UK’s right-wing media launch McCarthyite witch-hunt of scientists

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The *Mail on Sunday*’s editorial begins, “How predictable. As we head towards Freedom Day on July 19, the usual siren voices on the Left are again portending doom. The lockdown enthusiasts seem drunk on a cocktail of anti-capitalist ideology and reverence for an over-controlling state.”

It lists as “opponents of liberation” the “more militant climate change activists, who seem to welcome the economic damage caused by shutdowns” and then names “Professor Susan Michie—a powerful voice on the official Sage [Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies] committee, who also happens to be a member of the Communist Party”.

The editors call on Prime Minister Boris Johnson to “hold his nerve and embrace freedom.”

This outburst encapsulates the McCarthyite campaign in the right-wing media being used to support the UK government’s criminal pandemic policy. The reference to Michie invokes an ongoing anti-communist witch-hunt of the government advisor and clinical and health psychologist, who has been critical of Johnson’s reopening strategy.

On July 5, Michie was interviewed by ITV’s *Good Morning Britain* about the removal of public health restrictions from July 19. Host Richard Madeley intervened with the ignorant rant, “You’ve been a member of the Communist party for about 40 years now, you’re still a member. And we know that communism is basically statist. We look at communist countries around the world and we see that they are tremendously top-down dominant and control societies that they rule over.

“I just wonder, and I’m putting this question on behalf of those who wonder about your politics, if your politics inform your sense of control, it’s not just a medical argument, but you have a political bent to want the state to tell people what to do.”

By speaking of “those who wonder about your politics”, Madeley was referring to the editors of the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail*. On April 25, the *Telegraph* ran the hit piece, “Government scientist who has advocated for more Covid controls is member of the Communist party”; the *Mail* asked, “Is TV's favourite Sage member Professor Susan Michie such a big fan of lockdowns because she's a Communist once known as Stalin's nanny?” and “Fellow Marxists searched Professor Susan Michie’s baby’s pram for propaganda”.

The GMB interview was a set-up designed to prosecute this witch-hunt. Michie, a prestigious scientist, was interviewed alongside Dominique Samuels, a right-wing pundit with no credentials to speak on the subject other than Thatcherite screeds published in the *Sun*, the *Mail*, Brexit Central and Orthodox Conservatives. Samuels was for a time a “Young Influencer” for Turning Point UK, a spinoff from the larger organisation in the US whose purpose is to intimidate left-wing teachers and academics. She began by determinedly misrepresenting Michie’s position on mask wearing, along the lines set down in a June 10 *Mail* article, “Social distancing and face masks should stay FOREVER says Communist SAGE committee member Professor Susan Michie”.

Ofcom, the UK’s broadcasting regulator, has received 145 complaints about the interview.

Michie is a long-time member of the Stalinist Communist Party of Britain, a fact which neither she nor the media have considered a hindrance to her involvement with the government until now. Her disgusting, red-baiting treatment in recent weeks reflects an aggressive shift in the policy of the ruling class towards reopening. It gives focus to a broader campaign by the right to present public health restrictions, and scientific warnings about the pandemic, as tantamount to a communist plot for authoritarian state control.

On June 6, the *Sun* published, “Left-wing bias of scientists on Independent Sage urging for harsher Covid rules”. Independent Sage is a collection of doctors and scientists convened in May 2020 as a more transparent and critical alternative to the official Sage group, by Sir David King, a former adviser to the Labour governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, and the Conservatives under

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David Cameron. The *Daily Express* commented the month before, “Left-wing ‘zero covid’ scientists plot bid for endless lockdowns”.

Efforts to end restrictions on the virus are portrayed as part of the “battle to remake the case for personal liberty and responsibility”, likened to the fight for “freedom” in the Cold War, according to *Telegraph* columnist Sherelle Jacobs.

The paper published a comment piece earlier in the year arguing, “Lockdown has turned Britain into the Soviet Union.” The *Mail* asked, “Guess where Professor Lockdown [government modeller Neil Ferguson] got his ideas,” answering “China’s police state.”

The turn to McCarthyism in the push to end the UK’s last public health measures has a deeply rooted political logic. Johnson’s rush to scrap any possible restrictions on private profit-making is bringing into sharp focus fundamentally opposed class interests.

The pandemic is a crisis rooted in capitalism, the impact of which falls overwhelmingly on the working class. The Health Foundation reports that the poorest half of the population have a Covid mortality rate more than double that of the richest 10 percent. The Office for National Statistics reports similar figures. Among the working-age population, death rates are highest for those in the poorest-paid jobs. The decline in life expectancy in Manchester between March 2020-2021 was 25 percent higher than the national average, a result renowned public health expert Sir Michael Marmot described as “generalisable” across deprived areas all over the country.

For the ruling class, these deaths and the burden of long-term illness are a price well-worth paying to maintain a continued flow of profits by forcing workers into unsafe conditions. These imperatives drive the political representatives of big business to wage their latest anti-communist witch-hunt, one that links a traditional hatred of socialism and the working class to a deep-seated hostility to the scientists exposing their lies.

Telegraph associate editor Camilla Tominey has claimed, “The hard-Left politics of supposedly independent lockdown advisers raises some sinister questions”, attacking “behavioural science charlatans who make a living from stoking our anxieties” and “[Sir David] King and his cabal”. Richard Littlejohn, writing in the *Mail*, refers to “siren voices of ‘the science’…still chanting their mantras of doom.” LBC radio host Nick Ferrari warned that if the country allows itself to “be in hock to these doom-mongers then we will never… break free.”

Such anti-scientific nonsense is reinforced by the warmongering lie of a Wuhan lab origin of the virus. Tominey attacks Michie for linking the development of the COVID-19 virus to climate change, a well-established link for zoonotic diseases, rather than “a Wuhan lab leak”.

The witch-hunt is designed to enrage and mobilise broader sections of the petty-bourgeoisie, either ruined by or losing out on potential fortunes due to the pandemic and associated restrictions, against the working class. Indeed, there is little or nothing separating the articles in the right-wing press from the fascistic ravings of anti-lockdown, anti-vaccination demonstrators, who believe COVID-19 is a hoax created by global elites to engineer a greater state control of the population and seizures of private property.

Littlejohn is explicit. “Our city centres are dying. The hospitality industry is on its knees. Small businesses… have gone bust,” he writes, and “employers are waking up to the fact that they’re not getting the full bang for their buck” from their employees. The cause of their problems, he argues, is that “Idleness has become institutionalised” in the working class, who “can’t go on cowering from coronavirus”. He concludes, “Half the country has been on holiday for the past 16 months. The party’s over. Britain must get back to work.”

For working class people, the need to oppose the destruction of lives and livelihoods brings them into an objective alliance with principled scientists whose own concern is to safeguard public health. That alliance must now be made conscious.

The *Mail* and the *Telegraph*, as can be expected, identify “militant” and “left-wing” unions as their opponents. But the truth is that no such union exists. The real, politically rotten trade unions, along with the Labour Party, have spent the pandemic doing everything they can to suppress the mass opposition that exists in the working class to the government’s policies of social murder.

The ferocious reopening campaign now underway in the ruling class proves the urgency of workers breaking free from this straitjacket, to develop their own international counteroffensive based on a scientifically grounded and globally coordinated use of society’s wealth to preserve lives and livelihoods, not private profits.

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