

Billionaires back Black Lives Matter

Gabriel Black
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The Ford Foundation, one of the most powerful private foundations in the world, with close ties to Wall Street and the US government, recently announced that it is overseeing the funneling of \$100 million over six years to several organizations that play leading roles in the Black Lives Matter movement.

“We’re eager to deepen and expand this community of social justice funders,” the foundation’s announcement reads. “We want to nurture bold experiments and help the movement build the solid infrastructure that will enable it to flourish.”

Fortune Magazine wrote that the foundation’s announcement “would make anyone sit up straighter if they read it in a pitch deck [a presentation for startups seeking investor capital].” The contribution of such an immense sum of money is a gift from the ruling class that will allow Black Lives Matter to construct a bureaucracy of salaried staff and lobbyist positions. The influx of money will bring the movement greater influence through campaign contributions and integrate it even more closely with the Democratic Party and the corporate media.

The Ford Foundation will also provide various forms of consultancy and advisory assistance to a consortium of 14 groups associated with Black Lives Matter. Both the financing and the auxiliary services are to be organized through a fund called the Black-Led Movement Fund (BLMF), which is being overseen by a firm called Borealis Philanthropy.

The Ford Foundation receives the bulk of its endowment from corporate contributors and very wealthy donors through trusts and bequeathments. Established in 1936 by Ford Motor Company founder Henry Ford and his son, Edsel, it today boasts the third largest endowment of any foundation, valued at roughly \$12.4 billion.

The Ford Foundation has for years maintained close ties to US military and intelligence agencies. A British

historian of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Frances Stonor Saunders, described the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations in her book *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* as “conscious instruments of covert US policy, with directors and officers who were closely connected to, or even members of American intelligence.”

Today, the foundation is not formally connected to Ford Motor Company, but its board of directors is a “who’s who” of powerful corporate players, including CEOs and Wall Street lawyers. The chairperson of the board of directors is Irene Inouye, widow of deceased Democratic Senator Daniel Inouye.

The \$100 million gift is an acknowledgment by a powerful section of the ruling class that the aims of the Black Lives Matter movement are aligned with those of Wall Street and the US government.

In an interview with *Bloomberg News* in 2015, the Ford Foundation’s current president, Darren Walker, an ex-banker at UBS, spelled out the pro-capitalist perspective underlying the foundation’s decision to bankroll Black Lives Matter:

“Inequality in many ways undermines our vision for a more just and fair world,” he said. “Indeed, the American people, and it’s not just the Trump supporters, are feeling increasingly vulnerable, increasingly insecure, and what that does is it drives wedges in our society, in our democracy. Inequality is bad for our democracy. It kills aspirations and dreams and makes us more cynical as a people... What kind of Capitalism do we want to have in America?”

The foundation’s support for Black Lives Matter is an investment in the defense of the profit system. Black Lives Matter portrays the world as divided along racial lines, proclaiming on its web site that it “sees itself as part of a global black family.”

It claims that black people are “extended families and ‘villages’ that collectively care for one another, and

especially ‘our’ children...” It explicitly rejects the notion that any other section of society has the right to raise grievances of its own. Its group history page notes: “Not just all lives. Black lives. Please do not change the conversation by talking about how your life matters, too.”

The petty-bourgeois leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement are now poised to exercise a significant degree of political influence directed at securing privileges within the political elite. A quick look at the founders of Black Lives Matter gives a sense of the opportunist and self-promotional character of the group as a whole. The official Black Lives Matter organization was founded by three people: Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi. The three met as members of BOLD (Black Organizing for Leadership and Dignity). BOLD is one of the 14 organizations now being funded by the Black-Led Movement Fund.

One of these founders, Garza, runs an organization called the National Domestic Workers Alliance, on whose board sits Alta Starr. Starr oversees a fund at the Ford Foundation. She is also on the board of a foundation backed by billionaire George Soros, the Open Society Foundation’s Southern Initiative.

Patrisse Cullors is the director of the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights. This organization was founded by Van Jones, a Democrat who worked under Obama as a special advisor on “green jobs, enterprise and innovation.” He is also a long time contributor to CNN. This organization also receives funds from the Open Society Foundation.

A leaked document from an October 2015 board meeting of the Soros-funded US Programs/Open Society revealed that the organization provided \$650,000 “to invest in technical assistance and support for the groups at the core of the burgeoning #BlackLivesMatter movement.” The document notes that the board planned to discuss the difficulty of dealing with a de-centralized movement: “What happens when you want to throw a lot of money at a moment[sic], but there isn’t any place for it to go?” It was also raised that the Soros name could discredit Black Lives Matter if the public became aware of his financial support.

Many of the organizations on the list of Ford recipients are also members of the newly-formed

“Movement for Black Lives,” which has published a policy agenda document centered on demands for greater government financing of black-owned businesses and institutions.

In an earlier period, nationalist movements such as the Black Panthers, however politically disoriented, had a genuine element of social struggle and conflict with the state. While their political program was of a petty-bourgeois character, they had a significant base of support among the oppressed. This was the period of the mass civil rights movement against Jim Crow segregation in the South and the urban rebellions in the North.

In response to the upheavals of the late 1960s, a section of the ruling class sought to cultivate a base of support among the more privileged sections of minorities that would be loyal to the status quo. As a result of policies such as affirmative action, social inequality among African-Americans has soared, with a small elite holding positions of power in corporate America and the state. This found its apotheosis in the election of Barack Obama to preside as president over a historic transfer of wealth to the financial aristocracy following the Wall Street crash of 2008.

These social transformations are reflected in the political outlook of the Black Lives Matter movement, which is devoid of any genuine element of social protest or democratic struggle. The agenda of these organizations, as underscored by the support of groups like the Ford Foundation, has nothing to do with the real social and economic grievances of millions of workers and young people of any race or ethnicity. They speak for highly privileged sections of the middle class who are fighting over the distribution of wealth within the top 10 percent of the population.

In the face of rising popular opposition to war, police violence and social inequality, the decision to advance the racist program of Black Lives Matter is aimed at dividing the working class and preventing the emergence of an independent and unified working class movement against the capitalist system.



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