



ALEX BEAM

Empathy for the devils

Maybe instead of being driven to distraction by the Koch brothers, the left should embrace them

By Alex Beam

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But seriously, if the two-man, right-wing Axis of Evil - brothers Charles and David Koch - didn't exist, the neurasthenic left wing would have had to invent them.

Where to begin? I've been hanging out on the website of the Center for Public Integrity which calls itself a "nonpartisan, nonprofit investigative news organization." At the CPI, it seems as if every day is Fear the Dread Koch Brothers Day.

Last week, the Center noted that the Kochs - pronounced like the drink "Coke" - who own a vast pile of refineries and chemical plants, have been resisting post-9/11 security regulations. In April, in a lengthy report on "Koch's web of influence," the Center wrote that "Koch Industries is spending tens of millions to influence every facet of government that could affect its global empire."

No Koch misstep evades the gimlet eyes of the Integrity People! Earlier this summer, they noted that "a foreign subsidiary of Koch Industries has been fined \$4,700 by the Federal Election Commission for making 12 illegal donations totaling \$26,800 to seven non-federal committees over a four-year period." Where did this "investigative news organization" glean this tidbit? hilariously, the Koch baddies reported the infraction voluntarily to the FEC.

For organizations like the CPI, the Kochs are the gift that just keeps on giving. In last year's massive New Yorker magazine takedown that introduced the Kochs to polite society, CIP capo Charles Lewis accused Koch Industries of "a pattern of lawbreaking, political manipulation, and obfuscation. I've been in Washington since Watergate," he added, "and I've never seen anything like it. They are the Standard Oil of our times."

Standard Oil, eh? You mean the company that offered competitors lucrative stock buyouts before crushing them? The company whose founders donated the Grand Tetons, Acadia National Park, and one-third of the island of St. John to the national park system? We need more Standard Oils, not fewer, I'd say.

So who are Charles and David Koch and why do right-thinking people tremble at the mention of their name? (I recently Googled "Koch Brothers" and "Satan," and landed 345,000 hits - not bad!) They are charter members of the Lucky DNA Club, who inherited a vast fortune from their father and made it much bigger. Between them, they hold two bachelor's degrees and three master's degrees from MIT. They run Wichita, Kansas-based Koch Industries, a sprawling, privately held conglomerate with fingers in many pots - refining, commodities, ranching, paper, you name it. The brothers are perfervid libertarians who want government to shrink and to get off of everyone's back, most especially theirs.

Let's start cataloging their many sins. Like every oil and gas conglomerate in the world, they manufacture extremely dangerous products and gripe and moan about government regulations every chance they get. They pour money into the political coffers of pro-business, conservative, political candidates, in the same manner that Big Labor backs the various union cat's-paws who stand for election, especially here in Massachusetts.

What else? The Kochs founded the Cato Institute in 1977. So? One of my favorite writers works for Cato, but I'll spare him the stigma of being praised in *The Boston Globe*. "Cato scholars have been particularly energetic in promoting the Climategate scandal," *The New Yorker* breathlessly reported last year. I don't doubt it. But they didn't create the Climategate scandal, did they?

More Koch crimes and misdemeanors: They've bankrolled dubious "citizens' action organizations" with earnest sounding names such as Citizens for a Sound Economy, Citizens for the Environment, and Americans for Prosperity. Bloomberg Television, the seldom-seen video arm of New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg's media empire, reports that the Kochs have "used their enormous wealth to bankroll their ideological agenda and shake up the political landscape."

Gosh! But when Bloomberg creates its own squirrely named front organization, the Coalition for Competition in Media, to bankroll *its* agenda of fiddling with the proposed NBC-Comcast merger, I guess that's OK. Bloomberg, a \$7 billion privately held media conglomerate, retained the inside-the-Beltway influence peddlers Glover Park Group to make sure CNBC wouldn't steal a march on Bloomberg TV in the proposed merger.

“Operating out of Glover Park Group’s office, the ‘coalition’ had a website registered on a Portuguese island,” the Nation magazine wrote. Very shadowy. Very Koch-like!

I don’t doubt for a moment that the Koch brothers are brigands of the first order, probably as unpleasant to deal with in their line of work as Mr. Rupert Murdoch is in his. But just as Ronald Reagan’s kooky, right-wing Secretary of the Interior James Watt was catnip for Sierra Club fund-raising letters, real and imagined - “Watt to Privatize Yellowstone!” - the Kochs will keep the dollars flowing to every oddball, save-the-planet charity for the next decade.

Embrace them. They are so bad, they’re good.

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