

All progress depends on the unreasonable person

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George [Monbiot has written his morning](#):

It's as clear and chilling a statement of intent as you're likely to read. Scientists should be "the voice of reason, rather than dissent, in the public arena". Vladimir Putin? Kim Jong-un? No, [Professor Ian Boyd](#), chief scientific adviser at the UK's Department for Environment.

Boyd's doctrine is a neat distillation of government policy in Britain, Canada and Australia. These governments have suppressed or misrepresented inconvenient findings on climate change, pollution, pesticides, fisheries and wildlife. They have shut down programmes that produce unwelcome findings and sought to muzzle scientists. This is a modern version of Soviet Lysenkoism: crushing academic dissent on behalf of bad science and corporate power.

Writing in an online journal, Boyd argued that if scientists speak freely, they create conflict between themselves and policymakers, leading to a "chronically deep-seated mistrust of scientists that can undermine the delicate foundation upon which science builds relevance". This, in turn, "could set back the cause of science in government". So they should avoid "suggesting that policies are either right or wrong". If they must speak out, they should do so through "embedded advisers (such as myself), and by being the voice of reason, rather than dissent, in the public arena".

This reminds me of a quote I have used here before, [from George Bernard Shaw](#):

The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man. The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man.

Shaw's suggestion is, of course, that progress is dependent on the exact opposite of what the government seeks.

Opposition in economics has been almost totally silenced by the hegemony of neoliberal thought that has led to the crushing of so many in our society for the benefit of the corporate elite. The government would now wish to do the same for science.

Let us quietly hope for the survival of the unreasonable person - because Shaw's language does reflect an era and sexism now long gone, but not maybe for the government.