

Peter Foster: Obama vs. The Kochtopus

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Peter Foster September 3, 2010 – 6:31 pm

We feel a mighty winnowing coming in November

The big Tea Party rally in Washington last weekend has thrown the punditocracy into a tizzy. Liberals are, naturally, beside themselves, but even some Canadian conservatives, such as the Post's own Tasha Kheiriddin, seemed to see the USS Handmaid's Tale lurking offshore the Potomac, carrying a cargo of threatening theocrats. However, the latest counterattack on the movement is based not so much on the dangers of God as the threat of Mammon. The new tactic in the Democrats' increasingly desperate attempt to derail the Tea Party juggernaut before the November elections is to suggest that it is not just a train of unsophisticated know-nothings, led by the PhD-less Sarah Palin and — as Christopher Hitchens snottily called him — the “quasi-educated Mormon broadcaster” Glenn Beck. It is a corporate plot!

The New Yorker, house magazine of the Chattering Classes, last week carried a piece, titled “Covert Operations,” that suggested that the movement was being secretly funded and manipulated by two “billionaire brothers who are waging war against Obama.” The villains, who are “out to destroy progressivism,” are Charles

and David Koch, owners of giant Koch Industries, “the biggest company you’ve never heard of.”

Not only are these dark figures allegedly for “drastically” lower taxes, minimal social services “for the needy,” and more lax environmental regulation, their company, according to Greenpeace, is a “kingpin of climate science denial.” In “political circles,” according to the article, it is known as “the Kochtopus” (by analogy to Standard Oil, which was dubbed “the Octopus.”)

The magazine fingered the brothers’ support for an organization called Americans for Progress, which in turn had “helped educate” Tea Party activists. The Kochs had also founded or funded such free-market bastions as the Cato Institute, the Heritage Foundation and the Mercatus Centre at George Mason University.

These guys sounded great! But of course that wasn’t The New Yorker’s take. According to the article, the brothers’ defining and fatal flaw was that the programs they supported were “self interested.” There might be liberal billionaires that splashed money around in the political arena, notably George Soros, but none of Mr. Soros’s contributions, according to the article, were “in the service of his own economic interests.”

This is almost comically revealing of the liberal mindset, which, while posturing as sophisticated and analytical, is consumed by primitive “them and us” moralism and still hasn’t grasped the Invisible Hand after two hundred years of its spectacular benefits. Worse, it implies that its own kind are motivated only by “the public interest,” with no thought to the satisfactions of rewards of wielding power. “We” are motivated only by sustainability, responsibility, inclusiveness and progressivism. “They” are driven by hatred and mean-spiritedness (The Kochs are described in The New Yorker as “the billionaires behind the hate”.) It is impossible for “them” to operate on principle. “They” have no principles. Examination of objective truth doesn’t come into it. The doctrine of catastrophic climate change, for example, is proven simply by the fact of “their” opposition, which can only be based in the fact that legislation would hurt their bottom line.

Koch Industries is described as “the poster child of a company run amok.” But one fascinating thing about Koch is that it isn’t typical at all. That’s got a lot to do with the fact that it is a private company, and thus better able to resist the blackmail and thuggery of the often state-funded NGO crowd.

Meanwhile, there is more to demonization of the Kochs than their use of money to support right-wing causes. The Obama administration is still infuriated by last January’s Supreme Court decision in the case of Citizens United. That decision overturned restrictions on corporations’ rights to defend or promote their interests before elections. At the time, President Obama called it “a major victory

for big oil, Wall Street banks, health insurance companies” and other “special interests.”

Categorize any other social group as all bad and you’ll be pilloried for ignorance and intolerance. Suggest that all oil companies are crooks and you’re just running for office, or trying to stay in it.

Mr. Obama subsequently vilified the Supremes for their decision during the State of the Union address. The Great Conciliator similarly demonized Chrysler bondholders for attempting to stand up for their rights, and castigated opponents of Obamacare as guilty of “demagoguery and distortion.”

There can be no doubt that corporations sometimes promote self-interested legislation that is against the public interest, but the most egregious examples at the moment are those who support draconian climate change laws and want wind and solar subsidies, or opportunities to trade in government-mandated hot air.

The Koch brothers might well seek to use the Tea Party movement to promote their interests, but that doesn’t make those interests invalid, much less suggest that they should be silenced. The most dangerous people are those who condemn self interest on principle, because they live in the delusion that they have none themselves. George Soros, too, should be free to promote all the anti-market nonsense he wants, and leave it up to the public to separate the wheat from the chaff at election time. We feel a mighty winnowing coming in November.

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