

Rockefeller, Ford Foundations Behind World Social Forum (WSF). The Corporate Funding of Social Activism

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This year the World Social Forum is being held in Montreal, regrouping committed social activists, anti-war collectives and prominent intellectuals.

Most of the participants are unaware that the WSF is funded by corporate foundations including Ford, Rockefeller, Tides, et al. Much of this funding is channelled to the WSF organizers under the helm of the WSF International Council.

This is an issue which has been raised on numerous occasions with progressive organizations and WSF activists: you cannot effectively confront neoliberalism and the New World Order elites and expect them to finance your activities.



The World Social Forum operating under the banner of “Another World is Possible” was founded in 2001 at its inaugural venue of Porto Alegre. Brazil.

From the outset in 2001, the WSF has been upheld as an international umbrella representing grassroots people’s organizations, committed to reversing the tide of globalization. Its stated intent is to challenge corporate capitalism and its dominant neoliberal economic agenda.

The World Social Forum at its inaugural meeting defined itself as a counter-offensive to the World Economic Forum (WEF) of business leaders and politicians which meets annually in Davos, Switzerland. The 2001 Porto Alegre WSF was held simultaneously with that of the WEF in Davos.

While there have been many important accomplishments of the WSF, largely as a result of the commitment of grassroots activists, the core leadership of WSF –rather than effectively confronting the New World Order elites– serves (often unwittingly) their corporate interests. In this process, co-optation has been achieved through the corporate funding of the WSF.

Among the two major accomplishments are the participation of the WSF in the February 2003 Worldwide protest against the US led war on Iraq. The WSF has also supported progressive movements and governments, particularly in Latin America.

In contrast, at the Tunis 2013 WSF, the final declaration paid lip service to to the US sponsored “Syrian opposition”. Similarly the Al Qaeda affiliated Libya Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) which allegedly led the “Arab Spring” against the government of Muammar Gaddafi

was tacitly upheld as a revolutionary force. Several workshops on Libya applauded Western military intervention. A session entitled “Libya’s transition to democracy” focused on “whether [Libya was better off without Muammar Gaddafi.](#)”

[Update] Similarly, a Montreal WSF 2016 event on Syria refers to a country “in ruins as a result of a multifaceted war between the dictatorship of Bashar al Assad and a host of opposition organizations,” echoing almost verbatim the narrative of the mainstream media. The central role of US-NATO in destroying Syria as a sovereign country is not mentioned.



Funding dissent

From the outset in 2001, the World Social Forum was funded by governments and corporate foundations, including the Ford Foundation which has ties to US intelligence.

The anti-globalization movement is opposed to Wall Street and the Texas oil giants controlled by Rockefeller, et al. Yet the foundations and charities of Ford, Rockefeller et al will generously fund progressive anti-capitalist networks as well as environmentalists (opposed to Wall Street and Big Oil), etc. with a view to ultimately overseeing and shaping their various activities.

The mechanisms of “manufacturing dissent” require a manipulative environment, a process of arm-twisting and subtle co-optation of a small number of key individuals within “progressive organizations”, including anti-war coalitions, environmentalists and the anti-globalization movement. Many leaders of these organizations have in a sense betrayed their grassroots.

The corporations are funding dissent with a view to controlling dissent.

The Ford Foundation (which has links to the CIA) provided funding under its “Strengthening Global Civil Society” program during the first three years of the WSF.

When the WSF was held in Mumbai in 2004, the Indian WSF host committee declined support from the Ford Foundation. This in itself did not modify the WSF’s relationship to the donors. While the Ford Foundation formally withdrew, other foundations positioned themselves.

The WSF (among several sources of funding is supported by a consortium of corporate foundations under the advisory umbrella of Engaged Donors for Global Equity (EDGE).

This organization, which previously went under the name of The Funders Network on Trade and Globalization (FTNG), has played a central role in the funding of successive WSF venues. From the outset in 2001, it had an observer status on the WSF International Council.



In 2013, the Rockefeller Brothers representative Tom Kruse co-chaired EDGE’s program committee. At the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Kruse was responsible for “Global Governance” under the “Democratic Practice” program. Rockefeller Brothers grants to NGOs are approved under the “Strengthening Democracy in Global Governance” program, which is broadly similar to that put forth by the US State Department.

A representative of the Open Society Initiative for Europe currently sits on EDGE’s Board of directors. The Wallace Global Fund is also on its Board of Directors. The Wallace Global Fund is specialized in providing support to “mainstream” NGOs and “alternative media”, including Amnesty International, Democracy Now (which supports Hillary Clinton’s candidacy for president of the US).

Several members of the EDGE BoD, however, are from non-corporative and family foundations with a social mandate. (see below).

EDGE Board of Directors

Co-Chairs

- › Terry Odendahl, Executive Director, Global Greengrants Fund
- › Nicolas Krausz, Program Officer, Charles Leopold Mayer Foundation

Members

- › Nikhil Aziz, Program Director, American Jewish World Service
- › Tanya Dawkins, Trustee, CarEth Foundation
- › Jeff Furman, Trustee, Ben & Jerry's Foundation
- › Leah Hunt-Hendrix, Advisor, The Sister Fund
- › Matthias Fiedler, Managing Director of Bewegungsstiftung
- › Ellen Dorsey, Executive Director, Wallace Global Fund
- › Monica Enriquez-Enriquez, Program Officer, Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice
- › Samantha Harvey, Program Manager, Overbrook Foundation
- › Cuong P. Hoang, Director of Programs, Chorus Foundation
- › Shalini Nataraj, Vice President, Programs, Ing Foundation
- › Rose Longhurst Facilitating Member, Edge Fund UK
- › Donal Mac Fhearraigh, Program Officer, Open Society Initiative for Europe



In one of its key documents (2012), entitled [*Funders Network Alliance In Support of Grassroots Organizing and Movement-Building*](#) (link no longer available) EDGE acknowledged its support of social movements which challenge “neoliberal market fundamentalism.” including the World Social Forum, established in 2001:

“From the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas (1994) to the Battle in Seattle (1999) to the creation of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre (2001), the TINA years of Reagan and Thatcher (There Is No Alternative) have been replaced with the growing conviction that “another world is possible.” Counter-summits, global campaigns and social forums have been crucial spaces to articulate local struggles, share experiences and analyses, develop expertise, and build concrete forms of international solidarity among progressive movements for social, economic and ecological justice.”

But at the same time, there is an obvious contradiction: another world is not possible when the campaign against neoliberalism is financed by an alliance of corporate donors firmly committed to neoliberalism and the US-NATO military agenda.

The following is the EDGE Montreal WSF Communique. The donors not only fund the activities, they also influence the structure of the WSF venue, which was determined in Puerto Alegre in 2001, namely the decentralized and dispersed mosaic of “do it yourself” workshops.

An invitation to funders – WSF 2016

An Invitation to Funders Participating in the 12th World Social Forum

Montreal, Canada

August 9-14, 2016

Funders and donors attending or considering participating in the World Social Forum in Montreal are invited to join us in a series of activities being organized by EDGE members with foundation colleagues who have long been associated with the WSF process. Together with Forum organizers and movement partners we will deepen our understanding of WSF 2016 context and goals, share information about activities, initiatives and key themes being discussed during formal and informal gatherings during the week, and have opportunities to come together with members of the philanthropic community to share insights and explore opportunities to build alignment and collaboration over the coming period.

To better assist members and funder allies to participate at the WSF, EDGE will organize the following activities:

An orientation call in early August to discuss the WSF process and goals, highlight Just Transition-oriented sessions planned, and lay out our plans to convene funders and movement allies during the forum itself.

A lunch briefing on the opening day of the WSF for EDGE members, (12noon – 2pm, August 9th, Location TBC) led by key WSF organizers and local hosts, after which the delegation will join social movements for the opening march in downtown Montreal.

On the evening of the second day, and following a screening of *This Changes Everything* (4pm – 6pm, August 10th, Concordia's Hall Building) – there will be an evening reception and dinner (7pm – 10pm, location TBC) where funders will get a chance to meet key social movement organizers and thought leaders working on system change campaigns and movement strategies for alternative economic models that serve the long-term needs of people and planet.

On afternoon of August 11th, there will be a Just Transition Collaborative workshop to discuss strategies for organizing philanthropy to be better aligned with the emergent needs of systems change strategies and movement needs. This workshop will also start to generate plans and proposals for the Just Transition Collaborative, on the road to Barcelona and beyond.

For more information about WSF 2016 and EDGE activities in Montreal, please contact Mark Randazzo, mark@edgefunders.org.

With regard to the Montreal WSF, the Consortium of Donors (EDGE) intent is:

“...to develop an intersectional space for funders and various movement partners – organizers thought leaders and practitioners – to build alignment by cultivating a shared understanding of the visions, values, principles and pathways of a “just transition.” (See <http://edgefunders.org/wsf-activities/>)

“Just Transition” implies that social activism has to conform to a “shared vision” with the corporate foundations, i.e. nothing which in a meaningful way might upset the elite structures of global capitalism.

From the standpoint of the corporate donors “investing in the WSF” constitutes a profitable (tax deductible) undertaking. It ensures that activism remains within the confines of “constructive dialogue” and “critique” rather than confrontation. Any deviation immediately results in the curtailment of donor funding:

“Everything the [Ford] Foundation did could be regarded as “making the World safe for capitalism”, reducing social tensions by helping to comfort the afflicted, provide safety valves for the angry, and improve the functioning of government (McGeorge Bundy, National Security Advisor to Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson (1961-1966), President of the Ford Foundation, (1966-1979))

The limits of social dissent are thereby determined by the “governance structure” of the

WSF, which was tacitly agreed upon with the funding agencies at the outset in 2001.

“No Leaders”

The WSF has no leaders. All the events are “self-organized”. The structure of debate and activism is part of an “open space” (See y Francine Mestrum, *The World Social Forum and its governance: a multi-headed monster*, CADTM, 27 April 2013, <http://cadtm.org/The-World-Social-Forum-and-its>).

This compartmentalized structure is an obstacle to the development of a meaningful and articulate mass movement.

How best to control grassroots dissent against global capitalism?

Make sure that their leaders can be easily co-opted and that the rank and file will not develop “forms of international solidarity among progressive movements” (to use EDGE’s own words), which in any meaningful way might undermine the interests of corporate capital.

The mosaic of separate WSF workshops, the relative absence of plenary sessions, the creation of divisions within and between social movements, not to mention the absence of a cohesive and unified platform against the Wall Street corporate elites, against the fake US sponsored “global war on terrorism”, which has been used to justify and US-NATO’s “humanitarian R2P interventions (Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Ukraine, etc).

The corporate agenda is to “manufacture dissent”. “The limits of dissent” are established by the foundations and governments which ultimately finance this multimillion dollar venue. The financing is twofold:

1. Core financing of the WSF Secretariat and the Costs of the WSF venue.
2. Many of the constituent NGOs which participate in the venue are recipients of donor and/or government support.
3. The WSF venue in Montreal also receives funding from the Government of Canada as well as from the Quebec provincial government.

What ultimately prevails is a ritual of dissent which does not threaten the New World Order. Those who attend the WSF from the grassroots are often misled by their leaders. Activists who do not share the WSF consensus will ultimately be excluded:

“By providing the funding and the policy framework to many concerned and dedicated people working within the non-profit sector, the ruling class is able to co-opt leadership from grassroots communities, ... and is able to make the funding, accounting, and evaluation components of the work so time consuming and onerous that social justice work is virtually impossible under these conditions” (Paul Kivel, *You Call this Democracy, Who Benefits, Who Pays and Who Really Decides*, 2004, p. 122)

“Another World is Possible” is nonetheless an important concept, which characterizes the struggle of the peoples movements against global capitalism as well as the commitment of

thousands of committed activists who are currently participated in the Montreal 2016 WSF.

Activism is being manipulated: “Another World is Possible” cannot, however, be achieved under the auspices of the WSF which from the outset was funded by global capitalism and organized in close liaison with its corporate and government donors.

The important question for activists in Montreal:

Is it possible to build “an Alternative” to global capitalism, which challenges the hegemony of the Rockefellers et al and then asks the Rockefellers et al to foot the bill?

We call upon participants of the Montreal World Social Forum (WSF) to raise and debate these issues: the campaign against neoliberalism is financed by corporate foundations (and governments) which are firmly committed not only to the tenets of neoliberalism but also to the US-NATO led military agenda.

Why would they fund organizations which are actively campaigning against war and globalization? The answer is obvious. ...

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