

Antimonopoly researchers say Google CEO pressured leading think tank to fire them

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A team of researchers at New America Foundation, a Washington DC-based think tank that has received more than \$21 million in funding from Google and its executives, were fired after they published a statement criticizing the Internet search company, the researchers said this week.

The researchers are led by Barry Lynn, who headed the foundation's "Open Markets" initiative. They said in a statement that Google is "trying to censor journalists and researchers who fight dangerous monopolies." The team has since founded their own group, Citizens Against Monopoly.

"When our research team at the New America Institute criticized Google's monopoly practices, the chairman of Google's parent company [Eric Schmidt] threatened to cut its funding for New America," the researchers wrote in the statement, posted Monday to their website. Schmidt was chairman of New America until 2016.

The firing of the researchers is only the latest in a series of incidents in which the technology giant has sought to censor and manipulate opinions. While the media has prominently reported on developments related to the New America Foundation and Citizens Against Monopoly, both of which are connected to the Democratic Party, it has remained silent on the more significant and overt act of Google censorship, the blacklisting of left-wing websites, including the *World Socialist Web Site*, through the manipulation of search results.

In mid-2016, New America's president, Anne-Marie Slaughter, a Princeton University professor who worked in the State Department under the Obama administration, warned Lynn not to run afoul of the corporate giant at a conference organized by the Open Markets initiative. "We are in the process of trying to

expand our relationship with Google on some absolutely key points," she wrote in an email made available to the *New York Times*, adding, "just THINK about how you are imperiling funding for others."

On June 27 of this year, the European Commission fined Google a record €2.42 billion for breaching EU antitrust rules and abusing its market dominance by giving an unfair advantage to one of its own comparison shopping services.

The same day, Lynn issued a statement praising the decision, which was posted on New America's website. The statement was removed after Schmidt contacted Slaughter, only to be inexplicably reposted within hours. According to the researchers' statement, "Google representatives" threatened "to cut off all funding for New America."

In an email subsequently released to the public, Slaughter, the director of the think tank, told Lynn on June 30 that "the time has come for Open Markets and New America to part ways," declaring that the team's work was "imperiling the institution as a whole."

Google is the most politically connected US corporation, spending a record \$6 million on lobbying between May and July. The *New York Times* noted that Google donates to 170 nonprofits, according to its own disclosures, up from 45 in 2010. The monetary values of its donations, however, are kept secret.

The search giant "has been spending a lot of money influencing public opinion, and influencing the opinions of leaders in government in very underhanded ways," Robert Epstein, senior research psychologist at the American Institute for Behavioral Research and Technology, told the WSWWS in a telephone interview. "That's really what's coming out."

"They will stop at nothing to control people's opinions," added Epstein, who has written regularly on

Google's actions. "They are paying scholars to write papers that support their viewpoint, and in many cases the scholars do not even acknowledge that they receive money from Google.

"This is part of a larger pattern of an attempt to influence people, on a massive scale. They take down whoever they want to take down. They can take down any organization, any politician. Any political realm, statement, or idea, they can shoot it down."

The researchers' claims have been met with denials by both Google and the New America Foundation. A Google spokesperson told the *Guardian* that blaming the tech giant for firing of the researchers would "not be a fair characterization at all." She added, "I can confirm that our funding levels for 2017 have not changed as a result of NAF's June post, nor did Eric Schmidt ever threaten to cut off funding because of it."

Slaughter issued a statement declaring, "Today's *New York Times* story implies that Google lobbied New America to expel the Open Markets program because of this press release. I want to be clear: this implication is absolutely false."

All available evidence, however, including the correspondence that has now been published by New America itself, indicates that the statements by Google and New America are a cover-up.

If Google is in fact lying about this incident, in the face of documentary evidence, what else is it lying about?

The revelations of Google's censorship of antimonopoly scholars lends credence to extensively documented revelations by the *World Socialist Web Site* that Google is manipulating search results to demote left-wing, progressive, and antiwar websites, who have seen their search traffic plummet since April.

Google's censorship of left-wing websites is, however, an act of censorship on a much larger scale, as the search giant is not seeking to influence just one think tank, but to make a whole range of constitutionally protected speech unavailable to billions of people.

Notably, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Guardian*, and the *Intercept* have all run reports or statements documenting and denouncing Google's censorship of the Open Markets researchers. However, not one of these news outlets has even referred to the WSWS's revelations or the campaign launched by the

WSWS against Internet censorship, which has received widespread international support. More than 3,000 people from over 80 different countries have signed the WSWS's petition in opposition to Google's censorship of left-wing sites.

The silence of the press on this issue is a testament to how politically explosive the WSWS's revelations are, and how integral the censorship of socialist viewpoints is to the strategy of the Democratic Party, with which all these news outlets are politically aligned.



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