



Published on *Truthout* (<http://www.truth-out.org>)

Jim Hightower | The Kochs Are Coming

Jim Hightower | Thursday 03 February 2011



Rancho Mirage, California - The multibillionaire Koch brothers are used to running their nefarious network of political front groups from behind closed doors, keeping their identities and self-serving involvement secret from the media and us hoi polloi.

For more than three decades, Charles and David Koch have been quietly funneling tens of millions of dollars from their industrial fortune into the Cato Institute, Federalist Society, Heritage Foundation, Americans for Prosperity, FreedomWorks and dozens of other right wing organizations set up to push their extremist laissez-faire agenda of plutocratic rule. From behind their plush curtain, they've operated as the right wing's Wizard of Oz -- only Ozzier.

But now, the curtain is being pulled back, and there they are -- buck naked and butt ugly for all to see.

What an unpleasant surprise it must have been for the brothers last Sunday to find ordinary folks peering at them and their fellow Republican billionaires. About 200 of the wealthy elite were comfortably sequestered behind the gated walls of the Rancho Las Palmas Resort, presumably untouchable in the Southern California desert.

They had been invited to this lair of luxury to participate in an exclusive four-day political retreat that Charles periodically organizes to plot strategy with his peers and get money commitments from them for the next national election.

In the past, these have been totally clandestine pow-wows. They allow the Kochs and the corporate cohorts to huddle privately with such top GOP officials as House Majority Leader Eric Cantor and Supreme Court Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas and to hold knob with such right-wing sparklies as Karl Rove and Glenn Beck.

This year, however, the letter of invitation from Koch Industries was leaked to researcher Lee Fang at the Center for American Progress. In it, Charles bragged that "we will assemble an exceptional group of leaders" at Rancho Las Palmas. And he did -- but not the kind of leaders he intended to bring together!

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Instead, he found some 1,500 grass-roots leaders gathered at the resort to greet the elite. Accompanied by national media, these uninvited guests succeeded in uncloaking the Kochs, turning the family's name into a four-letter word -- as in, "to Koch" democracy.

I was among the "rabble" intruding into this corporate getaway, having been invited by the political reform group Common Cause to speak and emcee the people's Las Palmas rally. I can testify that the Koch crowd was not happy to see us -- indeed, photographer Michael Cline snapped a wonderful picture of an exasperated David and Julia Koch glumly watching us from their resort's balcony.

The purpose of our public protest was not merely to expose the handful of wealthy interests who are using front groups and secret corporate cash to gain political supremacy -- we "outsiders" were also there to organize support for repealing last year's infamous anti-democracy edict by the Supreme Court. A five-man cabal of corporatados on the Court ruled that a corporation is a "person" entitled to use unlimited sums of corporate funds to elect or defeat any candidate of its choosing -- thus enthroning special-interest business money over all other interests in our society.

Unfortunately, to reverse the Kafkaesque hubris of the five Supremes who're trying to play God, we need to pass a constitutional amendment that explicitly makes the obvious point that, to be a person, you have to have a navel. While passing any amendment to our nation's basic governing document is difficult, it can -- and must -- be done if America is even to pretend to be a government of and by the people.

The good news is that Americans are up for it. A nationwide poll in January found that four out of five of our people support the passage of just such an amendment -- including 68 percent of Republicans.

Two hundred and thirty-six years ago, Paul Revere rallied the American public's resistance to the democratic repression with the cry, "The British are coming!" Today, the rallying cry is, "The Kochs are coming!" To join the resistance, go to www.freespeechforpeople.org.

National radio commentator, writer, public speaker, and author of the book, [Swim Againsts The Current: Even A Dead Fish Can Go With The Flow](#), Jim Hightower has spent three decades battling the Powers That Be on behalf of the Powers That Ought To Be - consumers, working families, environmentalists, small businesses, and just-plain-folks.

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