that the population could live with it by “optimizing population protection without prohibitive restrictions on our daily lives.” The authors did not say what those restrictions were. In the spring of 2022 they were masks, ventilation, paid isolation and the closure of unsafe workplaces, and they were being stripped away one after another at the demand of the banks and corporations that needed workers back on the

line. The paper lent that demand the authority of the country’s most senior infectious disease scientists, which the WSWWS opposed.

But the defense of Morens does not rest on agreement with him. He is being prosecuted for the conclusion he got right, that the virus emerged through a natural spillover event, because that conclusion obstructs the effort to pin American mass death on China. Biden, for his part, pardoned Fauci alone and left the others to the prosecutors. What is prosecuted here is not the harm done to the working class. It is the refusal to endorse the Wuhan lab lie.

As the WSWWS has written from the beginning, the Wuhan lab lie serves to divert attention from the policies that produced mass death and to whip up nationalist hatred in preparation for war with China. What has happened to Morens goes far beyond one man. A scientific finding will now be judged by whether it serves the state that funds the research, and this at a moment when disease surveillance is being dismantled, vaccination programs wrecked and preventable diseases allowed to spread.

Every researcher now understands that a finding which offends the state can be recast as corruption, that private deliberation among colleagues can be produced as evidence of conspiracy, and that correspondence with a foreign scientist is discoverable, prosecutable and sufficient to end a career. Research that serves the financial oligarchy will be funded, and research that obstructs it will be prosecuted.

Scientific knowledge and public health are conquests of humanity, won over generations by the labor and intellect of millions, and a ruling class that treats every social gain as an obstacle to profit and war is destroying them. The working class alone has both the interest and the power to defend them. Workers must come to the defense of the scientists being hunted by the state and take up the fight for socialism, in which science serves human needs rather than private profit.



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