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## Report from the Field: Left Media and Left Think Tanks – Foundation-Managed Protest?

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### Abstract

Left media and left think tank staff people generally deny that the acceptance by their organizations of grants from liberal foundations has transformed their organizational priorities, subjected them to elite control, or channeled their energies into safe, legalistic, bureaucratic activities and mild reformism. In this report, we will be discussing organizations, e.g., Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), Middle East Research & Information Project (MERIP), Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR); and media, e.g., *Nation*, *Progressive*, *Mother Jones*, *In These Times*, widely regarded as left-wing. Some originated in the 1960s and 1970s with bold challenges to the United States political and economic system; we can read (some are online) their early publications and mission statements to be reminded of the initial militancy. In the popular mind, these media and think tanks are clearly distinguished from, on the one hand, the liberal media, e.g., *New York Times*, *Harper's*, and think tanks, e.g., Brookings Institution, Urban Institute, and on the other, the “far” left, e.g., *Workers' World*, Maoist Internationalist Movement. A few of the left-wing organizations are primarily concerned about threats to media independence, yet all their attention is focused on for-profit corporate (or government) control; they ignore the possible influence of large subventions from non-profit institutions such as foundations.

### Keywords

think tanks, left-wing media, foundations, non-profit organizations

When the rare report calls attention to the possibility of foundation influence over the left-wing media or think tanks, a typical attitude is unqualified denial. In 2001, for instance, the former executive director of the left media watchdog group FAIR, Jeff Cohen, told German journalist Anja Einfeldt: “There have never been strings attached to any grants. We have never been asked to tone down our criticism. If anyone tried, we would refuse the money” (Einfeldt 2001:53). Another FAIR staff person also insisted that “the charitable foundations which we do accept funding from have no oversight or control over our work” (Einfeldt 2001:53).

Yet in 1998, Michael Shuman, executive director of the IPS, wrote:

A number of program officers at progressive foundations are former activists who decided to move from the demand to the supply side to enjoy better salaries, benefits and working hours. Yet they still want to live like activists vicariously... by exercising influence over grantees through innumerable meetings, reports, conferences and “suggestions”... Many progressive funders treat their grantees like disobedient children who need to be constantly watched and disciplined. (Shuman 1998)

A former staff person at NACLA also recalled that in the late 1980s “in order to get to the next tier of foundation support in New York, you had to demonstrate that you were doing something in Washington” (Rosen 2002).

Journalist Ron Curran maintains that: “The foundation money has engendered a climate of secrecy at IAJ (Institute for Alternative Journalism n/k/a Independent Media Institute [IMI]) that’s in direct conflict with IAJ’s role as a progressive media organization” (Curran 1997). He added: “the only money nonprofits can get these days is from private foundations – and those foundations want to control the political agenda.”

Rick Edmonds, researcher at the Poynter (journalism) Institute observed:

When they show up with much-needed funding for an investigative series or pay the freight for a reporter working on an underreported beat, foundations don’t receive the same due-diligence scrutiny for hidden subtext that journalists apply to a corporate press release or a politician’s statement. The effect that foundation money may have on the news business is subtle but real, and increasingly troubling on the ethical front... The lack of overt editorial

influence should not blind us to the more subtle, one might say cultural, ties that bind these news organizations to their funders. There is, for example, any number of opportunities for grant makers to shape the editorial product as it is developed. If the foundations' and recipients' goals have been properly "aligned" not much more money may be needed to see that the intent is carried out.

Lost in the benevolent fog that surrounds most foundations is the notion that they may have more of an agenda, not less, than a sponsoring corporation. Cultural affinity can sometimes make it difficult for editors and journalists to draw the distinction between accepting a grant and accepting a funder's point of view. (Edmonds 2002)

In an interview with *Message* magazine, this author asserted that:

The acceptance by media watchdog groups of large sums of money from U.S. Establishment foundations may raise legitimate conflict-of-interest issues. They may tend to avoid providing readers, listeners or viewers with much critical alternative news coverage of the global business and political activities of their multibillion dollar foundation funders. (Einfeldt 2001:53)

To document the degree to which left media organizations and think tanks have been channeled into a more mainstream direction by their liberal foundation funders would require a massive research project unlikely to find funding. However, the evidence is overwhelming that since the early 1990s, liberal foundation grant money has become increasingly important to left media and think tanks.

Why would the liberal foundations want to fund the left? Since their creation, an important goal has been to channel all protest and dissent into activities that do not threaten the wealth and power of the large corporations, or their access to the resources and markets of the world (US Congress 1915; Arnove 1980; Domhoff 1998; Roelofs 2003). The foundations do not deny this aim. In 1969, McGeorge Bundy, President of the Ford Foundation, testified at a Congressional hearing on foundations. He was asked why Ford supported radical organizations. He replied:

[T]here is a very important proposition here that for institutions and organizations which are young and which are not fully shaped as to their direction it can make a great deal of difference as to the degree and way in which they

develop if when they have a responsible and constructive proposal they can find support for it. If they cannot find such support, those within the organization who may be tempted to move in paths of disruption, discord and even violence, may be confirmed in their view that American society doesn't care about their needs. On the other hand, if they do have a good project constructively put forward, and they run it responsibly and they get help for it and it works, then those who feel that that kind of activity makes sense may be encouraged. (US Congress 1969: 371)

When they were criticized by the right for aiding these strange bedfellows, the foundation spokespeople explained how useful it was to have a “piece of the action.” Bob Nichol, a consultant to foundations, advised: “Prepare your boards. . . . You're moving into a new funding arena. These are people dealing with social change. . . . It is buying into a movement,” which is “what America is all about” (Johnson 1984).

Groups genuinely independent of elite control are to be feared. Consequently, *Foundation News* articles emphasize how important it is to co-fund projects sponsored by alternative foundations and religious organizations and that the wildest appearing groups are essentially pragmatic (Williams 1984).

Such financing has become increasingly important to publications and think tanks, but that is rarely part of the “transparency” that these organizations profess to uphold. Beth Schulman (1995) assistant publisher of *In These Times* magazine, asserted that between 1990 and 1993, “I can identify only \$269,500 in combined grants from private foundations for the four leading progressive publications: *The Nation* (through its affiliate, the Nation Institute), *Mother Jones*, *The Progressive* and *In These Times*.” Schulman's \$269,500 figure for 1990–1993 grants to *The Nation*, *Mother Jones*, *The Progressive*, and *In These Times*, however, did not completely reflect the degree to which the US left media was receiving foundation money either between 1990 and 1993 or by 1995, when her article was published (see Table 1).

Table 1. Foundation Grants to *The Nation*, *The Progressive*,  
*In These Times* and *Mother Jones*, 1990 to 1995.

<i>The Nation</i> /The Nation Institute Total: \$115,000	\$90,000 from Aaron Diamond Foundation \$25,000 from John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation in 1992 “for expenses for participants of Interna- tional Conference of Investigative Journalists after the Cold War” (omit- ted in Schulman’s 1995 chart)
<i>The Progressive</i> Total: \$230,000	\$10,000 from Stern Family Fund \$20,000 from J. Roderick MacArthur Foundation \$50,000 from John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation \$150,000 from John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation in 1994 (omitted in Schulman’s 1995 chart)
<i>In These Times</i> (Institute for Public Affairs) Total: \$62,500	\$15,000 from Schumann Foundation \$47,500 from John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
<i>Mother Jones</i> (Foundation for National Progress) Total \$537,500	\$25,000 from Arca Foundation \$12,500 from “anonymous foundation source” \$500,000 in 1995 from Schumann Foundation (omitted in Schulman’s 1995 chart)

Sources: *Foundation Grants Index*; *Who Gets Grants?* (1998); *Chronicle of Philanthropy*; *Aquarian Weekly/Downtown* (January 1, 1997 to March 26, 1997 issues); Form 990 reports of non-profit organizations posted on their web sites or at Guidestar ([www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org)); annual reports and web sites of foundations.

In addition, Schulman failed to include in her calculation the grants received by left publications other than *The Nation*, *Mother Jones*, *The Progressive*, and *In These Times*, such as FAIR’s *Extra!* magazine or Political Research Associates’ *Public Eye* magazine. *Extra!* magazine/FAIR, for instance received at least \$575,000 in grants from foundations between 1990 and 1995 (see Table 2).

Table 2. Foundation Grants to *Extra!//Fairness* & Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR), 1990 to 1995.

<i>Extra!//FAIR</i> Foundation Funder	Amount of Grant Money
Rockefeller Family Foundation	\$20,000 in 1991
Aaron Diamond Foundation	\$25,000 in 1992
Joyce Mertz-Gilmore Foundation	\$15,000 in 1992
Foundation for Deep Ecology	\$15,000 in 1992
Sister Fund	\$50,000 between 1992 and 1996
John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation	\$300,000 between 1992 and 1995
Florence & John Schumann Foundation	\$150,000 in 1995

Sources: *Foundation Grants Index*; *Who Gets Grants?* (1998); *Chronicle of Philanthropy*; *Aquarian Weekly/Downtown* (January 1, 1997 to March 26, 1997 issues); Form 990 reports of non-profit organizations posted on their web sites or at Guidestar ([www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org)); annual reports and web sites of foundations.

*Public Eye* magazine/Political Research Associates (PRA) also received at least \$314,000 in grants from foundations between 1993 and 1996 (see Table 3).

Table 3. Foundation Grants to *Public Eye!//Political Research Associates* (PRA), 1993 to 1996.

<i>Public Eye/Political Research Associates</i> (PRA) Foundation Funder	Amount of Grant Money
Public Welfare Foundation	\$90,000
Nathan Cummings Foundation	\$80,000
List Foundation	\$75,000
Tides Foundation	\$69,000

Sources: *Foundation Grants Index*; *Who Gets Grants?* (1998); *Chronicle of Philanthropy*; *Aquarian Weekly/Downtown* (January 1, 1997 to March 26, 1997 issues); Form 990 reports of non-profit organizations posted on their web sites or at Guidestar ([www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org)); annual reports and web sites of foundations.

Another left media group that received heavy funding from the liberal foundations prior to 1995 but was not mentioned in Schulman's article was AlterNet/Independent Media Institute (IMI) (see Table 4).

Table 4. Foundation Grants to: AlterNet/Independent Media Institute (IMI) 1994–1995.

<b>AlterNet/Independent Media Institute (IMI) a/k/a Institute for Alternative Journalism (IAJ) Foundation Funder</b>	<b>Amount of Grant Money</b>
Schumann Foundation	\$35,000 in 1994
Schumann Foundation	\$120,000 in 1995
List Foundation	\$74,000 in 1995
Ford Foundation	\$50,000 in 1995
John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation	\$50,000 in 1995

*Sources: Foundation Grants Index; Who Gets Grants? (1998); Chronicle of Philanthropy; Aquarian Weekly/Downtown (January 1, 1997 to March 26, 1997 issues); Form 990 reports of non-profit organizations posted on their web sites or at Guidestar (www.guidestar.org); annual reports and web sites of foundations.*

Foundation funding of Pacifica Foundation's Pacifica Radio alternative radio network of five stations was also not mentioned in Schulman's article. But a \$150,000 grant which the Ford Foundation's Fund for Education gave to the Pacifica Foundation/Pacifica Radio in the early 1950s helped insure this non-communist alternative media group's survival during the McCarthy Era. During the Cold War Era the CIA utilized foundations such as Ford "to set up and finance a 'parallel' organization to counter known left-wing bodies" (Coxsedge 1982:70). In 1975, the radical US feminist group Redstockings asserted that: "one major CIA strategy" during the Cold War Era was "to create or support parallel organizations which provide alternatives to radicalism and yet appear progressive enough to appease dissatisfied elements of the society" (Coxsedge 1982: 74). In 1995, the Pacifica Foundation/Pacifica Radio also received a \$40,000 grant from George Soros' Open Society Institute.

Since the publication of Schulman's 1995 *Extra* article, the extent to which liberal foundations have been funding left media has generally increased (see Table 5).

Table 5. Foundation Grants to Left Media, 1996 to 2004.

<b>Media</b>	<b>Source</b>
<i>The Nation</i> /The Nation Institute Total: \$340,000	\$10,000 from Open Society Institute (1997) \$30,000 from the Arca Foundation (1997) \$50,000 from the Merck Foundation (1997) \$20,000 from the John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation "to publish and publicize series on NATO expansion." (1997) \$50,000 from Open Society Institute "to support project to improve performance and reach of Radio Nation, weekly public radio news and commentary program." (1998) \$50,000 from Robert Sterling Clark Foundation (1998) \$55,000 from the List Foundation for Radio Nation and "project on media ownership" (2000) \$10,000 from the Public Welfare Foundation for "contribution to Jack Newfield fellowship" (2000) \$55,000 from Glaser Progress Foundation "for research grants to independent journalists" (2000) \$10,000 from List Foundation for "investigative reporting" (2003)
<i>The Progressive</i> Total: \$620,000	\$200,000 from Ford Foundation (1998) \$50,000 from Rockefeller Foundation (1998)



Table 5. (cont.)

Media	Source
	\$250,000 from Ford Foundation (2000) \$120,000 from John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (2002)
<i>Mother Jones</i> (Foundation for National Progress) Total \$568,000	\$150,000 from Schumann Foundation “to support the hiring of a new senior editor at <i>Mother Jones</i> magazine” (1996) \$32,000 from California Wellness Foundation (1996) \$30,000 from Joyce Foundation (1996) \$100,000 from Schumann Foundation (1997) \$35,000 from John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (1998) \$111,000 from Glaser Progress Foundation for MoJo Wire project (1999) \$100,000 from Glaser Progress Foundation for “general support” of MoJo Wire project (2000) \$10,000 from List Foundation for “Washington Watchdog” project (2003)
<i>Extra//FAIR</i> Total \$886,000	\$20,000 from Tides Foundation (1996) \$15,000 from Schumann Foundation (1996) \$200,000 from Ford Foundation “to combat racism and sexism in the news” (1997) \$150,000 from Ford Foundation (1998) \$150,000 from Ford Foundation for “general support to monitor and analyze the performance of the news media in the United States.” (2001)

Table 5. (cont.)

Media	Source
	\$75,000 from John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (1996)
	\$150,000 from John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (1998)
	\$31,000 from Tides Foundation (2000)
	\$75,000 from the Schumann Foundation (2001)
	\$20,000 from Glaser Progress Foundation “ for its “Action Alert Network”, in order to “increase demand for more balanced news from mainstream media.” (2001)
<i>Public Eye</i> /Political Research Associates	\$50,000 from Public Welfare Foundation (1999)
Total \$808,000	\$120,000 from San Francisco Foundation (1999)
	\$57,000 from Tides Foundation (1999)
	\$55,000 from Cummings Foundation (1999)
	\$25,000 from List Foundation (1999)
	\$15,000 from Ms. Foundation for Women (which, itself, received over \$1.2 million from Ford Foundation between 2000 and 2002) in 1999.
	\$50,000 from Public Welfare Foundation (2002)
	\$176,000 from Ford Foundation (2002)
	\$100,000 from Public Welfare Foundation (2003)
	\$10,000 from List Foundation (2003)
	\$150,000 from Ford Foundation (2004)
AlterNet/Independent Media Institute (IMI)	\$200,000 from Schumann Foundation to fund its “Media & Democracy” conference (1996)
Total \$363,000	

Table 5. (cont.)

Media	Source
	\$78,000 from Open Society Institute “to fund the start-up of Youth Source, a youth web site which will be part of a larger web portal, Independent Source.” (1999)
	\$30,000 from List Foundation (2000)
	\$35,000 from Glaser Progress Foundation to “support the online magazine.” (2001)
	\$20,000 from Glaser Progress Foundation (2002)
Independent Press Association Total \$455,000	\$455,000 from Rockefeller Foundation (2002–2003)
<i>In These Times</i> /Institute for Public Affairs Total \$10,000	\$10,000 from John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation “for conference about state of American democracy and role of popular movements within it.” (1998)
Pacifica Foundation/Pacifica Radio Total \$148,000	\$25,000 from Carnegie Corporation of New York to launch <i>Democracy Now!</i> program (1996) \$13,000 from J.M. Kaplan Fund to support <i>Democracy Now!</i> show (1997) \$25,000 from Public Welfare Foundation (1998) \$10,000 from J.M. Kaplan Fund (1998) \$75,000 from Ford Foundation “towards marketing consultancy, promotional development and program development of radio program <i>Democracy Now!</i> (1998)

Sources: *Foundation Grants Index*; *Who Gets Grants?* (1998); *Chronicle of Philanthropy*; *Aquarian Weekly/Downtown* (January 1, 1997 to March 26, 1997 issues); Form 990 reports of non-profit organizations posted on their web sites or at Guidestar ([www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org)); annual reports and web sites of foundations.

Between 1991 and 2001, *The Nation* magazine/Nation Institute received at least \$135,000 from Bill Moyers' Schumann Foundation. Coincidentally, an official of the Nation Institute, Hamilton Fish III, was also a personal political advisor to George Soros, on whose Open Society Institute foundation board Schumann Foundation President Bill Moyers also sat. Foundation influence is exerted not only through grants, but also through shared staff and board members of funded organizations. A member of the Nation Institute and PBS boards, Catharine Stimpson, a prominent upper middle-class feminist academic, was also the director of the Fellows Program of the MacArthur Foundation. Body Shop entrepreneur Anita Roddick, is on the *Mother Jones*/Foundation for National Progress board of directors, along with representatives of the Kadima Foundation, the HKH Foundation and the Adam Hochschild Charitable Trust/Sequoia Fund. The wife of *Mother Jones*/Foundation for National Progress board member Adam Hochschild was also given a \$3 million grant in 1997 by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation "to establish a Center for Working Families," at UC-Berkeley. An individual grant of \$100,000 was also given to an executive director of the Independent Press Association-NY by the Ford Foundation in 2003 (Form 990 reports of non-profit organizations posted on their web sites or at Guidestar ([www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org)); annual reports and web sites of foundations). Left think tanks have also been receiving large amounts of money from liberal foundations since the 1990s. Michael Shuman (1998), IPS's executive director, stated "over the past fifteen years, I've raised more than \$12 million from foundations." This included grants from four of the ten largest US foundations. Table 6 indicates some of the foundation grants received by the IPS since 1995:

Table 6. Foundation Grants to Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), 1995–2004.

Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) Foundation Funder	Amount of Grant Money
John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation	\$100,000 in 1995 \$575,000 "to develop global affairs agenda for US and to mobilize cons- tituency for its support" in 1998

Table 6. (cont.)

<b>Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) Foundation Funder</b>	<b>Amount of Grant Money</b>
	\$50,000 in 2000
	\$350,000 “in support of the Foreign Policy in Focus Program” in 2001.
Arca Foundation	\$110,000 in 1996
Schumann Foundation	\$123,000 in 1998
Ford Foundation	\$233,000 in 2000
	\$95,000 in 2001
Rockefeller Foundation	\$200,000 in 2000
Rockefeller Brothers Foundation	\$100,000 in 2000
List Foundation	\$10,000 for “general support” of “Democracy Action Project”

Sources: *Foundation Grants Index*; *Who Gets Grants?* (1998); *Chronicle of Philanthropy*; *Aquarian Weekly/Downtown* (January 1, 1997 to March 26, 1997 issues); Form 990 reports of non-profit organizations posted on their web sites or at Guidestar ([www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org)); annual reports and web sites of foundations.

Another left think tank, the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, has also been the recipient of liberal foundation grants (see Table 7):

Table 7. Foundation Grants to Institute for Women’s Policy Research, 1996–2004.

<b>Institute for Women’s Policy Research Foundation Funder</b>	<b>Amount of Grant Money</b>
Ford Foundation	\$100,000 in 1996 180,000 in 2004
John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation	\$100,000 in 1996
Joyce Foundation	\$50,000 in 1996

Sources: *Foundation Grants Index*; *Who Gets Grants?* (1998); *Chronicle of Philanthropy*; *Aquarian Weekly/Downtown* (January 1, 1997 to March 26, 1997 issues); Form 990 reports of non-profit organizations posted on their web sites or at Guidestar ([www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org)); annual reports and web sites of foundations.

In addition, a \$250,000-plus, individual “genius grant” was given to the executive director of the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, Heidi Hartmann, by the MacArthur Foundation in 1994.

Among the other left think tanks that have been funded by the liberal foundations since the 1990s are the Institute for Public Accuracy (IPA), the Institute for Media Analysis/Democracy Now!, the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), and the Interhemispheric Resource Center (IRC) (see Table 8).

Table 8. Foundation Grants to Other Left Think Tanks/Media Groups, 1996 to 2004.

Institute for Public Accuracy (IPA) Total \$464,000	\$100,000 from Stern Family Fund (1997) \$100,000 from Schumann Foundation (1997) \$34,000 from Glaser Progress Foundation (2001) \$20,00 from Glaser Progress Foundation (2002) \$10,000 from List Foundation (2003) \$200,000 from Ford Foundation (2004)
Institute for Media Analysis/ <i>Democracy Now!</i> Total \$535,000	\$40,000 from Glaser Progress Foundation “to support the daily national television news program” (2001) \$85,000 from J. Roderick MacArthur Foundation (2001) \$60,000 from Glaser Progress Foundation “for support of Amy Goodman’s <i>Democracy Now!</i> ” (2002) \$100,000 from Lannan Foundation (2003) \$100,000 from Glaser Progress Foundation “for support of the newscast <i>Democracy Now!</i> ” (2003) \$150,000 from Ford Foundation (2004)

Table 8. (*cont.*)

North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA)	\$11,000 from Ford Foundation (1998)
Total \$661,000	\$160,000 from Ford Foundation (2000)
	\$165,000 from Ford Foundation (2001)
	\$325,000 from Ford Foundation (2003)
Interhemispheric Resource Center (IRC)	\$300,000 from Ford Foundation (2000)
Total \$1.15 million	\$200,000 from Carnegie Corporation of New York (200)
	\$350,000 from John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation “in support of the Foreign Policy in Focus Project” (2001)
	\$150,000 from Rockefeller Foundation (2002)
	\$150,000 from Ford Foundation to promote “core support for the Foreign Policy in Focus Project” (2003)

Sources: *Foundation Grants Index*; *Who Gets Grants?* (1998); *Chronicle of Philanthropy*; *Aquarian Weekly/Downtown* (January 1, 1997 to March 26, 1997 issues); Form 990 reports of non-profit organizations posted on their web sites or at Guidestar ([www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org)); annual reports and web sites of foundations.

According to IPA executive director Norman Solomon (1999):

It's only because of a few funders that IPA has been able to function with appreciable resources. A “Public Interest Pioneer” grant from the Stern Family Fund enabled me to found the Institute for Public Accuracy. The Florence and John Schumann Foundation and an individual donor made it possible for IPA to open its media office in Washington. The Arca Foundation and Deer Creek Foundation recently gave us grants.

The “mainstream towing” of left organizations has been gradual; the following is a typical example. The *NACLA Newsletter* (1969) examined “The Rockefeller Empire: Latin America” and concluded:

Through a network of over 13 foundations, 75 family trusts and other mechanisms of high finance, the Rockefellers maintain a dominant interest in some of the world’s largest oil companies . . . Each brother has a particular area of the family empire to oversee; John D., III, the eldest, is the “philanthropist.” He heads the Rockefeller Foundation and has a particular interest in the Far East (especially Japan) and ‘population control,’ (he founded the Population Council) . . . The brothers are the epitome of the East Coast Establishment. Their third generation wealth is managed for them by institutions which they control (especially foundations, Rockefeller Brothers, Inc. and trusts) . . .

Despite its past political critique of “philanthropic foundations,” however, “about 25%” of NACLA’s “revenue comes from project-oriented foundation grants” these days, according to its web site (2004). Coincidentally, a 2005 article about the problems of attaining democratic representation at the World Social Forum doesn’t mention foundation funding (Hammond 2005; see article in this issue by RUPE).

When the same activities that were roundly criticized before the infusion of large foundation grants are now ignored or praised, we might suspect there is a relationship – certainly enough to investigate further. An example comes from the publications of the Interhemispheric Resource Center. In 1990, that think tank produced a thorough analysis and critique of the National Endowment for Democracy, the agency established to do overtly what the CIA had been doing covertly. NED engages primarily in funding foreign political parties, movements, and non-governmental organizations, to aid US control over the politics of other nations, often to help in the overthrow of legally elected governments. Many of these activities are violations of international law, and it would not be permissible for foreign governments to do the same in the USA – even if non-violent. The IRC (now renamed International Relations Center) hardly ever draws attention to the NED, or criticizes it, despite its role in a spate of sponsored overthrows and attempted overthrows of foreign governments. On the contrary, in a rare mention of the NED, IRC policy expert Stephen Zunes (2004) commends its activities:



Some elements of the American left have committed a grievous error, both morally and strategic-ally, in their failure to enthusiastically support the momentous pro-democracy movement in the Ukraine.

Accepting US support does not guarantee subservience to US interests

American progressives need to be emphasizing that *this* is how regime change ought to take place: not by foreign conquest but by the subjugated peoples themselves; not by bombs and bullets but by the far-greater power of nonviolence. We should be pleased that the Bush administration is actually embracing, albeit for suspect reasons, an authentic, grassroots democratic movement against an authoritarian regime. Instead of questioning U.S. support for Ukrainian democrats, progressives must seize this opportunity to emphasize the need for the United States to champion nonviolent democratic movements everywhere and to end U.S. backing for autocratic regimes and occupation armies that suppress such movements.

Another left think tank that's been focusing on Middle East issues since the 1970s, the Middle East Research & Information Project (MERIP), also was being funded by the Ford Foundation by the 1990s. As it noted in a March 11, 1999 press release: "Thanks to a generous grant from the Ford Foundation, MERIP is now embarking on a multi-faceted Media Outreach and Policy Shaping Project" (MERIP 1999). A member of MERIP's editorial committee who was responsible for its *Middle East Report* journal's reviews is also a former program officer for the Ford Foundation and Rockefeller Foundation-funded Civil Society in Middle East Center of NYU (MERIP 2004). The Ford Foundation and Rockefeller Foundation have joined the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation in heavily subsidizing the Interhemispheric Resource Center's work in recent years (see Table 8).

Supporters of left media and think tank grant acceptance generally argue that grants from liberal foundations are necessary for left movement groups to: "level the playing field" in the contest for US public opinion because right-wing elite foundations "sponsor think tanks, academic seminars, conferences for journalists and campus newspaper internships" (Schulman 1995). Schulman (1995) also maintains:

Unencumbered grant income makes it possible, for example, to ensure that key staff members on Capitol Hill get a complimentary copy of every issue of

a magazine. Public and university libraries can be offered free or subsidized subscriptions. Furthermore, the magazines can afford the staff time to promote individual stories and writers, to build relationships with op-ed page editors, talk show hosts and broadcast producers.

Roelofs (2003) notes, however, that “there is not a conflict of interest when corporate money goes to produce pro-corporate ideology,” while “the dependence of the ‘Left’ press on elite subsidies can result in mellowing and avoiding topics embarrassing to the funders” (2003: 58).

Like many left and liberal critics of foundation grants to right-wing media and groups, however, Schulman does not object to the hegemonic role of foundations in US society. Left media and think tank executives who have tried to imitate the undemocratic US right-wing approach to political movement-building still generally reject corporate sponsorship of their political or media activity (unless a corporate sponsor is engaged in “socially responsible” investing). Nevertheless, they contend that support from non-profit corporations, such as foundations, does not imply control; often they don’t even investigate or consider this possibility. Some argue that it’s not important where the left media gets its money from, as long as they use the foundation grant money for anti-corporate, progressive purposes. Yet, if we examine recent publications of these formerly radical organizations, we find that the domain of “progressive” has expanded, and the anti-corporate perspectives have become scarce.<sup>1</sup>

A critic of the grant system, Brian Salter makes a strong case against foundation funding of left media and think tanks. After examining the corporate and political connections Ford and similar foundations’ board members, Salter (2002) concludes:

The big establishment foundations are likely to seek out “alternative” media that is more bark than bite, which they can rely on to ignore and dismiss sensitive topics... as “irrational distractions” or “conspiracy theory.” Recipients of funding will always protest that they are not swayed by any conflicts of interest and don’t allow the sources of funding to affect their decisions, but whether or not these claims are actually true is already somewhat of a red

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<sup>1</sup> “Progressive” is rarely defined, but the historical Progressive Movement evolved as a project to reform the capitalist system to eliminate destructive tendencies, such as racism, poverty, or environmental destruction, but not to challenge corporate wealth and power or US imperialism.

herring. The more important question is, what sort of “alternative” journalism garners the goodwill of the Ford Foundation’s corporate rogues’ gallery in the first place? Or the Rockefeller Foundation? Or Carnegie, Soros and Schumann?

...

Judging by the journalism being offered (and not offered) by *Nation* magazine, FAIR, Pacifica, *Progressive* magazine, IPA, *Mother Jones*, AlterNet, and other recipients of their funding, the big establishment foundations are successfully sponsoring the kind of ‘opposition’ that the U.S. ruling elite can tolerate and live with.

### Conclusion

This report has shown that organizations and media generally considered left-wing have in recent years received substantial funding from liberal foundations. This information alone is significant, as left activists and scholars are either unaware of or uninterested in examining the nature and consequences of such financing. Furthermore, although a definitive evaluation would require a massive content analysis project, there is much evidence that the funded left has moved towards the mainstream as it has increased its dependence on foundations. This is shown by the “progressive,” reformist tone of formerly radical organizations; the gradual disappearance of challenges to the economic and political power of corporations or United States militarism and imperialism; and silence on the relationship of liberal foundations to either politics and culture in general, or to their own organizations. Critiquing right wing foundations, media, and think tanks may be fair game, but to explain our current situation, or to discover what has happened to the left, a more inclusive investigation is needed.

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