

Covid, Conspiracies & Jew-Hate



Antisemitism in the Covid-19 conspiracy movement



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INTRODUCTION

Antisemitism is one of the oldest conspiracy theories. It claims that a secretive, powerful group – the Jews – are the true power behind world events; the hidden hand pulling the strings that control empires and nations, and manipulate politicians, the media and the banks. Jews have been turned into scapegoats that have been blamed throughout history for wars, revolutions, social turmoil, economic crashes and pandemics.

It was depressingly inevitable, with the rise of conspiracy theories about the Covid-19 pandemic, that some people would use this global emergency as an opportunity to spread hateful conspiracy theories about Jews. The growth of a broad conspiracy movement in Britain, focused on the Covid-19 pandemic and the vaccines used to protect people against this deadly virus, provided a welcome home in which antisemitic conspiracism could flourish. As a result, large numbers of people were potentially introduced to anti-Jewish ideas for the first time.



The mixture of antisemitism and other types of conspiracism is typified by this placard, on display at an anti-vaccination protest held in Manchester city centre on 20 November 2021. It talks of a “media cabal” and “media mind control” by a “Zionist team” and calls the press “Zionist rats”. It mentions George Soros, a Jewish philanthropist who is named by conspiracy theorists as one of the supposed secret string pullers controlling our world.¹

Zionism is the name of the political movement that emerged in the nineteenth century to campaign for the creation of a Jewish homeland in what is now Israel. Since then, “Zionist” has come to be used as a general term for people who support Israel’s existence and wellbeing. But in the antisemitic world, it gets used in exactly the same way that antisemitic propaganda used to talk about Jews. Where antisemites used to say Jews controlled the media, now conspiracists say that “Zionists” do. This placard goes further, by talking about “Zionist rats”: Nazi propaganda repeatedly described Jews as rats and vermin to be exterminated.

Why did this person think it was relevant, never mind acceptable, to express antisemitic conspiracy theories at a protest against Covid vaccinations?

In April 2020, not long after Covid-19 began spreading through the world’s population, CST released a research briefing titled *Coronavirus and the Plague of Antisemitism*.² It demonstrated how the pandemic was being used by far-right extremists online to push antisemitic narratives and conspiracies.

This new research briefing will explore the antisemitism that is present inside the Covid conspiracy movement that evolved as the pandemic continued to spread around the world.

It is not limited to the far right: this movement is a loose association of individuals and groups, who actively spread falsehoods about Covid-19. They hold anti-Covid/vaccination protests, produce propaganda literature and target vaccine venues, test centres and schools. Some incite violence against those in authority (including health officials, nurses, doctors, politicians and journalists), who they claim are pushing lies about Covid-19, whilst others have physically confronted them.

This Briefing will explain the impact that Covid-19 conspiracism has had on antisemitism in the UK, by showing the way it has influenced antisemitic hate crimes and the spread of antisemitic, Covid-related conspiracy content online. It will show how some in this movement use and abuse Nazi and Holocaust imagery and language to illustrate their arguments. It will identify some of the main individuals and networks within this movement, give some case studies of individuals who propagate antisemitism alongside Covid-19 and other conspiracies, and explore where the movement may go next, including their recent shift to pushing conspiracy theories about the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

¹ https://twitter.com/CST_UK/status/1491700476919832580

² <https://cst.org.uk/data/file/d/9/Coronavirus%20and%20the%20plague%20of%20antisemitism.1615560607.pdf>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Antisemitism is easily found within the Covid conspiracy movement, an amorphous network of groups and individuals brought together by a set of shared beliefs founded on the idea that Covid-19 is a fake pandemic being exploited by elites to control their populations, and that Covid vaccines are either ineffective, unsafe or are deliberately dangerous. However, not all followers of this movement believe in every conspiracy theory found within it, and some will be more extreme than others.

Antisemitic images and language began to circulate in online spaces used by the Covid conspiracy movement early in the pandemic, and have become much more widespread in those networks. These include conspiracy theories claiming that the virus is a Jewish hoax, and that vaccines have been invented by Jews to poison the population.

The Covid conspiracy movement brings together people from the far right, far left, new age and wellness movement, mixed ideologies and other parts of society. This movement reaches well beyond traditional forms of extremism: leading figures even include a celebrated street artist and a rapper. This is the first time that Britain has had a domestic political movement fuelled primarily by conspiracy theories, that is active both online and offline. It has outlived the ending of Covid restrictions and is likely to retain an influence in the future.

Far-right groups, including Patriotic Alternative, have exploited the anti-vaccine and anti-lockdown movement to hand out their propaganda both in online spaces and on anti-lockdown protests. This is an attempt to draw in and recruit Covid-sceptic individuals into the far right.

Antisemitic narratives related to Covid influenced and inspired antisemitic activity offline. CST recorded 118 antisemitic hate incidents in 2020

and 2021 that involved language or imagery linked to the pandemic. These hate incidents included verbal abuse and threats directed at Jewish people, graffiti blaming Jews for Covid, and antisemitic leaflets calling vaccines a "Jew Jab".

Leading activists in the Covid conspiracy movement showed their tolerance for antisemitism when they demonstrated in support of Tahra Ahmed, a Covid conspiracy activist who was sentenced to 11 months in prison for stirring up racial hatred by claiming that the Grenfell Tower fire was a "Jewish sacrifice".

An alternative form of antisemitism that manifested in the Covid conspiracy movement is the grotesque and offensive misuse of language and symbols related to the Holocaust. Anti-vaccine and anti-lockdown protesters have worn yellow stars (similar to the identifying badges the Nazis forced Jews to wear during the Holocaust) and compared vaccination centres to death camps.

Some Covid conspiracists have started to incorporate conspiracy theories about Russia's invasion of Ukraine in their online output. This is one example of how the pandemic has left a legacy of a permanent conspiracy movement that will latch on to any crisis, whether domestic or global, that allows them to spread more conspiracy theories and misinformation.

There are elements within the Covid conspiracy movement that are moving in a more confrontational and violent direction. In the UK this has involved the harassment of politicians, journalists and police officers on the streets. In Germany, the confluence of Covid conspiracism and far-right extremism has led to a number of violent incidents. The antisemitism in the Covid conspiracy movement, combined with this gradual move towards violent activism, could therefore pose a direct threat to the Jewish community.

COVID CONSPIRACY MOVEMENT - A DEFINITION

The Covid conspiracy movement is an amorphous network of groups and individuals, which has evolved as the pandemic has progressed. They are brought together by some shared beliefs, although not all followers of this movement believe in every conspiracy theory found within it, and some will be more extreme than others. These include:

- Covid-19 is a fake pandemic and elites are using it as a pretext to control the world population and force them to accept unnecessary laws and lockdowns (known as the “plandemic” or “scamdemic”).
- Covid vaccines are experimental, unsafe and are killing people – perhaps are deliberately designed to do so – and vaccine programmes should be stopped.
- Face masks do not offer any protection in the fight against Covid and are detrimental to people’s health.

There are various groupings within this movement, including Stand Up X, Stop New Normal and Resistance GB (see p.7 for explanations of these groups).³ Added to this mix is the QAnon conspiracy movement, which although American in origin, has spread to other countries, including the UK. QAnon adherents claim that there is a conspiracy by political and cultural elites to abduct and kill children, either for paedophilia or, in an echo of the antisemitic ‘blood libel’ myth, to drink their blood. They then present themselves as the defenders and saviours of children from this so-called paedophile elite.

The influence of antisemitism can be seen in both QAnon’s founding ideology (an all-powerful ruling cabal who use the blood of children for their own nefarious purposes) and amongst some of its supporters.⁴

It is important to note that the Covid conspiracy movement encompasses people from different ideological strands under one umbrella. It enables people from the far left, the far right, new age conspiracists, the wellness movement and anyone in-between to co-habit comfortably within the same political movement, due to their mutual distrust of the “elites” who run the world. It is not limited to traditional extremists, and antisemitism is one of the strands that permeate this movement and bind together its disparate parts.

³ <https://news.sky.com/story/how-covid-conspiracists-and-anti-vaxxers-are-getting-organised-and-making-money-12206707>

⁴ <https://www.adl.org/resources/reports/qanons-antisemitism-and-what-comes-next>

ANTI-JEWISH TROPES, THEN AND NOW

To better understand some of the images and language included in this report, here are short explanations for three antisemitic tropes that continue to be used against Jewish communities.

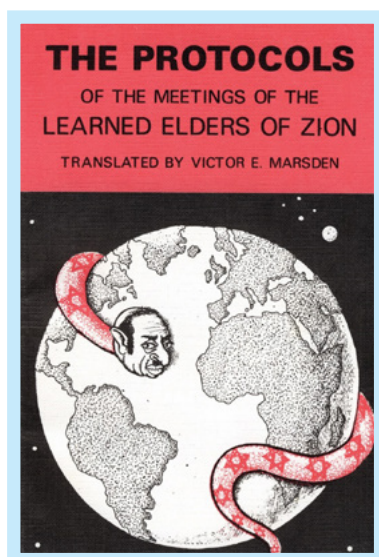
The **'blood libel'** refers to a false allegation dating back to the Middle Ages that Jews murder Christian children and use their blood for ritual purposes, including as an ingredient in the baking of the Passover unleavened bread (Matzah).⁵ These libels resulted in Jews being tortured until they 'confessed' and then put on trial. Many Jews were executed, imprisoned or forced to convert to Christianity as a result. The first 'blood libel' allegation occurred in Norwich in 1144 and they spread widely across Europe during the Middle Ages, before having a revival in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The **'well poisoning'** accusation began during the Black Death in 1348 and 1349, when Jews were blamed for purposefully spreading the plague through poisoning common drinking wells.⁶ This once again resulted in the murder of large

numbers of Jews and the expulsion of thousands of Jews, leading to the destruction of entire communities. This trope of Jews as poisoners is the one that most directly resonates with conspiracy theories linking Jews to Covid.

The **Protocols of the Elders of Zion** was a fake account of a supposed meeting of Jewish leaders that claimed to reveal the details of a Jewish plot to take over the world, by subverting governments, controlling the media and finance, undermining morality and spreading ideas like democracy, liberalism and atheism. In fact, it was written by the Russian secret police under the Tsar and was a completely false invention. Its legacy is found today in countless conspiracy theories about supposed Jewish power and influence, and more generally in the belief that a secret, faceless elite is responsible for all evil in the world.

Despite the fact that these tropes have been in existence for so long, they continue to circulate through a modern-day lens.



⁵ <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/glossary-terms/blood-libel>

⁶ <https://www.ajc.org/translatehate/poisoning-the-well>

GROUPS WITHIN THE COVID CONSPIRACY MOVEMENT

Amongst the conspiracy groups that sprang up after the Covid pandemic started are the following:

Stand Up X



Stand Up X claims to stand “For Our Freedom, For Our Rights, For Our Future” and was established in May 2020 as a “freedom movement, protesting and standing up for our rights across the UK”.⁷ Specifically, it does not consent to the “illegal and disproportionate COVID-19 measures”, including lockdowns, mask wearing, social distancing, mandated Covid jabs and vaccination passes. Amongst the “independent media channels” the group recommends are the well-known conspiracy theorists David Icke and Richie Allen, UK Column, and *The Light*. The group’s official Facebook page has 5,200 members and it has around 5,500 followers on Instagram.

Stop New Normal

Stop New Normal was set up by Piers Corbyn (Jeremy Corbyn’s brother and a veteran conspiracy theorist) to promote his views against Covid laws, regulations and the use of masks, as well as his belief that vaccines cause illness and death. Piers Corbyn is also the leader of the Let the UK Live Party. The group’s Facebook page has 2,200 members and Corbyn has 751 Facebook followers (see p.20 for more details about Piers Corbyn’s activities).

⁷ <https://www.standupx.info/>

Resistance GB



Resistance GB started in the winter of 2020 and claim to be: “British independent journalists documenting the growing resistance against tyranny and highlighting the principles of freedom that uphold a civilised society”.⁸ According to their tagline, they are: “Anti-lockdown. Pro-freedom. True liberal.” They are visible on a range of platforms: the group’s Facebook page has more than 4,000 followers, more than 3,500 followers on Twitter and over 71,000 subscribers on YouTube. One of the group’s main leaders is William Coleshill.



⁸ <https://www.resistancegb.org>

ANTISEMITIC INCIDENTS LINKED TO COVID

One of the main functions of CST is to receive reports of antisemitism from victims, witnesses, family members, CST volunteers, security guards and through data sharing with a number of police forces. CST has recorded antisemitic incidents in the UK since 1984, meaning it is possible to identify changing antisemitic trends over time. From early on in the pandemic, CST started receiving reports of antisemitic incidents linked to Covid and its impact on public life in Britain.

Several antisemitic incidents reported to CST involved the use of antisemitic rhetoric alongside references to the pandemic. These range from conspiracy theories about alleged Jewish involvement in creating and spreading Covid or creating and spreading the myth of Covid for various malevolent and financial purposes, to simply wishing that Jewish people catch the virus and die from it. In 2020, CST recorded 40 antisemitic incidents with Covid-related discourse.⁹ In 2021, this increased by 95% to 78 incidents with language or imagery linked to the pandemic.¹⁰

In addition, the Jewish community suffered from a new type of antisemitic incident known as 'Zoom-bombing'. Due to the closure of synagogues and communal venues, the community had to suddenly rely on online platforms to hold religious, educational and social events. This led to a wave of 'Zoom-bombings', in which individuals or groups hijacked these online Jewish communal events to spread antisemitic hate, either by shouting out antisemitic slurs or putting antisemitic comments in the chat function for the online events. CST received 19 reports of these antisemitic incidents in 2020¹¹ and 16 in 2021.¹² In response CST produced guidance for secure livestreaming.¹³

⁹ <https://cst.org.uk/data/file/7/2/Incidents%20Report%202020.1615559608.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://cst.org.uk/data/file/f/f/Incidents%20Report%202021.1644318940.pdf>

¹¹ <https://cst.org.uk/data/file/7/2/Incidents%20Report%202020.1615559608.pdf>

¹² <https://cst.org.uk/data/file/f/f/Incidents%20Report%202021.1644318940.pdf>

¹³ https://www.report-it.org.uk/files/safe_guidance_for_secure_livestreaming.pdf

CASE STUDIES OF COVID-RELATED ANTISEMITIC INCIDENTS

April 2020

While waiting for his wife to come out of a shop in south London, the victim was approached by a man asking for money. When he refused and attempted to walk away, the perpetrator followed him and asked, “Why are you looking so down?” The victim replied: “The coronavirus situation”. The perpetrator then said: “You believe in coronavirus? It’s a biological weapon made by white men. They are lying murderers and so are the Jews.” This was followed by further anti-white and antisemitic ranting. As the victim walked off, the perpetrator shouted, “Look at your nose, your ancestors were crooks”.

October 2020

A visibly Jewish couple were at a tram station in Manchester when they were approached by a man who came up close to them and shouted, “You Jews are spreading Covid, you’re responsible for it, you started it”. Two police officers were present and arrested him. In December 2021, the perpetrator was jailed for 26 weeks after being found guilty of Racially/Religiously Aggravated Intentional Harassment/Alarm/Distress.

January 2021

At a supermarket in northwest London, staff told a member of the public that if he did not wear a mask, he would not be allowed to enter the premises. The man became offensive and aggressive, shouting, “The Jews are behind this”.

June 2021

Whilst people were queuing for a Covid vaccination at a football stadium in north London, a member of the public shouted, “You are all queuing for your deaths, you might as well have been queuing for the gas chambers”.

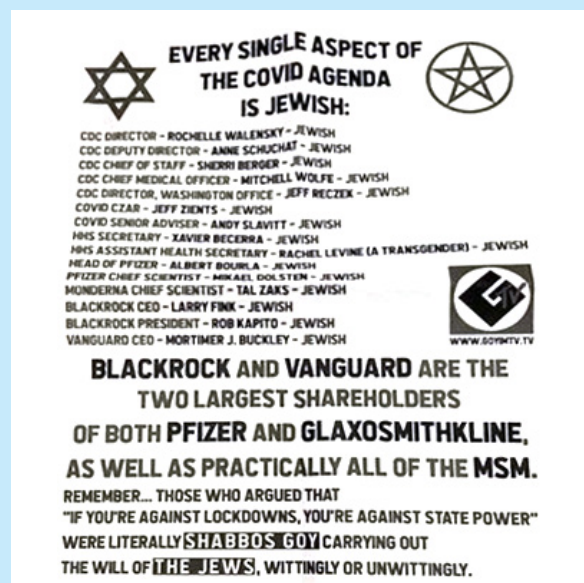
December 2021

A leaflet with antisemitic images was posted through the letterboxes of a South Yorkshire apartment complex. On them were printed antisemitic caricatures of a Jewish face, alongside the phrases “Don’t trust the Jew Jab” and “Beware the kike spike”. “Kike” is a racist slur for a Jewish person.

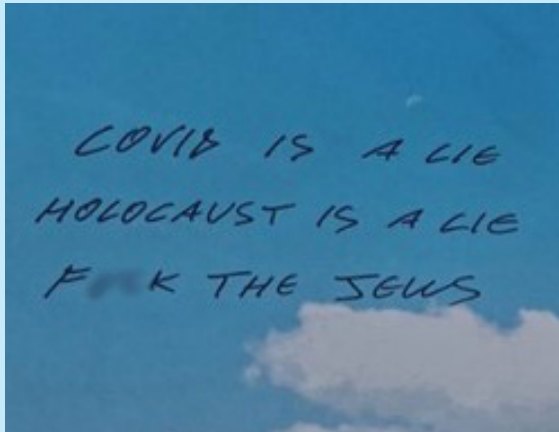


April 2022

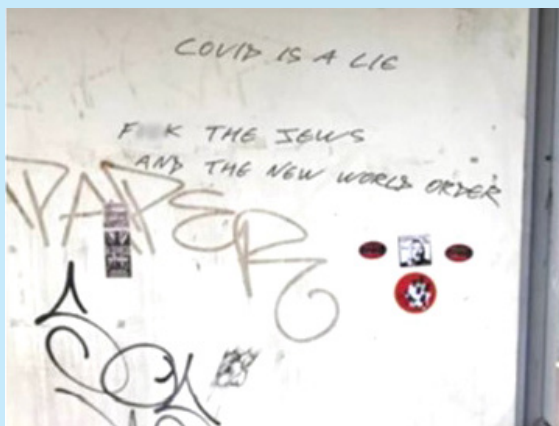
A leaflet claiming that all the leading figures behind the Covid response in the United States are Jewish, was distributed in the West Midlands. It bears the logo of Goyim TV, an antisemitic, far-right online video site.



Images of Covid-related antisemitic graffiti reported to CST:



Graffiti in London, April 2021. It combines Covid conspiracy with Holocaust denial, neo-Nazism and explicit antisemitism.



The “New World Order” is a term which conspiracy theorists claim is a grand plan to control global populations, often linked to Jewish people. This graffiti therefore links Jews to a Covid conspiracy and the “New World Order”.



Graffiti using swastikas to claim that a Covid vaccination centre is a Nazi extermination centre and referring to “Covid lies”.

COVID-RELATED ANTISEMITISM IN ONLINE SPACES

Since CST's April 2020 report *Coronavirus and the Plague of Antisemitism*,¹⁴ antisemitic Covid conspiracy theories and other Covid-related antisemitic content has continued to spread far and wide online, both on mainstream and on peripheral social media platforms. Towards the end of 2020 and into 2021 this antisemitic content switched focus from the virus itself to the newly created vaccines.

For example, an investigation by *The Times* in January 2022 found antisemitism present in several different Telegram channels dedicated to anti-vaccine or anti-lockdown views and activism.¹⁵ The connection between Covid conspiracism and far-right activism was demonstrated in a study by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, which looked at hundreds of far-right channels on Telegram and found that most had discussed Covid in extreme terms, and many had used it to spread conspiracy theories.¹⁶ The prevalence of antisemitism across several different social media platforms was demonstrated in a joint report by Hope Not Hate, Expo Foundation of Sweden and The Amadeu Antonio Foundation of Germany.¹⁷ And separate reports by the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH), and by CST, the Antisemitism Policy Trust and the Woolf Institute, showed how Instagram's algorithms associate antisemitic and other types of conspiracy theories together in the content they promote to users.¹⁸

Taken together, it is evident that there is an increasing amount of antisemitism, extremist ideology, far-right activism and the advocating of violence within group chats opposing Covid lockdowns or vaccination on various online platforms.

CST's open-source intelligence research has discovered numerous examples of antisemitic Covid-related images on various online platforms. The following images are a small sample of what continues to circulate online. They all depict antisemitic conspiracies alleging Jews are involved in, set up or control either the Covid pandemic, the vaccines, or both.

¹⁴ <https://cst.org.uk/data/file/d/9/Coronavirus%20and%20the%20plague%20of%20antisemitism.1615560607.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/kill-health-workers-antivax-campaigners-demand-in-telegram-chats-mk87kpcsd> & <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/antivaxer-online-forums-becoming-more-antisemitic-and-extremist-sxp9rq27x>

¹⁶ <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/The-Conspiracy-Consortium.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/google-report-2021-10-v21Oct.pdf>

¹⁸ https://www.counterhate.com/_files/ugd/f4d9b9_89ed644926aa4477a442b55afbeac00e.pdf & <https://cst.org.uk/data/file/9/1/Instagram-Report.1630924369.pdf>

THE HAPPY MERCHANT

Some of these images include the 'Happy Merchant' graphic, which is an antisemitic meme depicting a Jewish man with ugly stereotypical features, greedily rubbing his hands together. The meme plays on antisemitic stereotypes of Jews as rich and greedy, with big noses and ugly features. It is the most popular single antisemitic meme image among white supremacists, who have created a nearly endless series of images and variants featuring the 'Happy Merchant'.¹⁹

The following two images target the pharmaceutical company Pfizer and could be a reference to Dr Albert Bourla, CEO of Pfizer, who oversaw the development of a Covid vaccine. Bourla is Jewish and is the son of Holocaust survivors.



This image portrays the Jewish candelabra/Menorah used during the festival of Chanukah with syringes instead of candles.



This image portrays the Jew as a poisoner (updating the 'well poisoning' motif) – note the poison label on the bottle.



**Not the vaccines.
Not the vaccines.
Not the vaccines.
Not the vaccines.
Not the vaccines.
Not the vaccines.
Not the vaccines.
Not the vaccines.
Not the vaccines.
Not the vaccines.**



**You know
what's to
blame, right?
Omicron Variant**

The implication of this image is that the vaccines are causing illness rather than Covid, and that Jews are in control of the public narrative that blames the virus.

¹⁹ <https://www.adl.org/education/references/hate-symbols/the-happy-merchant>



This image suggests that Jews created Covid as a way to control the population.



A super-conspiracy: the Jews planned the Kennedy assassination and the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and created Covid. In this version, the pandemic is just the latest example of an earth-shattering event that was caused by Jews, rather than by those blamed under the official version of events.

The following two images list names of individuals, who are alleged to be Jewish and involved in all aspects of the "Covid agenda":



This belief that Jews are responsible for Covid vaccines was shared by Payton Gendron, the far-right extremist who perpetrated the terrorist shooting of 13 people, ten of whom died, in a supermarket in a predominantly African-American area of Buffalo, New York on 14 May 2022.

Gendron posted a manifesto before his attack that revealed the centrality of antisemitism to his political beliefs, with many pages of the manifesto dedicated to the discussion of Jews and Jewish conspiracies. This image from his manifesto reveals the antisemitic nature of his Covid conspiracism:

JEWS NATIONAL FUND

AstraZeneca Pfizer moderna SPUTNIK-V Gamaley

ORIGIN UNKNOWN

LEIF JOHANSSON
Chairman of AstraZeneca

- Bilderberg Group member, Corporate and Trade
- Black Rock Investor
- The King's Medal 12th size in the Ribbon of the Royal Order of the Seraphim (first and forenlist order of Sweden, motto: IHS)
- Knight of the National Order of the Legion of Honour, France
- Chairman of ERT (European Round Table of Industrialists)
- Member of the Board: Bristol-Myers Squibb Company, New York, and SCA (manufacturer of timber pulp and paper)
- Confederation of Swedish Enterprise
- Member of IVA (Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences).

ALBERT BOURLA
Chairman & CEO of Pfizer

- The Business Council member (organization of business leaders with headquarters in D.C.)
- Business Roundtable member (group of CEO's of major U.S. corporations established to promote pro-business public policy)
- Catalyst member (nonprofit organization promoting the advancement of women)
- PhRMA member (Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, a trade association representing companies in the pharmaceutical industry in the US.)
- Called "the most preminent Greek leader" of the global pharmaceutical industry
- Hanukkah is "the story of the impossible becoming possible."

STÉPHANE BANCEL
CEO of Moderna

- Known as businessman, not as a scientist
- Leads highly secretive culture
- No scientific publications to its name and not sharing a shred of data publicly.
- None of the companies work has been peer-reviewed or scientifically-validated.)
- Somehow convinced investors and multinational drug makers that its scientific expertise were destined to change the world in 2012.
- Nature outright compared Moderna's approach to that of Theranos. Said company underwent a rapid collapse followed by its keycharged with what the SEC called "massive fraud."

Gincburg

WHICH GROUP IS HEAVILY OVER-REPRESENTED IN VACCINE NEPOTISM?

- ☞ Pfizer's CEO is jewish
- ☞ AstraZeneca's CEO was to takeover as CEO of Israel's Teva Pharmaceuticals which means he is jewish
- ☞ Moderna's vaccine was created by a jew
- ☞ Johnson & Johnson's CEO is jewish
- ☞ Teva is an Israel pharmaceutical company with a jewish CEO
- ☞ Regeneron Pharmaceuticals CEO is jewish
- ☞ Sputnik-V Gamaleya's (Russia) head of research, Alexander Gincburg, is jewish

*** Why is 0.2 % of the 7.89 billion humans battling 1000 in vaccine nepotism?



This image shows a "Jewish" hand (with a Star of David) holding a syringe being gripped by a "Nazi" hand. Underneath is the number 1488, which is the combination of two numeric symbols used by neo-Nazis: 14 refers to the "14 words" slogan ("We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children") used as a mantra by white supremacists and 88 stands for HH or Heil Hitler.

MISUSE OF HOLOCAUST IMAGERY BY COVID CONSPIRACY ACTIVISTS

This abuse and misuse of the genocide of European Jewry by Nazi Germany during the Holocaust, either by the use of language or imagery taken from the Nazi persecution of Jews, is antisemitic and deeply offensive to Jewish people, as well as being historically inaccurate. It represents a form of Holocaust revisionism and distortion that ultimately minimises the experiences of Jews during that period.

One of the tactics that individuals within the Covid conspiracy movement have been utilising is the deliberate use of Holocaust imagery and terminology. This is intended to imply that the laws and regulations enacted by governments around the world to deal with a pandemic caused by a highly infectious airborne virus, including lockdown restrictions and vaccinations, are equivalent to how Jews were treated under Nazi rule.

This tactic has included the wearing of home-made yellow stars at protests, invoking the yellow stars that Jews living under Nazi rule were forced to wear to mark them out from the rest of the population. It has involved the comparison of lockdown rules to the Nuremberg Laws in Nazi Germany, which were a set of racial laws that excluded Jews from large swathes of German society. This grotesque phenomenon is also not limited to the UK and has been seen on anti-lockdown protests in numerous other countries, including in the United States,²⁰ Germany²¹ and Italy.²²



Protesters in London against Covid lockdowns and regulations wearing yellow stars, April 2021.²³



Protesters in London against Covid lockdowns and regulations comparing vaccines to the Holocaust, April 2021.²⁴

²⁰ <https://www.adl.org/blog/anti-vaccine-protesters-misappropriate-holocaust-era-symbol-to-promote-their-cause>

²¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-57020697>

²² <https://www.timesofisrael.com/protesters-against-italys-covid-rules-dress-up-as-holocaust-victims/>

²³ <https://cst.org.uk/data/file/f/f/Incidents%20Report%202021.1644318940.pdf>

²⁴ <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/people-india-jamie-parker-london-nhs-b931622.html>

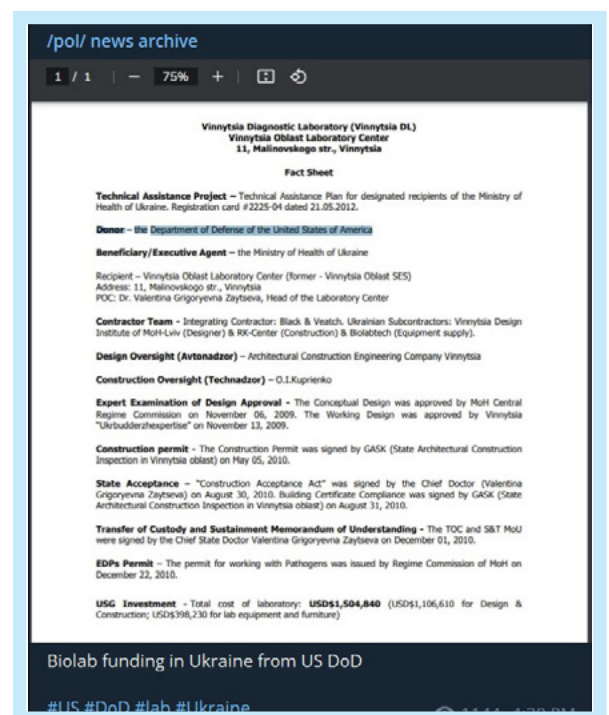
Some activists in the Covid conspiracy movement have moved on to promoting conspiracy theories about the Russian invasion of Ukraine, with the idea that this is a new crisis designed to provide further justifications for government control of populations.

For example, according to a statement from Piers Corbyn:²⁵

"This crisis will be used against the people of the UK and Europe to implement energy restrictions and lockdowns or equivalent as part of continuing moves to implement a New World Tyranny ("order") against all Rights and Freedoms as the Covid virus story hits the rocks."

This is typical of the behaviour of conspiracy theorists who will view every major event through a conspiracist prism.

One of the Russian propaganda claims during this war has been that biological weapons are being developed in laboratories in Ukraine, with support from the US.²⁶ Some Covid conspiracy activists are parroting this claim, and then using it as a pretext to imply that the original Covid virus was created in a US laboratory.



25 <https://www.stopnewnormal.net/post/ukraine-statement-from-piers-corbyn-23-02-22>

26 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/60711705>

FAR-RIGHT INVOLVEMENT IN THE COVID CONSPIRACY MOVEMENT

Blaming minorities for various national and international events is a long-standing part of the far-right playbook, and Covid is no exception. According to the European Union's Terrorism Situation and Trend 2021 report:

"Right-wing extremists exploited COVID-19 to support their narratives of accelerationism and conspiracy theories featuring anti-Semitism, and anti-immigration and anti-Islam rhetoric."²⁷

From the start of the Covid pandemic, some far-right individuals and groups have been vocal in their opposition to the various Covid measures imposed by governments around the world, including lockdowns, vaccines and the wearing of masks. As the pandemic evolved and restrictions became more severe, these far-right actors played an increasingly active role in the Covid conspiracy movement. This included online activities, including spreading Covid conspiracy material, as well as real life activities like leafleting, stickering and attending protests. This crossover between the Covid conspiracy movement and the far right has been described as a symbiotic relationship.²⁸ It has been noted in numerous countries around the world including the UK, Germany, USA and Canada.

The concern with this crossover is the radicalising influence that far-right ideology can have on those exposed to it. It could draw in vulnerable individuals who are initially attracted due to doubts about vaccines or lockdown measures, and who could become more radicalised by far-right messaging, including antisemitic conspiracy theories.

An early illustration of this far-right presence was an anti-lockdown protest in Trafalgar Square in London in August 2020, where a man was photographed holding a flag associated with the UK pro-fascist organisation New British Union.²⁹



Supporters of the QAnon conspiracy theory were also present at the protest:³⁰



²⁷ https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/tesat_2021_0.pdf

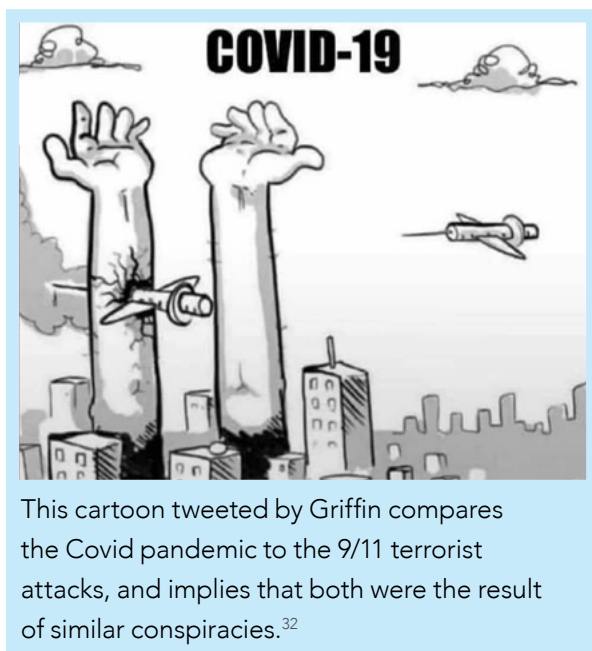
²⁸ <https://www.vice.com/en/article/88ggqa/how-the-far-right-is-radicalizing-anti-vaxxers>

²⁹ https://mobile.twitter.com/JoeMulhall_/status/1299676783017590785

³⁰ https://mobile.twitter.com/JoeMulhall_/status/1299683858896637953

Some far-right activists have been openly pushing anti-Covid messages online. They include Nick Griffin, former leader of the British National Party (BNP), who often writes in conspiratorial language. For example, he has included the following hashtags in his tweets:

"#GreatReset", "#BillGates", "#BigPharma", "#Nuremberg2", "#DoNotComply", "#covidhysteria", "#NoVaccinePassports" and "#globlelite".



Jayda Fransen, former deputy leader of the far-right Britain First and now leader of the far-right British Freedom Party (which Nick Griffin has also been associated with), has also been outspoken in her belief that Covid is a conspiracy. Here is an image of the British Freedom Party's newspaper with a headline calling for "Nuremberg #2" and a poster comparing Covid to the George Orwell novel 1984 with the words "Do not comply":³³



Far-right groups and activists have also been present on protests against Covid measures in other countries, including Hungary,³⁴ Canada,³⁵ Australia³⁶ and the United States.³⁷

³³ <https://www.britishfreedomparty.com/freedomissue1>

³⁴ https://news.yahoo.com/anti-vaccine-far-rally-attracts-154855743.html?soc_src=social-sh&soc_trk=tw&tsrc=twtr&guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly90LmNvLw&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAGXh4t4FmT98tacE29vUD0QcrSRDr0WYt6KZPk3Y_15B2G58xiA3LH9ZlxS46kcEQgjo7KeDAJV5RhO1SzjO0GolBsM2oKEvfMyE9FiElf_D79mEAjgg7nwkNkmo-nj0OLKPrurzqK5N7UrqhWoBxBsBjAkzFkZBKkpucPwq5

³⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/16/ottawa-blockade-strong-ties-extremists>

³⁶ <https://theconversation.com/white-supremacist-and-far-right-ideology-underpin-anti-vax-movements-172289>

³⁷ <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2022/01/23/anti-vaccination-ideas-extremists/6599746001/>

³¹ <https://twitter.com/NickGriffinBU/status/1479046464730972162>

³² <https://twitter.com/NickGriffinBU/status/1462081473087946772>

PATRIOTIC ALTERNATIVE'S PANDEMIC ACTIVISM

Patriotic Alternative (PA) has been described as “the largest and most active fascist movement operating in the UK today”, and it has repeatedly tried to use the anti-vaccine, anti-lockdown movement to spread its message and recruit new followers.³⁸ The leader of PA is Mark Collett, the former head of publicity for the BNP, who has made numerous antisemitic and pro-Nazi statements.³⁹ With PA, Collett has brought together various disparate strands within the splintered UK far right, especially younger activists. As well as its online output, PA has held in person events, including leafleting, banner activities and conferences.

During the Covid pandemic, PA has pushed out Covid-sceptic propaganda, both online and offline. According to an investigation by *The Times*,⁴⁰ PA appears to have posted propaganda material into Scottish anti-lockdown networks on Telegram, including details of their demonstrations and meetings. The investigation found that antisemitic material and conspiracies were being shared online. A PA spokesman told the paper that the group shared “common cause” with anti-vaccination activists.

On their Telegram channel, PA have provided evidence of numerous occasions where their activists attended protests against Covid measures and restrictions across the UK and handed out their literature. For PA, the Covid conspiracy movement provides a potential recruitment pool of individuals, who are already receptive to a lack of trust in authority and a belief that someone is pulling the strings.

Examples of Telegram posts showing PA activists at protests against Covid measures:⁴¹



Examples of PA anti-Covid leaflets shown being handed out on demonstrations in the above images:



³⁸ <https://hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/patriotic-alternative-report-2021-11-v3.pdf>

³⁹ <https://hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/patriotic-alternative-report-2021-11-v3.pdf>

⁴⁰ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/antivaxer-online-forums-becoming-more-antisemitic-and-extremist-sxp9rq27x>

⁴¹ <https://t.me/markacollett/3592> & <https://t.me/PatAltLondon/136>

LEADING FIGURES WITHIN THE COVID CONSPIRACY MOVEMENT

Even though the Covid conspiracy movement is made of all kinds of people, there are a small number of individuals who play influential and leading roles. They include the following:

Piers Corbyn

Piers Corbyn is one of the most high-profile activists in the Covid conspiracy movement. During the Covid pandemic, Corbyn, an independent meteorologist and brother of Jeremy, former leader of the Labour Party, led and attended numerous protests against Covid lockdowns, vaccinations and regulations. He was arrested on several occasions and convicted of breaking Covid regulations.⁴²

In February 2021, Corbyn was arrested on suspicion of malicious communications and public nuisance and bailed.⁴³ The charges relate to leaflets available online and posted through letterboxes in Southwark, which compared the Covid vaccine programme with Auschwitz concentration camp.

On the leaflet, in the sign above the camp's gates, the words "Arbeit Macht Frei" (work sets you free) are replaced by "Vaccines are safe path to freedom", which was a headline in the *Evening Standard* in November 2020.

On 18 December 2021, Corbyn spoke at a demonstration in London against vaccine certificates and Covid restrictions. He told the crowd that they needed to "get a bit more physical" and "hammer to death those scum who decided to go ahead with introducing new fascism". He said:



"You've got to get a list of them . . . and if your MP is one of them, go to their offices and, well, I would recommend burning them down . . . But I can't say that on air. I hope we're not on air." Corbyn was also filmed breathing fire whilst saying: "We're going to go to Boris Johnson and Keir Starmer and we're going to burn them alive."⁴⁴

On 29 December 2021, Corbyn reportedly led a group of anti-vaccine protesters who stormed a Covid testing facility in Milton Keynes.⁴⁵ Some of the protesters shouted abuse at NHS Test and Trace staff and removed test equipment. In one video from the protest, Corbyn shouts through a megaphone: "We are peaceful. You are killing people."

⁴² <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/02/piers-corbyn-found-guilty-of-breaching-regulations-with-lockdown-protest> & <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/30/piers-corbyn-fined-10000-for-organising-anti-lockdown-rally>

⁴³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-55933373>

⁴⁴ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/piers-corbyn-called-for-attacks-on-mps-kq59j0xtb>

⁴⁵ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/antivax-protesters-abuse-staff-at-covid-test-site-xbnlj3zf>

Piers Corbyn has a long record of conspiracist activism, and appeared in a February 2020 report by CST and Hope Not Hate about a conspiracy theory group based in London, titled *Inside Keep Talking: The conspiracy theory group uniting the far left and the far right*.⁴⁶ The report revealed the activities of a group of conspiracy theorists who held monthly meetings in London, and brought together Holocaust deniers, neo-Nazis, anti-Israel activists, people who had been expelled from the Labour Party and other random conspiracy theorists. It showed how:

“hateful conspiracy theories have permeated the far-left as well as the far-right, and have brought both together. The deeper we looked into the Keep Talking group, the harder it became to know whether it was far-right, far-left, a mixture of the two, or something else entirely... The people in the Keep Talking group who we tracked over a period of three years may seem like ridiculous cranks: but even ridiculous cranks have influence and connections today that were unimaginable just a few years ago. Their conspiracy theories spread across ideologies, connect political movements that were previously opposed to one another, and embed the view that the world is shaped and controlled by hidden hands. And more often than not, just as it always was, that hidden hand is identified as Jewish.”

This crossover of ideologies was evident in October 2021, when Piers Corbyn appeared on a live online show called *Weekly Patriotic Review* that was hosted by far-right leader Mark Collett.⁴⁷ He interviewed Corbyn on his views about “Covid tyranny” and “forced vaccinations”. Collett talked about the “Covid scamdemic” and said: “Obviously, you and I agree on a lot of things.” They also discussed the future of white people and Jews. Corbyn emphasised that he is not a Holocaust denier but offered to meet with Collett another time to discuss the Jewish question “more fully”.

⁴⁶ <https://cst.org.uk/data/file/6/c/keep-talking-2020-02.1615559510.pdf>

⁴⁷ <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk/piers-corbyn-appears-on-neo-nazi-s-show-and-discusses-the-jewish-question-1.521921>

David Icke

David Icke is a key figure in the Covid conspiracy movement and has been actively campaigning against the government’s Covid restrictions and laws. CST has previously written about Icke and his “new age antisemitism”.⁴⁸ For years, Icke has spread “new age” antisemitic conspiracy theories about “Rothschild Zionists” controlling the world, driving global conflict through NATO and seeking World War III. Icke also cites the antisemitic hoax *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in several of his books, quoting them extensively but renaming them the ‘Illuminati Protocols’ in an attempt to distance himself from their explicit antisemitism. It was inevitable that someone who thrives on creating conspiracy theories to fit any world event that takes place would seek to place the Covid pandemic within his warped world view.

Icke, along with his sons,⁴⁹ spoke at a number of the protest events against Covid restrictions and vaccinations across the UK. In 2020, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube closed Icke’s accounts due to Covid misinformation. An open letter was released by the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) calling for Icke’s accounts to be removed and stating that videos of Icke making “untrue and conspiracist claims about Covid-19” had been seen more than 30 million times. CCDH called Icke “the leading producer of Covid-19 misinformation” and claimed that “antisemitism is intrinsic to Icke’s COVID-19 superconspiracy.” One of Icke’s YouTube videos shows him claiming that “the Rothschilds” were involved in planning the Covid pandemic and has been viewed 5.9 million times.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ <https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2017/01/05/david-ickes-ages-old-new-age-antisemitism>

⁴⁹ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/sons-of-david-icke-take-centre-stage-in-covid-conspiracy-movement-ttvqqfvb>

⁵⁰ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-52501453> & https://www.counterhate.com/files/ugd/f4d9b9_db8ff469f6914534ac02309bb488f948.pdf

Kate Shemirani has become one of the most visible and outspoken individuals within the UK Covid conspiracy movement. She was a nurse who was permanently struck off the nursing register in June 2021 and repeatedly used grossly offensive Holocaust-related language to campaign against vaccines. She referred to the “Nazification of the NHS,” said that nurses were complicit in genocide, and claimed that nurse vaccination teams should be called “death squads”. She called the NHS the “new Auschwitz” and referred to healthcare professionals as “Nurses and Drs of the Third Reich”.⁵¹

Shemirani spoke at a number of protests against Covid lockdowns and vaccines. At one protest in London's Trafalgar Square, Shemirani asked protesters to collect the details of NHS workers and email them to her, saying: "With a group of lawyers, we are collecting all that. At the Nuremberg Trials, the doctors and nurses stood trial and they hung. If you are a doctor or a nurse, now is the time to get off that bus . . . and stand with us the people".⁵²



Kate Shemirani with Piers Corbyn⁵³

51 <https://metro.co.uk/2021/06/03/anti-vaxxer-nurse-who-compared-lockdown-to-the-holocaust-is-struck-off-14712043/>

52 <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/police-investigate-antivax-rally-over-nuremberg-cry-lq8xs2278>

53 <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/police-investigate-antivax-rally-over-nuremberg-cry-lq8xs2278>

Edward Freeman, a Jamaican-born rapper also known as Remeece, is another influential figure in the Covid conspiracy movement. Some of his songs, which were available on Spotify, have an explicitly anti-vaccination message. At the time of writing, Remeece had 12,500 followers on Instagram and 2,175 followers on Facebook.

Remeece visited primary and secondary schools in London, Cornwall and Birmingham singing his anti-vaccine song Don't Tek Di Vaccine outside the school gates and trying to speak to the schoolchildren.⁵⁴ The song's lyrics include the words "don't tek the damn thing" and describe the vaccine as "poison". Piers Corbyn appears in two of his music videos.⁵⁵ Remeece was reportedly present when Sir Keir Starmer and David Lammy were confronted by protesters outside Parliament in February 2022.⁵⁶



Remeece (on the far left)⁵⁷

54 <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/feb/13/dont-take-the-damn-thing-how-spotify-playlists-push-dangerous-anti-vaccine-tunes>

55 <https://metro.co.uk/2021/06/06/anti-vaxxers-targeting-children-with-fake-nspcc-leaflets-and-rap-music-14723130/>

56 <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10489865/The-anti-vax-aggressors-Keir-Starmer-stunt.html>

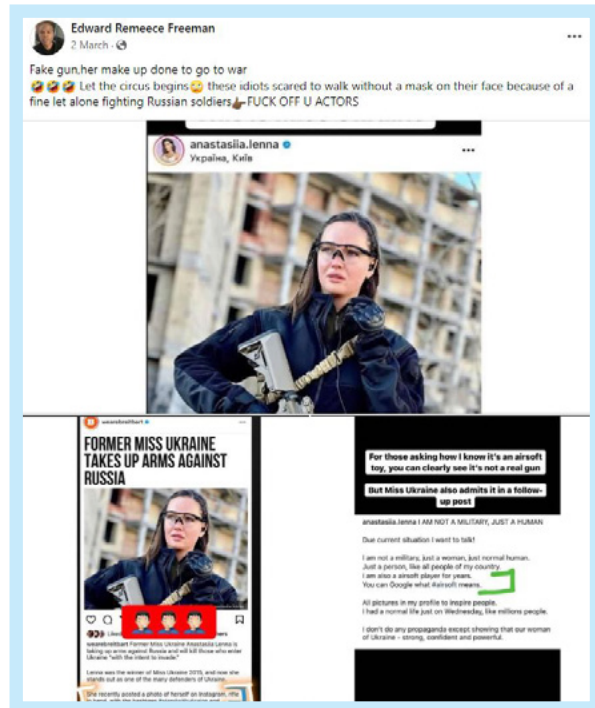
57 <https://www.remeece.com/?fbclid=IwAR2yiQVL86j6eX6w6jGckkI9GieFOIFHIZUqYo02FsU2FnmlpAJ3NfQjVno#Gallery>



Remeece (fourth from the left) alongside Piers Corbyn (fourth from the right)⁵⁸

Remeece promotes the Sovereign Citizen conspiracy movement on his website.⁵⁹ This movement posits that individuals should renounce their citizenship from the state, which they believe would then allow them to circumvent laws. The movement started in the United States⁶⁰ and has grown closer to the QAnon conspiracy group in America.⁶¹

Remeece has also indulged in conspiracy theories relating to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. He claimed that photographs of Ukrainian citizens injured by Russian bomb attacks have been faked and the individuals are “actors” or work for a Ukrainian “psychological special operations” centre.⁶²



⁵⁸ <https://www.remeece.com/?fbclid=IwAR2yiQVL86j6eX6w6jGckkl9GieFOIFHIZUgYo02FsU2FnmlpAJ3NfQjVno#Gallery>

⁵⁹ <https://www.remeece.com/birth-certificate-fraud>

⁶⁰ <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/sovereign-citizen-movement>

⁶¹ <https://www.adl.org/blog/sovereign-citizen-ideology-increasingly-seeping-into-qanon>

⁶² <https://www.facebook.com/redd.karpett.3/posts/3307459122873892> & <https://www.facebook.com/redd.karpett.3/posts/3307778366175301>

ORGANISATIONS AND NETWORKS

USING ANTISEMITISM WITHIN THE COVID CONSPIRACY MOVEMENT

The Light

An example of how far-right ideology and antisemitism have influenced the Covid conspiracy movement can be seen in *The Light* newspaper, a free conspiracist publication distributed in several towns and cities around the UK. For example, in the Cotswolds town of Stroud⁶³ a group of Covid sceptics held public rallies and distributed free copies of *The Light* to spread their message. A campaign group called Community Solidarity Stroud District formed to oppose them. This newspaper contains a mixture of Covid misinformation, conspiracy theories, adverts for David Icke's website and for Piers Corbyn's political party, alongside adverts for alternative medicines and new age products.



Extremism and antisemitism are interwoven within the publication. For example, issue 15 includes an article titled, "'Hate speech' pensioner jailed for 32 months. What would George Orwell make of it?", written by Louise Small. The article concerns the conviction and jailing of Cornish musician and radio host Graham Hart for stirring up racial hatred.

Small writes sympathetically about Hart and quotes his relatives, who claimed that in his broadcasts Hart "wanted to let off steam" and "he has been made an example of for being outspoken with his unorthodox views".⁶⁴

In fact, Hart pleaded guilty to using antisemitic language and racial slurs on his live radio show. On the shows, he continually insulted and dehumanised Jews, portraying them as an "evil" race and an enemy to be fought and brought down. According to the Crown Prosecution Service, Hart had "used his position to influence people as a radio host to stir up racial hatred and incite violence against the Jewish race".⁶⁵ Hart's social media also displayed images which corroborated his antisemitic views, with posts portraying the Holocaust as a hoax and ridiculing Jews.



Issue 9 (May 2021) included an interview with Anne Marie Waters, leader of the far-right anti-Muslim party For Britain.⁶⁶ Waters also wrote a column for Issue 14 of *The Light* about children and Covid vaccines.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ <https://thehighpaper.co.uk/assets/pdf/Light-15-iFinal.pdf>

⁶⁵ <https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/radio-host-sentenced-32-months-imprisonment-inciting-racial-hatred-his-radio-show>

⁶⁶ <https://thehighpaper.co.uk/assets/pdf/The-Light-9e-FINAL-1.pdf>

⁶⁷ <https://thehighpaper.co.uk/assets/pdf/Light-14-Final.pdf>

⁶³ <https://hopenothe.org.uk/2022/02/14/the-residents-shining-a-light-on-the-hateful-newspaper-spreading-disinformation-in-their-town>

The White Rose

One group that consistently makes a comparison between Covid laws and regulations and Nazi Germany is the White Rose, which is a conspiratorial network focused on encouraging people to put up stickers with anti-Covid messaging.

Historically, the White Rose was a non-violent resistance group that fought against Nazi propaganda by producing and distributing pamphlets and putting up graffiti. Today's White Rose has appropriated the name in order to draw parallels between governments' tackling of the Covid pandemic and Nazi Germany. They mainly spread conspiracy theories regarding Covid, demonise governments' actions against it, and urge people to rise up and resist. Also, being a network grounded in a Covid-related conspiracy theory, it is no surprise that some followers subscribe to other conspiracy theories, some of which are antisemitic, and the grouping has attracted some far-right elements.⁶⁸

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, members of White Rose have reportedly been sharing content and conspiracy theories from Russia Today, the state-owned news channel.⁶⁹

Examples of White Rose material from Telegram:



Message from Patriotic Alternative channel showing PA activity posted in White Rose chat group on Telegram.

⁶⁸ <https://theferret.scot/pro-russia-propaganda-anti-vaccine-white-rose/>

⁶⁹ <https://theferret.scot/pro-russia-propaganda-anti-vaccine-white-rose/>

Case studies: how anti-vaxx conspiracies and antisemitism mix

The following are case studies of three individuals who have been actively involved in spreading anti-vaccine or anti-lockdown propaganda, and who have also exhibited antisemitic beliefs.

CASE STUDY

Anna Laurini

Anna Laurini is a celebrated and highly successful artist whose work is exhibited by Saatchi Art, amongst others, where it sells for thousands of pounds.⁷⁰ She has had numerous high-profile commissions including in Carnaby Street where she was commissioned to paint construction hoardings with her distinctive face-like designs.⁷¹ In October 2021, she had an exhibition in Freud's Bar in Shaftesbury Avenue and her drawings have been on display in the Wells Tavern in Hampstead.⁷² Her graffiti art can be seen commonly painted or stickered around Soho, Primrose Hill and other areas of London.



A sticker with Anna Laurini's art alongside a sticker about "Covid Lies" from the White Rose movement, on a post box in Primrose Hill, north London, January 2022

⁷⁰ <https://secretartlondon.uk/anna-laurini> & <https://www.saatchiart.com/account/artworks/1252147>

⁷¹ <https://www.shutterstock.com/editorial/image-editorial/anna-laurinis-urban-spinxes-in-carnaby-street-london-uk-04-aug-2020-10733162e>

⁷² <https://ra.co/events/1440149>

However, it is unlikely that any of the galleries displaying Laurini's art, or companies commissioning her work, are aware that Laurini has been actively promoting Covid conspiracy messages as well as explicit antisemitism. Her social media accounts show that she is a conspiracy theorist with an obsessive interest in 9/11 conspiracy theories and a fan of David Icke, who she sees as an inspiration.

In January 2021, Laurini attended an anti-lockdown protest in Clapham Common, where 16 people were arrested.⁷³

Laurini has used her Instagram account to promote Covid conspiracy views:



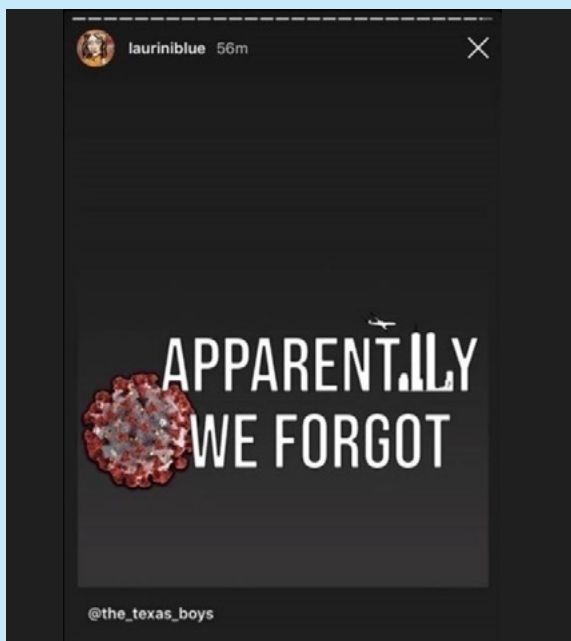
⁷³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-55601600> & <https://youtu.be/15Bi8eWQJ30>



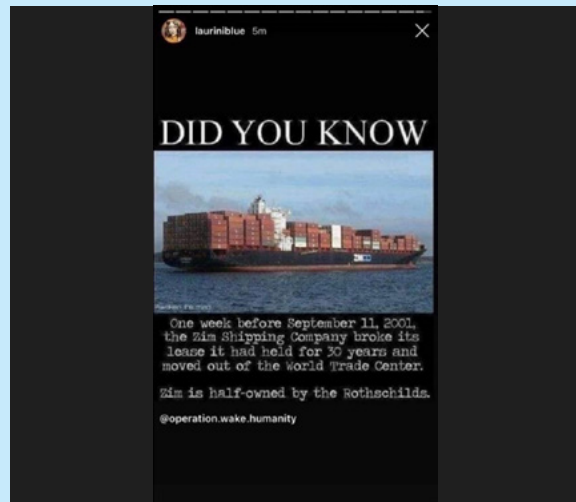
Laurini promoting a White Rose conspiracy sticker.



Laurini with David Icke.



Laurini promoting a conspiracy linking the 9/11 terrorist attacks with Covid.



Laurini promoting an antisemitic conspiracy linking "the Rothschilds" with the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

The following images are taken from Laurini's account on Gab, a social media platform favoured by far-right extremists, and show her endorsing or promoting antisemitic conspiracy theories.

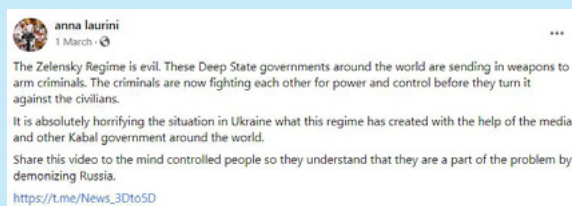
Here she reposts an antisemitic cartoon showing a Jewish Star of David connecting the media, banking, government, Hollywood, pornography and "the 1%". The message from the original poster reads "If you ignore the JQ you are politically illiterate". "JQ" stands for "Jewish Question" and is a common acronym used by far-right activists online:



In this post, Laurini has reposted an image claiming that the involvement of Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell in child sex trafficking and other related crimes was actually an Israeli intelligence operation. This is an antisemitic conspiracy theory based solely on the fact that Epstein and Maxwell are both Jewish, which the post explicitly states:



Laurini has also indulged in conspiracy theories about the Russian invasion of Ukraine, claiming that it is part of a plot by “Deep state governments around the world to arm criminals” and claiming “the Zelensky regime is evil”.⁷⁴



⁷⁴ https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10158305620877821&id=45169637820



CASE STUDY

Matthew Henegan

Matthew Henegan, from St Neots in Cambridgeshire, is a self-declared National Socialist, who wrote, designed and distributed a leaflet that wove together antisemitism with conspiracy theories about Covid and about terrorist attacks.

In December 2021, Henegan was convicted of six charges of possessing, distributing and publishing material intended to stir racial hatred and one charge of possessing a document useful to a terrorist.⁷⁵ He claimed in leaflets and online that Jews “controlled the media”, were behind Covid news stories and were evil. In March 2020, local residents reported receiving leaflets through their letterboxes that used extremely offensive antisemitic and racist language about “kikes” and “our struggle against this kike led tyranny”. The leaflets expressed admiration for Adolf Hitler, referred to “the kike propaganda machine” and encouraged readers: “why not turn that hatred towards the enemy”. Henegan also posted racially inflammatory video and audio files online.

Police searched Henegan’s home and found a swastika armband and leaflets referring to Hitler as “Your Saviour”. He also possessed a copy of a document entitled “How to Make Armour Piercing Bullets”. Following his arrest, Henegan

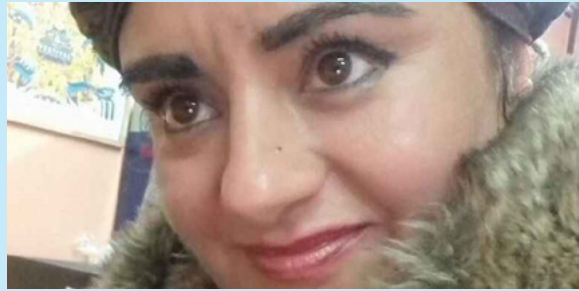
⁷⁵ <https://ersou.police.uk/news/2021/12/10/matthew-henegan-guilty/>

described Jews as “a bunch of criminals” and claimed Hitler was “clearly a righteous person”. Alongside this neo-Nazi Jew-hatred, Henegan published documents and videos titled Corona Virus Hoax Full Edition, Corona Virus Hoax Supplement and Corona Virus Hoax Update – How You Are Being Controlled.⁷⁶ His conspiracy theories extended to accusing Jews of staging terrorist attacks using ‘crisis actors’ (people posing as victims and witnesses of atrocities).

In March 2022, Henegan was sentenced to more than eight years in jail, with an extended four-year licence. According to Nick Price, head of the CPS Counter Terrorism Division: “The vile and insulting language Matthew Henegan used showed the jury his desire to incite others towards the warped racial and antisemitic views he holds.”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ <https://courtnewsuk.co.uk/dont-associate-my-toothbrush-moustache-with-hitler-neo-nazi-tells-jury>

⁷⁷ <https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/white-supremacist-jailed-over-antisemitic-covid-claims>



CASE STUDY

Tahra Ahmed

Tahra Ahmed, from Tottenham, north London, has been involved in propagating conspiracy theories for a number of years. In 2013, she organised a conference in London for the self-defined “Truth movement”, called “Seek Speak Spread Truth”. It included the promotion of antisemitic conspiracy theories and the guest speaker was the jazz saxophonist Gilad Atzmon, who is well-known for propagating antisemitic views.^{78 79} Ahmed had posted Holocaust denial on her Facebook page, in a comment that read: “the number of Jews who died during WWII is greatly exaggerated.”

After the start of the Covid pandemic, Ahmed became an anti-lockdown campaigner and started her own pressure group called the Freedom Festival. The group released videos encouraging people on anti-lockdown protests to become “lawful observers”. This involved confronting police officers and telling them that Covid laws were not laws and the officers would be held personally liable for any “illegal” actions they took against protesters.⁸⁰



⁷⁸ <https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2013/12/09/truth-movement-stupidest-people-on-the-planet>

⁷⁹ <https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2013/12/12/the-truth-will-set-you-free-jazz-redux>

⁸⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OdJ8DWM9ZO8>

In June 2017, four days after the Grenfell fire tragedy, Ahmed, then a local activist involved in volunteer support activity for the victims and survivors of the fire, wrote on Facebook:

“Watch the live footage of people trapped in the inferno with flames behind them. They were burnt alive in a Jewish sacrifice. Grenfell is owned by a private Jewish property developer just like the twin towers was owned by Jew Silverstein who collected trillions in insurance claims. I wonder how much Goldman is standing to make in the world’s most expensive real estate location.”

She also posted a link to a video titled “London Tower Block Fire: Sinister Connections with Jewish Ritual Sacrifice Explored”.

A later Facebook post by Ahmed, written a few months after the fire, read:

“Jews have always been the ones behind ritual torture, crucifixion and murder of children, especially young boys, as a way of atoning for their sins in order to be allowed back into Palestine. Here is a very brief history of these crimes they committed in Britain over the centuries.”

Ahmed was arrested and charged with stirring up racial hatred after CST reported her Facebook posts to the police and provided expert witness testimony for the prosecution. In her defence, Ahmed told the court that the “Jews” she referred to in the post were those who belonged to a criminal “cabal” of “the evil elite who are orchestrating everything in order to divide and conquer the world.” She claimed she was not referring to the “common Jew” and she made a distinction between the “common” and the “cabal” Jew. “If you look at the other comments, I have always qualified it with satanic, Zionist, evil, ruling or whatever.” The court also heard from a police officer, who trawled through Ahmed’s Facebook account and found

antisemitic assertions blaming Jews for the 9/11 terrorist attacks in America.⁸¹

On 11 February 2022, Ahmed was sentenced to 11 months in prison after she was convicted of two charges of stirring up racial hatred in relation to the two Facebook posts.⁸² According to the prosecution, her Facebook posts “revealed a history of antisemitic comments and propagation of a number of conspiracy theories”.⁸³

Ahmed’s offences occurred before the Covid pandemic began, but by the time her case came to court Britain’s Covid conspiracy movement was in full swing, and it is from this world that she attracted support during her trial. Around 50 of Ahmed’s supporters from Freedom Festival were present outside the Old Bailey to show solidarity for her sentencing hearing. One of those present was reported to be William Coleshill, co-leader of Resistance GB.⁸⁴ Also in attendance to show support for Ahmed was Remeece, who said he first met Ahmed in May 2020 and called her a “real hero”.⁸⁵ Their support for Ahmed is a sign of how antisemitism is no barrier to involvement in, or acceptance by, some of the leading figures in the Covid conspiracy movement.

81 <https://courtnewsuk.co.uk/grenfell-tower-volunteer-shocked-as-she-is-jailed-for-race-hate-posts/>

82 <https://news.met.police.uk/news/woman-jailed-for-anti-semitic-posts-442276>

83 <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/grenfell-tower-fire-helper-tahra-ahmed-made-antisemitic-posts-kvmk5s9jk>

84 <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/anti-lockdown-activist-tahra-ahmed-jailed-over-facebook-post-blaming-jews-for-grenfell-fire-0nm0m0kwh>

85 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1WjMbTmwRIw&t=71s>

One of the supporters held the placard shown below.⁸⁶ The wording is strikingly similar to Pastor Martin Niemöller's famous poem about the Holocaust, called "First they Came".⁸⁷ It is another example of the appropriation of Holocaust language by the Covid conspiracy movement.



A few days before her sentencing, two anti-vaccine activists were filmed on a demonstration discussing Ahmed's case and speculating about what kind of sentence she might get. One of the men, who is wearing a yellow star in mimicry of the Nazi persecution of the Jews during the Holocaust, jokes that she will probably get "Judge Goldberg", and the other replies that the jury will probably consist of "eleven out of twelve of them from the State of Israel". The fact that these anti-vaccine protesters were telling each other antisemitic jokes as a way of expressing support for someone who had been convicted of stirring up racial hatred against Jews, while one of them wore a yellow star, illustrates how the misappropriation of Holocaust imagery is not a genuine display of sympathy with Jews who suffered but is a cynical move by people who are willing to indulge antisemitic attitudes.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/anti-lockdown-activist-tahra-ahmed-jailed-over-facebook-post-blaming-jews-for-grenfell-fire-0nm0m0kwh>

⁸⁷ <https://www.hmd.org.uk/resource/first-they-came-by-pastor-martin-niemoller/>

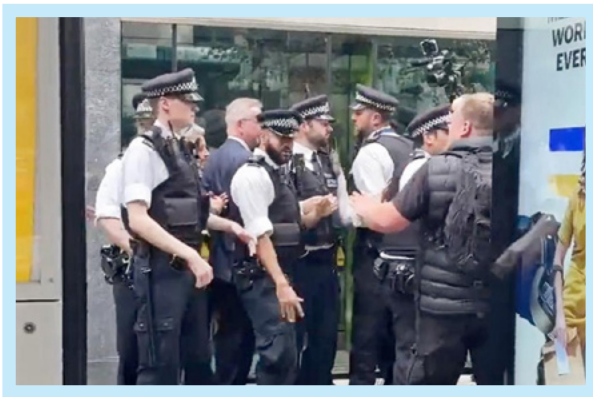
⁸⁸ <https://twitter.com/marclister3k/status/1490680167227871238>



COVID CONSPIRACY ACTIVISTS CONFRONTING POLITICIANS AND JOURNALISTS

Much of the conspiracy activism evidenced in this report has either been online, or has involved offline activity limited to stickers, posters, graffiti and other propaganda work. However, some elements in the Covid conspiracy movement have shown a determination to take their activism to the streets in a more direct way, including harassing politicians, journalists and police officers in a threatening and intimidating manner whilst filming and uploading the footage online in real time.⁸⁹

This raises the possibility that the Covid conspiracy movement could generate more violent and extremist activity. None of this has, so far, targeted the Jewish community, but the presence of antisemitism within this movement, combined with this aggressive, potentially violent fringe, cannot be ignored.



Examples of this kind of activity include:

On 14 June 2021, Newsnight's political editor Nicholas Watt was confronted and chased down the street in Westminster by a group of protesters, who allegedly shouted abuse at him including the word "traitor".⁹⁰ Activists had gathered in Westminster to protest against the government's extension of Covid restrictions in England. Three men have been charged in relation to this incident.⁹¹

On 10 October 2021, a group of anti-vaccination protesters visited the home of television and radio presenter Jeremy Vine and attempted to serve his wife an "anti-vaxx writ".⁹²

On 19 October 2021, Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, was walking along Horseferry Road in London when he was surrounded and harassed by a group of anti-lockdown protesters who were already in the Westminster area.⁹³ Mr Gove had to be escorted by police officers to his department building nearby. The Instagram account of Resistance GB put up a photograph of the incident and a link was included for a video (no longer accessible).⁹⁴ William Coleshill from Resistance GB was reportedly one of the protesters who confronted Mr Gove and filmed the encounter.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ <https://news.sky.com/story/how-do-i-find-where-he-lives-how-online-groups-plot-confrontations-with-mps-over-covid-rules-12440222>

⁹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvDQft9enw4>

⁹¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-57674494>

⁹² <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2021/oct/10/jeremy-vine-unnered-after-anti-vaccine-protesters-target-his-home>

⁹³ <https://news.sky.com/story/number-10-condemns-intimidation-of-michael-gove-by-anti-lockdown-demonstrators-12438447>

⁹⁴ <https://www.instagram.com/p/CVUL56hFTx/>

⁹⁵ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/gove-william-coleshill-conservative-gb-resistance-b1942091.html>

On 7 February 2022, Sir Keir Starmer MP, Leader of the Labour Party, and David Lammy MP, Shadow Foreign Secretary, had to be bundled into a police car after they were ambushed by a group of Covid conspiracy activists as they walked through the streets of Westminster. The protesters shouted phrases including: "traitor", "paedophile protector", "Jimmy Savile", "freemason", as well as the antisemitic phrase "controlled Zionist".⁹⁶ Amongst those who were present were William Coleshill, Remeece, Piers Corbyn, David Burrige of Stop New Normal and a member of the anti-vaccine direct action group Alpha Men Assemble.⁹⁷ Footage of the incident was reportedly shared online followed by posts calling for Starmer and Lammy to be killed, including threats such as "The sooner they's (sic) all dead the better. Hang the f***ing lot of them" and "They can all swing on a rope together".⁹⁸



On 1 April 2022, Cressida Dick, then Metropolitan Police Commissioner, was confronted by a group of protesters as she was walking in the streets of London. Footage of the incident was uploaded online by Piers Corbyn.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/08/ex-councillor-william-coleshill-thrown-out-tory-party-among-mob-starmer-incident-resistance-gb>

⁹⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/08/cultivating-conspiracy-how-boris-johnson-amplified-the-far-right>; <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10489865/The-anti-vax-aggressors-Keir-Starmer-stunt.html> & <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/boris-johnson-defies-calls-to-apologise-over-savile-jibe-at-keir-starmer-n9dvcwb8f>

⁹⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/13/met-investigates-death-threats-against-keir-starmer-in-wake-of-johnsons-savile-slur>

⁹⁹ <https://odysee.com/@PiersCorbyn:5/CressidaDickchallengedbyp:0>

A SHIFT TOWARDS VIOLENCE

Police and counter-terrorism officials have expressed concern that some individuals in the Covid conspiracy movement may move towards violence or terrorism. One group, Alpha Men Assemble, has reportedly held military-style training and there is evidence that some elements have been preparing for violent confrontations with the authorities.¹⁰⁰

An investigation by Vice in April 2022 found that some activists were trying to recruit former police officers and soldiers to form a unit to arrest people under common law for “crimes against humanity”, claiming: “The notices are not working. The whole fucking system is satanic and evil to the core... It’s time we take things into our own hands.”¹⁰¹

Beyond the UK these fringes of the Covid conspiracy movement have already shown signs of carrying out their violent threats. On New Year’s Eve 2021, there was an arson attack on the Freemasons’ Hall in Dublin which the Gardai believe may have been inspired by online anti-vaccine conspiracy theories. There was graffiti on the pavement nearby accusing the Freemasons of being part of a global Covid conspiracy and describing the pandemic as a hoax. The alleged perpetrator leapt from a window shortly after the fire started inside and reportedly shouted anti-vaccine statements as he jumped.¹⁰²

100 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jan/15/concern-for-uk-security-as-anti-vaxxer-groups-evolve-towards-us-style-militias>; <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10384239/Alpha-Men-Assemble-Inside-anti-vax-group-members-taught-wage-war-government.html>; <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10360603/Anti-vax-conspiracy-theorists-video-fighting-combat-training-strategy-meetings.html> & <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10382723/Exposed-Leader-ex-Army-group-thats-plotting-mayhem.html>

101 https://www.vice.com/en/article/y3v9vg/covid-peace-constable?utm_campaign=Disinformation+Newsletter+19+Apr+2022+-+USERS&utm_content=bbc-monitoring.co.uk&utm_content=bbc-monitoring.co.uk&utm_medium=email&utm_source=BBC+Monitoring&wp-linkindex=12

102 <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/antivaxer-link-to-freemasons-hall-arson-562n59hk7>

The shift from conspiracy talk to violent action appears to be particularly acute in Germany, where it is linked to wider far-right extremism. In December 2021, German police carried out raids on several locations in the state of Saxony in connection with a suspected plot by far-right anti-vaccination activists to murder the state’s prime minister using crossbows or other “piercing weapons”.¹⁰³

Also in December 2021, a German anti-vaccination extremist murdered his wife and three daughters before killing himself because he believed the vaccination programme was a world Jewish conspiracy. German police have classified it as an antisemitic act.¹⁰⁴

In April 2022, German police arrested four people on suspicion of plotting to create “civil war conditions” and overthrow democracy by targeting power stations and kidnapping Germany’s health minister. The suspects are allegedly linked to far-right and anti-Covid movements.¹⁰⁵

103 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-59664076>

104 <https://m.tagesspiegel.de/politik/hoechststand-bei-antisemitischer-kriminalitaet-judenhasser-verueben-2021-mehr-als-3000-straftaten-vier-menschen-sterben/28077846.html>

105 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-61106241>

CONCLUSION: WHERE NOW FOR THE COVID CONSPIRACY MOVEMENT?

Britain has never before had a domestic political movement fuelled primarily by conspiracy theories, that is not tethered to a specific ideological standpoint. The Covid conspiracy movement is just such a force. It encompasses far right, far left, mixed ideologies and none. It brings together hardcore neo-Nazis with street artists, rappers and new agers. It has outlived lockdowns, masks and other Covid restrictions, and shown that it now has a life of its own.

Even though the UK has moved on from Covid restrictions, the Covid conspiracy movement continues to circulate conspiracy material and misinformation, all based on the erosion of trust with the government, police, scientists and other established authorities. Some, for example, are now incorporating conspiracies linked to the Russian invasion of Ukraine within their output. Any future crisis, whether domestic or global, is likely to further energise this movement to continue spreading misinformation. And of course, antisemitism is ever-present.

This briefing has shown the presence of antisemitism within this movement and attempts by far-right groups and individuals to infiltrate and influence it. It has also shown how this antisemitism sits easily alongside other conspiracy theories, and even alongside the attempt to compare anti-vaccine protesters to Jews suffering under the Nazis.

Conspiracy theories often end up with the scapegoating of Jews and antisemitism, and the conspiracies around the Covid pandemic have been no different. With the growth of street activism and potential for violence gradually emerging from within this movement, the danger is that radicalised individuals could seek to carry out some kind of violent attack. If they have been influenced by the antisemitism they have seen

pumped through their online channels, they may choose to target the Jewish community. The instant availability of harmful material online and the incitement of individuals to act against perceived enemies must be addressed before more real-world attacks take place.

CST'S MISSION

- **Promote good relations** between British Jews and the rest of British society by working towards the elimination of racism, and antisemitism in particular.
- **Represent British Jews** on issues of racism, antisemitism, extremism, policing and security.
- **Facilitate Jewish life** by protecting Jews from the dangers of antisemitism, and antisemitic terrorism in particular.
- **Help those who are victims** of antisemitic hatred, harassment or bias.
- **Promote research** into racism, antisemitism and extremism; and to use this research for the benefit of both the Jewish community and society in general.
- **Speak responsibly** at all times, without exaggeration or political favour, on antisemitism and associated issues.



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