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À propos du PhiLab | About PhiLab

Le **Réseau canadien de recherche partenariale sur la philanthropie** (PhiLab) a été créé en 2014 dans le cadre d'une demande de financement « développement de partenariat » obtenue du Conseil de recherche en sciences humaines du Canada (CRSH). Ce financement a été reconduit en 2018 pour six années par l'obtention d'une subvention « partenariat » du CRSH. Depuis 2024, PhiLab profite de financements octroyés par différentes fondations dont la Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon et la Fondation Mirella et Lino Saputo. Le Réseau pancanadien constitue un lieu de recherche partenarial, de partage d'information, de mobilisation des connaissances sur la philanthropie subventionnaire et de formation à la recherche. Les activités de recherche conduites en partenariat valorisent les connaissances auprès d'une diversité d'acteurs sociaux, d'agences gouvernementales, milieux universitaires et petits et grands médias. La valorisation des connaissances, via des outils de communication novateurs et accessibles, permet une diffusion élargie des connaissances produites ou déjà existantes. Le Réseau regroupe des chercheurs, des décideurs et des membres de la communauté philanthropique à travers le monde afin de partager des informations, des ressources et des idées.

The **Canadian network of partnership-oriented research on philanthropy** (PhiLab) was created in 2014 as part of a "partnership development" funding application obtained from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). This funding was renewed in 2018 for six years by obtaining a "partnership" grant from SSHRC. Since 2024, PhiLab has benefited from funding granted by various foundations, including the Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon and the Mirella and Lino Saputo Foundation. The Pan-Canadian Network is a hub for partnership research, information sharing, knowledge mobilization on grantmaking philanthropy and research training. Research activities carried out in partnership promote knowledge among a wide range of social players, government agencies, academics and small and large media. The valorization of knowledge, via innovative and accessible communication tools, enables a wider dissemination of the knowledge produced or already existing.

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PHILANTHROPIE SOUS TENSION | PHILANTHROPY UNDER PRESSURE

Credit : Tommy Trenchard

PHILANTHROPIE SOUS TENSION
PHILANTHROPY UNDER PRESSURE

Now is the Time of Monsters : Will Political Polarization Be the End of Social Justice Philanthropy in the U.S.?

By Joshua Newton , *Postdoctoral Scholar*

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"The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters."[1]

The above (loosely translated) quote from Antonio Gramsci on the rise of fascism in Italy has garnered renewed interest as far-right extremism grows around the world. In the U.S., the advent of Donald Trump's second term has solidified these extremist tendencies in the nation's highest office and created fear of political retaliation against those he labels as enemies. These fears were stoked when Trump declared himself a "president of law and order"[2] amid riot and mounted police tear gassing and spraying peaceful protestors in Lafayette Square in 2020. This was compounded by the recent arrest of Mahmoud Khalil, a leader of a pro-Palestinian protest at Columbia University, with the promise from Trump that this was the "first arrest of many to come."[3] Indeed, U.S. democracy appears to be under threat; but a far more nefarious assault on grassroots democracy is being obscured by Trump's actions against social movements: an attack on social justice philanthropy.

Image: Trump visiting St. John's Church as protesters are dispersed.

The Old World is Dying: Political Polarization and the Rise of Fascism

How did we get here? Many commentators point to the rise of political polarization in the U.S. Over the past couple of decades, this has been exacerbated by a two-party system that creates hyper-partisanship, policy-making gridlock, and incivility between political opponents[4]. Regarding the latter, in a recent call for funding, the Carnegie Corporation of New York identified political behaviors, such as "threats to free speech, the decline of civil discourse, disagreement over basic facts, and a lack of mutual understanding

and collaboration," as salient issues[5]. Scholars claim group behaviors are compounded by individual behaviors—avoiding politically different ideas and people, choosing to live in places that reflect a person's politics, and absorbing disinformation from social media[6]. Whatever the mix of causes may be, the result has been increasing right-wing extremism that is being solidified in a fascist[7] presidential administration.

But this fascist politics is unique from past versions: it is led by one—arguably two—of the most prominent capitalists of our time. This seems ironic considering commentators have announced the end of neoliberal capitalism since the 2007 global economic crisis. Even more, the rise of authoritarianism throughout the world has often been misdiagnosed as a strengthening of state power against capitalist forces[8]. In reality, neo-Marixst scholars claim state authoritarianism is the logical outcome of neoliberal capitalism[9]. Ironically, freedom of markets and creative destruction of the public sector, as well as the social control necessary to accomplish both, are easier with a stronger state—even more so when the state is headed by capitalists.

This is being exemplified in the presidency of Trump, and illegitimate power of Elon Musk. The Department of Governmental Efficiency (colloquially called DOGE), an initiative by executive order spearheaded by Musk, has initiated the destruction of the public sector with proposed or implemented cuts to most major governmental agencies, and proposals to replace the vacancies with private sphere solutions. For instance, the Trump administration's cuts to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) have been followed by DOGE's recommendation that Musk's company, SpaceX, become the sole supplier of technical infrastructure to the FAA[10]. Musk and DOGE have also suggested the privatization of the U.S. Postal Service, Amtrak, and the destruction of social welfare such as Social Security and Medicaid. These cuts to the public sphere and expansion of the private sphere have been accompanied by Trump's use of U.S. Immigration and Customs domestically, and economic tariffs internationally, to enforce his political and social control. Authoritarian neoliberalism is underway.

The New World Struggles to Be Born: The Assault on Social Justice Philanthropy

In previous eras, the role of philanthropy in U.S. society has ebbed and flowed with dynamics of the economic system and strength of the public sector[11]. In other words, at the height of deregulated privatization, the philanthropic sector supplemented diminished public funding and service provision. For instance, unregulated capitalist gains in the Gilded Age—mid-1860s to early 1900s—due to a diminished public sector led to multiple societal ills which ushered a period of expanded philanthropic community development—most notably in the settlement house movement.

Image: Sprague Settlement House in Providence, Rhode Island.

Still, there is little agreement amongst scholars about the role of philanthropy in the dichotomy between public and private sector power. Some claim the philanthropic sector is a "shadow state" carrying out service provision under the guidance of the public sector[12], while others claim it is "philanthrocapitalism" carrying out the will of the private sector[13]. Regardless of allegiances to the public or private sector, and despite incorporation of neoliberal logic into philanthropic giving, scholars note a shift in a small percentage of philanthropic organizations toward social justice philanthropy[14]. The sector of social justice philanthropy has brought an increase in "granting of philanthropic contributions to nonprofit organizations…that work for structural change in order to increase the opportunity of those who are the least well off politically, economically, and socially"[15].

While this is a small portion of philanthropic giving, the Trump Administration has targeted it as part of its mission of social control. Even before Trump's inauguration, the Republican-controlled House of Representatives passed — after failing and being reconsidered — *H.R. 9495* (Stop Terror-Financing and Tax Penalties on American Hostages Act) to

limit the ability of philanthropic organizations to engage in social justice advocacy and grantmaking. This proposed bill allows for the termination of tax-exempt status for terrorist supporting organizations. As with most laws and policy, the definition of "terrorist supporting organizations" is open to interpretation. This is particularly concerning as the Trump Administration has labeled multiple groups as terrorists. The White House Press Secretary, Karoline Leavitt, claimed Mahmoud Khalil and other pro-Palestinian activists "sided with terrorists"[16]. Trump claimed that anti-Elon Musk protestors who damaged Teslas are domestic terrorists. The consequences for philanthropic organizations could be far reaching as the bill is ultimately meant to "intimidate activists"[17].

However, I contend that Bill H.R. 9495 is only the beginning of the attack on social justice philanthropy—and quite possibly philanthropy in general. Trump's federal funding freeze—the halting of all federal grants and loans—is meant to curb any funding of DEI (read: funding of social movements against Trump policies). Trump also recently released a memorandum "to stop funding NGOs that undermine the national interest"[18]. He has also signed an executive order to deny student loan forgiveness for workers in nonprofits for social justice causes, issued a memorandum to stop funding to foreign aid not aligned with American values (read: Trump's values), and issued a number of other directives that directly affect philanthropic organizations involved in issues around immigration, gender identity, and other social justice causes including executive orders to demolish the Department of Education, to invoke use of the Alien Enemies Act, and to establish the use of a binary gender policy at the federal level.

The Time of Monsters and Solutions

What is philanthropy to do in a "time of monsters"? Now seems the time for philanthropic organizations to be clear about allegiances. As private corporations and billionaires use government offices to destroy our public institutions and put residents' economic and physical safety at-risk, philanthropic organizations should dissociate from philanthrocapitalist tendencies and solidify cooperative relationships with local public and civil society actors typical of the shadow state. A couple of possibilities exist in this regard, especially in terms of overcoming the assault on social justice philanthropy.

First, the larger foundations need to increase grantmaking to alleviate the effects of Trump's federal funding freeze on communities around the U.S. At least two foundations, MacArthur Foundation and Freedom Together Foundation, have announced plans to increase spending from the minimum required 5% of endowment to 6% and 10% respectively[19]. More foundations need to make similar promises, and foundations are going to need to promise more to overcome the billions of dollars that have been frozen. Likewise, some of this new funding should be allocated to helping nonprofit workers targeted by Trump's student loan forgiveness changes.

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Second, the philanthropic sector should challenge Trump's actions through the legal system and advocacy. For instance, the National Council of Nonprofits, Democracy Forward, and others filed a lawsuit that resulted in a temporary restraining order against the funding freeze[20]. More legal challenges like these can help stall efforts by the Trump Administration to punish his perceived political enemies. Likewise, the philanthropic sector should advocate at all levels of government—local, state, and federal—to push elected officials to stand against the Trump Administration and its policies. Any attempt to undo the destructive nature of this presidential administration will require a collaborative effort from the public and philanthropic sectors.

Finally, despite Trump's efforts, social movements are unlikely to die down. Instead, they are likely to expand and amplify. As mentioned in the beginning of this section, the philanthropic sector must take a stand and affirm its allegiance to these social movements and the causes of democracy, equity, and justice. As stakeholders that are largely independent from the private and public sectors, the philanthropic sector can reinforce the need for these values. Some regional and national foundations—including the Ford, Kellogg, Kresge, Robert Wood Johnson, and Surdna Foundations—have done just this by standing against Trump's repudiation of DEI policies[21]. While Trump may be using the public sphere to increase his private gains, the philanthropic sector should make it clear that he has no power over their policies and priorities.

The role of the philanthropic sector has been unclear throughout the history of the U.S. In this burgeoning new world of authoritarian neoliberalism, there is an opportunity to solidify the sector as a supportive force in our most marginalized communities. The philanthropic sector must stand against the monsters of our time!

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