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SURGE DESK

Charles and David Koch: Meet the Billionaires Linked to the Wisconsin Protests

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Contributor

Don't mess with the Kochs.

Charles and David Koch, the two billionaire brothers who fight for conservative causes, have found themselves embroiled in the ongoing Wisconsin standoff between [Republican Gov. Scott Walker](#) and public employees angry about his plan to kill [collective bargaining](#).

David Koch, in particular, is in the headlines today after the Buffalo Beast's Ian Murphy, masquerading as Koch, prank-called Walker and got the governor to reveal tidbits about his strategy to counter the state's Democrats.

But who are the brothers Koch, and where did their money and power come from? Surge Desk rounds up what we know about them.

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The family business

David and Charles Koch (pronounced like "coke") are co-owners of Koch Industries, which [Forbes named](#) the second-largest privately held company in the U.S. in 2010. "Koch Industries owns companies involved in refining and chemicals; service process and pollution control equipment; minerals; fertilizers; fibers and polymers; commodity and financial trading; forest and consumer products; ranching; and business development," says Forbes. The magazine estimated Koch Industries' 2009 revenue at \$100 billion.

The Koch brothers' father, Ed Koch, founded the company in the 1920s -- then called Rock Island Oil & Refining -- and three of his four sons went on to join him there. After his death in 1967, the company was rechristened Koch Industries in his honor.

In the '80s, there was a power struggle, and Charles and David bought out their two other brothers and took control of the company. The split was bitter, and [according to The New Yorker](#), it left the two camps so divided that "in 1990, they walked past one another with stony expressions at their mother's funeral."

Political leanings

Ed Koch was conservative, a member of the John Birch Society and a fierce critic of

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communism. He passed on these political sensibilities to his sons. "It's something I grew up with -- a fundamental point of view that big government was bad and imposition of government controls on our lives and economic fortunes was not good," David Koch said in a 2007 interview.

The Koch brothers have invested a great deal of money according to their conservative political beliefs -- more than \$100 million, by The New Yorker's estimates. Charles Koch co-founded the libertarian think tank the Cato Institute. In 1984, David Koch helped found what would become Americans for Prosperity, a fiscally conservative group, which [The Boston Globe said](#) in 2009 "is leading the way in channeling recession-era distress into anger at President Obama." David has also voiced skepticism about global warming.

Ties to Wisconsin

Americans for Prosperity has been a prominent supporter of Gov. Walker during the Wisconsin labor demonstrations, with President Tim Phillips helping organize counter-protests, [according to The New York Times](#). "Even before the new governor was sworn in last month, executives from the Koch-backed group had worked behind the scenes to try to encourage a union showdown," says the Times.

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Furthermore, the Kochs' "political action committee gave Gov. Scott Walker \$43,000 and helped fund a multimillion-dollar attack ad campaign against his opponent during the 2010 gubernatorial election," [says The Cap Times](#), a progressive Wisconsin paper.

The Cap Times also writes that Koch Companies Public Sector LLC, a lobbying arm of the company, has set up office in Madison, Wis.

No wonder Scott Walker was so quick to take what he thought was a call from one of the brothers Koch.

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