

How the ‘Neoliberal Thought Collective’ Is Influencing Donald Trump’s Presidency

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After [Donald Trump](#) won the US election, analysts, researchers and journalists got to work to track how this apparent political outsider would suddenly gather a team.

Despite promising to “drain the swamp” of vested interests and lobbyists, it became clear Trump was intent on refilling it with figures and ideas from the well-established network of conservative and neoliberal think-tanks.

Suddenly, staff from groups such as the [Competitive Enterprise Institute](#) and the [Heritage Foundation](#) were helping to draw up plans for a Trump administration.

Last month, Trump thanked one of those groups personally, with an address to the Heritage Foundation’s annual meeting.

But those think tanks, and the people who lead and run them, have strong links to another influential group that has been trying to bend governments around the world to a particular ideology for almost 70 years.

The [Mont Pelerin Society](#) (MPS) was established in 1947 by economist and philosopher Friedrich von Hayek — a man considered by many to be the godfather of modern free market thinking.

Mont Pelerin Society Membership List

Some scholars have described it as the “[neoliberal thought collective](#)” with its ideas heavily influencing the political administrations of Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the US, and many world leaders since.

DeSmog has obtained a [2013 Mont Pelerin Society membership list](#), showing the group continues to boast influential members including former judges, former country leaders, wealthy industrialists, academics and think tank operatives in 62 countries from Argentina to Zimbabwe.

According to the Mont Pelerin Society, its members “see danger in the expansion of government, not least in state welfare, in the power of trade unions and business monopoly, and in the continuing threat and reality of inflation.”

Members continue to meet at annual conferences and regional meetings, often held in appealing locations. The next meeting will be held in [Sweden’s capital, Stockholm](#).

High profile members include former Australian Prime Minister John Howard, petrochemical billionaire [Charles Koch](#) and former Czech Republic president [Vaclav Klaus](#).

Heritage Foundation's Influence

As DeSmog has [previously reported](#), many US, UK and Australia-based groups that have spread climate science denial are heavily represented among Mont Pelerin's membership list. Many [groups funded by Charles Koch and his brother David through their family foundations and Koch Industries Inc, are also well represented on the MPS directory](#).

When Donald Trump won the election, one of the first people appointed onto his transition team was the [Heritage Foundation's](#) Ed Feulner. Feulner joined MPS in 1972 - the year before he joined fellow Republican Paul Weyrich to start the Heritage Foundation.

Feulner was also president of MPS from 1996 to 1998 and has previously served as MPS treasurer.

In October, Trump gave a keynote address to the Heritage Foundation's annual President's Club Meeting.

"Heritage has been instrumental in providing the Trump administration with sound policies and experts who now serve in key government positions," wrote Feulner in an email announcing Trump's appearance.

In the speech, [Trump remembered the tax policies of the Ronald Reagan era](#), and recalled how President Reagan had worked closely with Heritage "to unleash the economic miracle of the 1980s".

Perhaps not coincidentally, Reagan's chief economic advisor was the late Martin Anderson, who joined the MPS in 1965. Anderson [once reported that 22 of the 76 economic advisors on Reagan's successful 1980 presidential campaign](#) were MPS members.

Heritage, a conservative libertarian think tank, was also described by [Politico](#) as Trump's "shadow transition team" as its fellows and staffers took up roles for the president.

In February, [New Republic](#) wrote how the Heritage Foundation was shaping Trump's administration and was set to play a "key role in steering domestic policy" for the coming years.

This week, the administrator of Trump's Environmental Protection Agency, Scott Pruitt, is scheduled to appear at a [climate and energy policy summit hosted by the Heritage Foundation](#). Among the speakers will be several climate science denialists from the [CO2 Coalition](#), including [William Happer](#).

A Neoliberal Network

MPS is also heavily linked with the [Atlas Network](#) — a co-ordinating group of more than 460 think tanks and operatives in 96 countries.

Atlas president Alejandro Chafuen joined MPS in 2010 and the current chair of Atlas, Linda Whetsone, is the daughter of the network's founder, Sir Antony Fisher.

DeSmog's [analysis of Mont Pelerin Society's membership](#) shows scores of members who are affiliated with the same network of think tanks that have fought against policies to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

When Trump is gutting [environmental regulations](#), pulling out of international climate agreements and [pledging to cut welfare support](#) and social security, it starts to look a lot like the world MPS members have been pushing for over decades.

Democracy In Chains

That larger strategy to undermine democracies the world over is chronicled in an excellent book "[Democracy In Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America](#)" by award-winning historian [Nancy MacLean](#) of Duke University. The book was a [finalist in the prestigious National Book Awards for 2017](#).

MacLean found what George Monbiot calls the "[missing link](#)" that helps to explain the radicalisation of governments from the US to the UK and beyond. In an abandoned building on the campus of George Mason University, MacLean found the paper trail of the life's work of James McGill Buchanan, including confidential letters with Charles Koch that confirm millions of Koch's dollars flowed to GMU in support of Buchanan's work.

Buchanan — who was a member and past-president of the Mont Pelerin Society — developed a strategy along with MPS member Charles Koch and other elite industrialists to construct a network of neoliberal think tanks that, as MacLean writes and documents, have infected democracies with radical right wing policy ideas designed to shield and benefit the wealthy elite, and to disempower the majority of citizens.

Buchanan served on the advisory board of the Exxon- and Koch-funded [Independent Institute](#), and as a Distinguished Senior Fellow of the [Cato Institute](#), which Charles Koch co-founded with Murray Rothbard and Edward Crane. Crane is a long-standing member of MPS, and Rothbard is credited as having suggested to Charles Koch that he study the leadership of Vladimir Lenin and to view government as "our enemy."

Sound familiar?

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