

George Soros: A Bridge to Radicalism

Soros Funds a Leftwing Network Addressing Media, Legal and Social Issues

by Neil Hrab

Summary: In 2001, George Soros' Open Society Institute donated \$103 million to causes in the U.S. Much funding went to liberal and radical leftwing groups addressing a ranging of issues from opposing the death penalty to undermining property rights.

George Soros, the international financier, is at present caught up in an insider-trading scandal in France. There's no clear proof that Soros is culpable for the stock shenanigans being investigated by Paris authorities. But the news represents one of the few times when his name has received unfavorable press mention. Soros is much better known for his philanthropy. In 2000 his private grantmaking foundation, the Open Society Institute (OSI), distributed over \$103 million to American nonprofits. OSI is only one component of the Soros foundations network. This network, covering 50 nations, includes several other foundations, network programs supporting them, and various international initiatives. Including OSI, the Soros foundations network spent \$453 million in 2001.

Some believe Soros' giving marks him as a billionaire with a conscience. "Mr. Democracy" is how he is described in the *American Bar Association Journal*. Soros, a currency speculator whose net worth is estimated to be more than \$1 billion, is called the man who could "bring more change to [America's] justice system and the [American] legal profession than anyone since Washington, Franklin, Jefferson



George Soros is perhaps the world's most ambitious donor.

and other Founding Fathers got together to write the Constitution."

The effusive ABA statement reflects Soros' philanthropic ambition to underwrite radical social and legal changes in America. Like the Ford, Rockefeller, MacArthur and Turner foundations, Soros' Open Society Institute lavishes donations on liberal political advocacy groups and activists of the radical Left.

Soros' support for left-wing causes is curious. Born in Hungary in 1930, his education and early life experiences surely made him aware of the perils of government control and collectivist ideology. Soros survived World War II and briefly

studied in London, where he became acquainted with Sir Karl Popper (1902-1994), the man he now regards as his intellectual mentor. Popper, a philosopher who wrote *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945), a treatise famous for its rebuttal of the

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political philosophies of Plato, Hegel and Marx, was eager to contrast the secrecy and brutality of totalitarianism to an “open society” based on freedom and human flourishing. Soros is now a naturalized American citizen.

Diverse Philanthropy Projects

Decades later, after a series of spectacularly successful deals in the 1980s, Soros became wealthy enough to engage in philanthropy on an enormous scale. His goal was to help make Popper’s vision of a humane “Open Society” – or rather his interpretation of it — a global reality. Nelson Aldrich Jr., editor of the now-defunct *American Benefactor*, called Soros “a man who’s willing to take the whole world as his stage, and to act on that stage in a way to, he hopes, change history for the better.” Aldrich is right—Soros certainly has world-wide ambitions.

In 1991, he gave \$250 million to establish the Central European University, which is chartered in New York but conducts classes in Budapest and Warsaw. Between 1992 and 1996, he donated \$125 million to provide relief in Russia and at least \$200 million more on other charitable works in Russia. Soros also gave millions of

dollars to Eastern European and Russian pro-democracy groups during the decade just-ended. His Open Society Institute is currently active in 60 countries around the world, including the United States.

OSI’s stated mission in America is to “strengthen democracy in the United States by addressing barriers to opportunity and justice, broadening public discussion about such barriers, and assisting marginalized groups to participate equally in civil society and to make their voices heard.”

Unfortunately, what this means in practice is generous funding of nonprofits whose concept of civil society is radically at odds with the American concept of equal opportunity and liberty under law.

Some critics say Soros’ activities in Eastern Europe are particularly destructive. In an April 1997 article in *Forbes*, Richard Morals says Soros’ philanthropic activities in Eastern Europe amount to “a one-dimensional ideological laundering” of that region’s old Communist leaders; his donations helped ex-Communists repackage themselves as “social democrats.” The reason? Financial analyst and Soros friend Byron Wien thinks the financier may feel hostility toward all forms of “right-wing nationalism,” perhaps as a consequence of growing up in Nazi-occupied Hungary. And Soros may believe a strong Left can be a good barrier to resurgent “far-right” movements. The giving pattern of Soros-linked foundations in the U.S. suggests these critics may be on to something.

What follows is a review of 22 organizations that recently received grants from the Open Society Institute. The information is based on the OSI 2001 annual report, the most up-to-date listing of the Institute’s grantees. Some of the groups are little-known and the grants are modest. OSI’s attention to their needs clearly shows that Soros’ philanthropic agenda is to strengthen left-liberal activism. The OSI-funded groups on this list advocate higher taxes and more government spending, oppose social security reform, litigate against property rights, oppose the death penalty,

oppose tough criminal incarceration policies, oppose Bush judicial nominees, and promote balkanizing racial agendas.

A. GROUPS BUILDING COMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE

1. We Interrupt This Message (San Francisco, CA)—\$22,000

<http://www.interrupt.org/mission.html>
WITM’s activities would radicalize minority youth to see America as a racist and economically unjust country. The organization calls itself a “non-profit media strategy and training center” that aims to “reframe public debate.” It wants to help the “disenfranchised” and the “marginalized” get around media stereotypes. The group takes credit for helping to exonerate minorities wrongly accused of murder. It also wants to glorify the 1992 Los Angeles riots - it refers to them as a “civil uprising.” The group takes credit for the city of San Francisco’s decision to pass a job-destroying “living wage” law over the objection of many local businesses. In 2001, We Interrupt This Message reported an income of \$531,958.

Grant: “\$22,000 over one year to work with Community Initiative grantees to provide media capacity training to generate positive news coverage, challenge unfair media images and reframe the media debate on progressive issues.”

2. Independent Media Institute—\$60,000

<http://www.alternet.org/imi.html>
Also based in San Francisco, this group publishes a series of regularly updated websites that offer news and opinion from a far left perspective. IMI thinks of itself as an “infomediary” that puts radicals in touch with news sources that reflect their beliefs. Recent articles on the website criticize President Bush’s proposed tax cut, urge resistance to a war against Iraq, and describe the immorality of owning a Sports Utility Vehicle. IMI executive director Don Hazen is a former publisher of the radical monthly magazine *Mother Jones*. In 2000, IMI reported nearly \$1 million in revenue. It receives support from the Ford, Tides and Carnegie Foundations. IMI also operates the SPIN Project (Strategic Press Informa-

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Address:

1513 16th Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20036-1480

Phone: (202) 483-6900

Long-Distance: (800) 459-3950

E-mail Address:

jcarlisle@capitalresearch.org

Web Site:

<http://www.capitalresearch.org>

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tion Network), which provides media assistance to leftist groups that want to shape public opinion.

Grant: “\$60,000, 1-year project grant to support *Wiretap*, an online independent magazine by and for youth activists.”

B. PUBLIC INTEREST LEGAL GROUPS

3. Community Rights Counsel—\$50,000

<http://www.communityrights.org/>

The Community Rights Counsel provides legal help to state and local governments that would restrict individual property rights in the name of “community interest.” It justifies its efforts to undermine the “Takings Clause” in the 5th Amendment (“nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation”) by claiming that the Clause has no bearing on most government land use regulation; it assists states and municipalities that are sued when they try to take private property. Community Rights Counsel is also behind the public relations campaign that would have Congress forbid federal judges from attending “law and economics” seminars sponsored by academic programs. These programs demonstrate the relation of economics to law and are intended to improve judicial decision-making. In 2002 Community Rights Counsel unsuccessfully attempted to block President Bush’s selection of federal judge Brooks Smith to the Third Circuit Court of Appeals by erroneously charging Smith with unethical conduct. For fiscal year 2000, the organization reported nearly \$400,000 in income.

Grant: “\$50,000 to support a project to protect judicial independence from lobbying in the form of privately-funded education programs for judges, typically combined with expense-paid luxury travel.”

4. Equal Justice Works—\$200,000

<http://www.napil.org/>

Formerly known as the National Association for Public Interest Law (NAPIL), EJW encourages young people to become public interest lawyers by funding student fellowships and helping them pay back their student loans. EJW defines public interest law to include workers’ rights, birth control and abortion issues, consum-

ers’ rights, disability issues, childrens’ rights, the death penalty, and prisoners’ rights. EJW reports that it has received \$8 million in annual donations from law firms, corporations and foundations to assist law students and lawyers “that bring justice to millions of low-income persons and families.” EJW receives grants from the Ford and Joyce Foundations.

Grant: “200,000 to support the work of NAPIL’s Student Organizing Department, including its ongoing programs to create public interest jobs, promote loan forgiveness programs for law graduates who take low-paying public interest jobs, and advocating for greater law school support for public interest-minded students.”

5. Legal Action Center—\$248,548

<http://www.lac.org/>

LAC is a public interest law firm that sues to force health care insurers to provide care to people with histories of addiction to alcohol and drugs. With offices in New York City and Washington, DC and a 2001 budget of \$3.3 million, LAC also fights community attempts to block the placement of alcohol and drug treatment centers in local neighborhoods. It successfully argued one case against White Plains, NY in 2001. LAC recently provided host Bill Moyers with commentary for his PBS documentary on drug addiction.

Grant: “\$248,548 to support the National Project to Mitigate the Collateral Consequences of Conviction that will develop a 50-state report card of the legal and practical barriers faced by people with criminal records, perform an in-depth analysis of barriers in a single state, and develop model policies.”

6. Brennan Center for Justice—\$215,000

<http://www.brennancenter.org/>

The Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law (2001 Income—\$3.6 million) is named for the late Supreme Court Justice William Brennan, whose decisions embody the idea that the U.S. Constitution is a “living document” that requires creative and expansive judicial interpretation. The Center files briefs, drafts legislation, publishes studies and litigates cases. It assists the so-called “living wage” movement, which lobbies local

governments to require employers to pay a minimum wage higher than the federal wage.

Grant: “\$215,000 to provide technical assistance to community justice initiatives in the defender field, which, by identifying community concerns and helping indigent defense service providers define their role within the community, endeavor to encourage and promote more equitable criminal justice policies and strategies.”

7. Southern Center for Human Rights—\$50,000

<http://www.schr.org/>

Founded in 1976, SCHR recruits lawyers to represent death row inmates. It also wants to reduce America’s alleged “over-reliance on incarceration” and opposes the election of local judges as a threat to “judicial independence.” SCHR claims judges sentence criminals to death to win elections. The Center’s 2001 budget is more than \$1.3 million.

Grant: “\$50,000 to renew support for the Center’s ongoing work to investigate, document and educate the public about threats to judicial independence in the South, and to advocate reforms to assure the diversity of race, ethnicity, gender and professional experience in the judiciary.”

C. ACTIVIST GROUPS

8. Population Services International—\$75,000

<http://www.psi.org/>

With a 2000 income of nearly \$97 million, PSI promotes birth control services in more than 60 countries. Founded in 1970, PSI uses what it calls “social marketing” and private sector expertise to reach its target audiences, which now include overseas HIV-positive women. PSI’s American activities include promotion of emergency contraception to young women and the installation of condom machines in restrooms.

Grant: “\$75,000 to support the Model Emergency Contraception Pill Promotion Project in Sacramento County, CA (renewal).”

9. Western States Center—\$100,000

<http://www.westernstatescenter.org/>

WSC aims to build a “progressive move-

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ment for social, economic, racial and environmental justice in the eight Western states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Nevada and Alaska.” WSC receives grants from the Ford, Tides and (Ted) Turner Foundations. Like the People’s Institute, it holds events to help white people overcome internalized racism and trains radical community organizers to strengthen their organizing and non-profit management and leadership skills. WSC reported an income of \$2.2 million in 2000.

Grant: “\$100,000 over one year to collect data on, and educate people about, money in politics in eight western states.”

10. Esperanza Center—\$50,000

<http://www.esperanzacenter.org/>
“Esperanza” means hope in Spanish. The San Antonio-based Center hopes to build a political movement drawing on “women, people of color, lesbians and gay men, the working class and poor” - that is, all who are “wounded by domination and inequality” in American political life. Founded in 1987 by a collective of Latina women, the Center’s staff of about 20 full- and part-time employees run programs that use art and culture to strengthen political coalition-building. “You can’t separate art from politics,” says Graciela Sánchez, the group’s leader. “It’s all connected.”

Grant: “\$50,000 to promote the development of Puentes de Poder/Bridges of Power, a community organizing project concerned with democratic process and the creation of progressive policy alternatives.”

11. Feminist Majority Foundation—\$150,000

<http://www.feminist.org/>
Founded in 1987 by former National Organization for Women president Eleanor Smeal, FMF believes “feminists - both women and men, girls and boys - are the majority, but this majority must be empowered.” It promotes grassroots organizing to support abortion and contraception, and aggressive use of Title IX, the federal law used to mandate gender equality in federally-funded higher education athletics programs. FM’s organizing activities have included the “Emergency Contraception Over-the-Counter National Day of

Action” (Dec. 7) and opposition to President Bush’s nomination of conservative physician W. David Hager to the Food and Drug Administration. Feminist Majority Foundation’s reported income in 2000 was \$4.3 million.

Grant: “\$150,000 to support the National Clinic Access Project, the Campus Leadership Program Choices Campaign, and the Campaign for Mifepristone and Women’s Health (renewal).”

12. Center for Public Integrity—\$144,800

<http://www.publicintegrity.org/dtaweb/home.asp>

Describing its work as “public service journalism,” CPI claims to be a nonpartisan investigative muckracker into government malfeasance and the role of money in politics. It takes credit for revealing former president Bill Clinton’s habit of allowing prominent Democratic Party donors to sleep in the White House and now monitors George W. Bush, who, says CPI, fetes donors the same way. With offices in Washington D.C., CPI receives funding from the Ford and Rockefeller foundations and the Pew Charitable Trusts. (2001 income—\$4.5 million.)

Grant: “\$144,800 to support an investigative series in newspapers nationwide on prosecutorial misconduct leading to wrongful convictions.”

D. PUBLIC POLICY GROUPS

13. The Sentencing Project—\$375,000

<http://www.sentencingproject.org/>
Founded in 1986, TSP aims to soften America’s “get tough” criminal justice policy by placing restrictions on juvenile sentences and sentences for drug convictions, promoting so-called “alternative sentencing programs,” and urging the public to oppose laws that strip convicted felons of their right to vote. TSP’s income in 2000 was \$760,000.

Grant: \$375,000 for “capacity building.”

14. Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy—\$75,000

<http://www.ctj.org/itep/>

This Washington, DC tax policy group believes rich Americans don’t pay enough taxes. Founded in 1980 by Robert S. McIntyre, ITEP publishes op-eds, studies and testimony that calls on states to tax the rich at a high “progressive” rate. It does not support flat taxes and criticizes states that permit tax deductions for federal taxes paid. Its reported 2000 income was nearly \$800,000.

Grant: “\$75,000 to research and analyze government economic development subsidies granted to private prison corporations.”

15. Critical Resistance—\$200,000

<http://www.criticalresistance.org/mission.html>
Founded in 1998 and based in Oakland, CA, CR believes a “Prison Industrial Complex” is fostering the delusion that “caging and controlling people makes us safe.” Its “global” fight “against inequality and powerlessness” aims to “push the public debate about the ‘need’ for prisons, policing, and other forms of social control.” CR is currently suing the state of California over a new juvenile detention facility. It publishes op-eds, studies and testimony.

Grant: “\$200,000 over two years to provide operational support for the development and implementation of a national organizing effort to oppose prison expansion and over-incarceration.”

16. Leadership Conference Education Fund—\$300,000

http://www.civilrights.org/research_center/multimedia_center/lccr_history_text.html
LCEF is affiliated with the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR) whose history goes back to the 1950’s, when it was founded by, among others, A. Phillip Randolph, the famed black community organizer. Nowadays, LCCR defends U.N.-sponsored birth control programs, demands racial reparations, calls for more leniency in the criminal justice system, supports affirmative action quotas for minorities and would expand welfare entitlements for immigrants.

Grant: “\$300,000 to support the Leadership Conference’s Criminal Justice Reform Campaign.”

17. Network for a Progressive Texas—\$50,000

<http://www.protex.org/>

NPT (2001 revenue —\$234,859) “works to assure justice, dignity and equity for all people ... by bringing together Texans who are committed to economic, social, and environmental justice and supporting them in networking, engaging in collective action, and building power to affect progressive change.” In other words, it brings together Texans who believe in radical political ideologies, links them through NPT’s website, and hosts email discussion lists.

Grant: “\$50,000 to support the salary of a full-time organizer devoted to supporting the Criminal Justice Coalition Network, a grassroots movement focused on death penalty reform, indigent defense reform, and police accountability.”

18. Center for Law and Social Policy—\$100,000

<http://www.clasp.org/>

CLASP is a national public interest law group and policy institute that promotes “economic security” - a term that covers government welfare entitlements and “job creation” programs. Started in 1968, it has become something of an incubator for other liberal law and policy groups, including the National Women’s Law Center and the Bazelon Center on Mental Health Law. CLASP receives support from the Ford Foundation and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. It had 2000 income of \$2,364,247. Its board of directors includes attorney Peter Edelman, husband of Childrens Defense Fund president Marian Wright Edelman

Grant: “\$100,000 over one year to research and educate the public about welfare and workforce development.”

19. Center for Policy Alternatives—\$175,000

<http://www.cfpa.org/>

Founded in 1976, it is the “nation’s leading nonpartisan progressive public policy and leadership development center serving state legislators, state policy organizations, and state grassroots leaders.” With a \$5.2 million budget and staff of 25, its “Summit on the States” links state legislators to radical organizers. CPA has close

ties to labor unions and in 1997 and 1998 received \$7.8 million from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to support community organization-building. In 2000-2001 the Ford Foundation contributed \$1.8 million for similar purposes.

Grant: “\$175,000 over one year for general operating support to a network for progressive legislators.”

20. Economic Policy Institute—\$75,000

<http://www.epinet.org/>

Among the prominent liberals who helped found EPI in 1986 are journalist Robert Kuttner, Clinton Labor Secretary Robert Reich, and economist Lester Thurow. EPI opposes social security privatization, supports an increase in the minimum wage, and attacks free trade agreements such as NAFTA. EPI had 2000 income of \$5.5 million, much of it coming from labor unions, and a staff of 50, including 10 Ph.D.-level researchers. Its reports receive considerable press notice.

Grant: “75,000 over one year to support the Economic Analysis and Research Network (EARN) of state groups working on economic issues.”

21. State Strategies Fund—\$300,000

<http://www.funder.org/grantmaking/ssf/> The State Strategies Fund (SSF) is a program of the Proteus Fund, a “funder collaborative” which acts as a type of community foundation for leftist donors. SSF works to create at the state level a coalition of environmentalists, union members, civil rights activists, “economic justice” supporters and feminists to support its agenda of “campaign finance reform, fair tax policy, and affordable [i.e. government-funded] health care.” The SSF board includes representatives of the Open Society Institute, the Carnegie Corporation and the AFL-CIO. SSF both receives grants (OSI, Ford Foundation and the Unitarian Universalists) and makes grants (e.g. United Vision for Idaho—\$40,000, Wisconsin Citizen Action Fund—\$50,000).

Grant: “\$300,000 over one year to funders’ collaborative supporting state coalitions and other multi-issue, joint efforts to build progressive policy infrastructure at the state level.”

22. DEMOS—\$75,000

<http://www.demos-usa.org>

DEMOS, headquartered in New York City, calls itself “a network for ideas and action.” DEMOS director of research David Callahan believes America’s problems stem from “the values of extreme laissez faire ideology that have deeply permeated our society. We’ve had 20 years of deregulation. We’ve been told that government is the problem, not the solution.” DEMOS’ remedies require undoing Ronald Reagan’s economic policy legacy. Callahan is the author of a new book, *Kindred Spirits: Harvard Business School’s Extraordinary Class of 1949 and How They Transformed American Business*.

Grant: “\$75,000 over one year to support network/ policy advocacy group working to revitalize America’s democratic life and to create a more broadly shared economic prosperity.”

Conclusion

Capital Research Center often cites grants by the Ford Foundation or the Pew Charitable Trusts to illustrate how foundation grantmaking undermines the donor’s intent. But there is no denying that the Open Society Institute is fulfilling George Soros’ intent. His private wealth underwrites efforts to transform global society and subsidize a new generation of radical activists.

(Source: <http://www.soros.org/usprograms/grants-nov-2000.htm>)

Neil Hrab, a freelance writer, works for the National Post in Toronto, Canada.

PhilanthropyNotes

A group of foundations that includes the **Pew Charitable Trusts**, the **John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation**, and the **David and Lucile Packard Foundation** has established a \$10 million commission to formulate a long-range energy policy for the United States. **The National Commission on Energy Policy** expects to issue a report in two years that will balance energy consumption and environmental protection. **John W. Rowe**, **commission co-chairman** and CEO of the Exelon Corp., says the group wants to develop a “centrist approach.” The 18-member panel includes **William Reilly**, EPA chief in the first Bush Administration, **John Holdren**, a Harvard professor who drafted the Clinton policy on climate change, and **Andrew Lundquist**, a former White House advisor who drafted President George W. Bush’s energy plan.

Ted Turner told a New York audience of diplomats gathered to celebrate his philanthropy to the United Nations that he would honor his \$1 billion 1997 pledge despite the reversal in his economic fortunes. Much of Turner’s wealth was invested in AOL Time Warner stock, which fell from \$56 in May 2001 to less than \$15 per share. So far Turner has given \$500 million to the UN. He says he will give the second \$500 million – but over the next ten years, not five.

The Hudson Institute recently established the **Bradley Center for Philanthropy and Civic Renewal**. The center’s mission is to encourage foundations and donors to direct more resources to “support small, local, often faith-based grassroots associations that are the heart of a vital civil society.” Based in Washington, DC, the center will be directed by William A. Schambra, former director of programs at the **Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation**. The Bradley Foundation, the center’s principal donor, is a prominent funder of public policy research on civic renewal.

A January report by the **General Accounting Office** (GAO), the investigative arm of Congress, recommends that charities and the government improve their collaborative efforts in responding to large-scale disasters such as **September 11**. The report says lack of coordination kept charities from effectively disbursing assistance. The sheer number of charities offering help confused charity recipients, who were also intimidated by the paperwork and bureaucracy. The situation improved over several months as charities and relief agencies coordinated their services and databases. The GAO says the **Federal Emergency Management Agency** should start working with major charities to improve the way contributions intended for disaster victims are collected and distributed.

Grocery entrepreneur and philanthropist **David Mugar** is demanding that **Boston University** return a \$3 million donation he made to the school in 1993 to renovate a library. The university admits it mishandled the donation but cannot give back the money, which was “lost” due to poor accounting. Mugar refused the university’s offer to name a new dormitory or theater after him and he contemplates filing a lawsuit. In a similar case, venture capitalist **Paul Glenn** sued the **University of Southern California**, claiming it misused his \$1.6 million gift for aging research.

The **Lilly Endowment** has announced grants totaling \$76.8 million to 39 church-related liberal arts colleges to establish programs that encourage students to consider the ministry as a possible career. The awards are part of Lilly’s theological vocation initiative.

