

Kochtopus: Right-wing Network of Money, Power, and Influence

by  [Dean Walker](#) April 25, 2011

Originally published at the Daily Censored for Project Censored.

Charles and David Koch might very well be the greatest threat to America since World War II. Over the last fifty years, the brothers have been slowly developing, tweaking, and expanding a fascist political network designed to end American democracy as we know it. The many arms of the Koch brother's ideological network have been descriptively labeled by some as the Kochtopus.

The Kochtopus finances no less than 85 right-wing extremist organizations that actively promote the Koch brothers' vision of a corporate state or fascism. Fascism is not a word that should be thrown about lightly. After all, over the last century, the greatest threat to freedom and democracy was not communism, rather fascist-influenced Nazism. Of course, this is not to say that communism was not also a threat to freedom and democracy. However, the Axis powers of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Nationalist Japan posed the single greatest threat to freedom and democracy the world has ever known.

The Koch brothers come from a family of Nazis and fascists. Fred Koch, the brother's father, came to the U.S. from Germany and went to MIT, where he studied engineering. In 1927, Fred invented a more efficient process for converting oil into gasoline. However, as the family lore goes, the major oil companies threatened to shut him out of the industry. While the details are limited, it seems like Fred then contacted his brother Erich, who was a high-ranking officer in the Nazi S.S., and had recently been put in charge of Prussia. Erich helped Fred gain oil contracts. A few years later, Erich was transferred and put in charge of one of the most notorious death camps, Buchenwald.

While Fred was producing oil for our enemy, Erich and his wife Ilse were in the act of committing some of the most heinous crimes known to man. Aunt Ilse especially seemed to thrive in the monstrosity of the Nazi death camp. Ilse's cruelty has been made into at least two campy (no pun intended) films. In later life, Ilse was often referred to as the "Lampshade Lady," or the "Bitch of Buchenwald." Apparently, Aunt Ilse had the psychopathic hobby of using the tattooed skins from the corpses at Buchenwald to sew into decorative items like lampshades.

As one would imagine, Erich and Ilse didn't do so well after the war. In fact, just months before the war's end, Erich was executed by Hitler's own S.S. for embezzling Nazi money and using Buchenwald for his own personal piggy bank. Ilse fled to her family estate where she was picked up by U.S. forces and tried for war crimes. She received a six-year sentence in by a U.S. military court,

which was later reduced to 2 years by U.S. General Cox. The U.N. tried her a second time. Ilse received a sentence of life in prison for her crimes at Buchenwald. In 1967, after exhausting all her appeals, the Lampshade Lady hung herself in her cell.

After the war, father Fred, on the other hand, attempted to play his cards with the new dictator. After the collapse of the Nazis, Fred continued processing oil, only this time with Stalin. However, Stalin was not a big fan of Fred and soon began to nationalize the oil industry. Frustrated, Fred Koch came back to the U.S. Being from a family that supported the Nazis and fascists, Fred Koch openly spoke out against all things left.

According to an in depth article on the Koch brothers published in the *New Yorker* by Jane Mayer:

“In 1958, Fred Koch became one of the original members of the John Birch Society, the arch-conservative group known, in part, for a highly skeptical view of governance and for spreading fears of a Communist takeover. Members considered President Dwight D. Eisenhower to be a Communist agent. In a self-published book, Koch claimed that “the Communists have infiltrated both the Democrat and Republican Parties.” He wrote admiringly of Benito Mussolini’s suppression of Communists in Italy, and disparagingly of the American civil-rights movement. “The colored man looms large in the Communist plan to take over America,” he warned. Welfare was a secret plot to attract rural blacks to cities, where they would foment “a vicious race war.” In a 1963 speech that prefigures the Tea Party’s talk of a secret socialist plot, Koch predicted that Communists would “infiltrate the highest offices of government in the U.S. until the President is a Communist, unknown to the rest of us.”

It should be remembered, that the fascist and Nazi loving Koch family fought against the social welfare state of England and the U.S., along with the communists. And the Koch family continues to fight against England and America’s social programs.

No one argues that fact that Fred Koch worked hard to instill his values in his four sons, Fred Jr., Charles, David, and William. Although, it might be debatable as to whether Charles and David are applying their father’s extremist, fascist ideology in order to directly alter America as we know it. In an interview with Brian Doherty, an editor for the libertarian magazine *Reason*, David Koch talked of how his father indoctrinated the boys. “He was constantly speaking to us children about what was wrong with government.”

According to the [New Yorker article](#), one of the most respected conservatives in America, the late William F. Buckley, Jr., called the John Birch Society (and the Koch family ideology) “Anarcho-Totalitarianism.” With all due respect to William F. Buckley, Jr., I’ll just keep to Mussolini’s term, fascism. However, the “Anarcho” term essentially refers to the extremist devotion to unfettered free

markets. In many ways, anarchy is the result of true “free markets”. But, it is the word “Totalitarianism” that makes Buckley’s observations so keenly astute and relevant.

In 1967, Fred died and passed his fortunes onto to his sons. Soon after, Fred Jr., and William split with their bothers Charles and David as to how the business should be run. After a complex dispute, Charles and David bought out Fred Jr. and William. William Koch now heads the oil company Oxbow Industry, while Fred owns several mansions in Europe that house famous works of art.

Charles and David’s first forays into serious national politics came in 1979 when Charles persuaded David to run as the V.P. candidate for president on the Libertarian ticket. According to Doherty, the Koch brother plan has long been to tear the U.S. government “out at the roots.” During the campaign, the Koch brother poured more than \$2 million of their own money into the campaign.

Disheartened with the less than 1% election results, the Koch brother began to create and funnel their money in libertarian think tanks and lobbying groups. While other millionaire and billionaires have donated money to political caused, no two people have given more to promote their own self serving interests. For example, Michael Vachon, a spokesman for billionaire George Soros argued that Soros’s has been transparent in his donation and that, “none of his contributions are in the service of his own economic interests.”

On the other hand, a 2004 report by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, a watchdog group, concluded the Kochs’, “foundations give money to nonprofit organizations that do research and advocacy on issues that impact the profit margin of Koch Industries.”

The Kochtopus has many arms. According to a report released this month by the [Center for American Progress](#), in 1977, Charles Koch founded the CATO Institute. In 1984, David Koch created Citizens for a Sound Economy, which in 2004 split off into Freedom Works and Americans for Prosperity. The Kochtopus also bankrolls numerous phony grassroots or “Astroturf” groups with seemingly innocuous names that have the words like “citizens” or “Americans” in their names. During the health care debate, one can recall former Republican Speaker of the House Dick Arney roll up in Freedom Works buses at the Tea Party rallies.

Along with the Cato Institute and Heritage foundation, the Kochtopus gives to no less than 85 different political think tanks and lobbying groups. According to the Center for American Progress, “This list of organizations is long but they have one common thread: promoting an antitax, antiregulatory ideology that will ultimately gut government’s ability to ensure markets functioning properly for everyone and protect consumers against abuses in the system. In addition to promoting this right-wing ideology, some of the groups on this list, such as the Competitive Enterprise Institute, seek to undermine the science behind climate change. Indeed, many of the policies these

organizations promote not only further a right-wing ideology but they also increase profits for Koch Industries.”



photo by Greenpeace

According to my former employer [Greenpeace](#), the Kochtopus has contributed at least \$55 million to climate change denying front groups, making them the single largest contributors, outspending ExxonMobil. However, the Kochtopus' network, combined with other corporate axis powers, have created a powerful monster designed to attack our government on every front.

Consider for a moment the recent story of Professor Bill Cronon, from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, [writing about were the policies](#) and funding is coming from for the latest anti-labor and workers rights attack bills. Cronon discovered the right-wing think tank American Legislation Exchange Council (ALEC) had virtually become a public policy writing factory. According to Center for American Progress, ALEC has received roughly \$668,000 from the Koch brothers. However, Cronon points out, that their contribution alone does not make up the whole of ALEC's support, nor explains the entire Tea Party phenomena:

“But even though I'm more than prepared to believe that David and Charles Koch have provided large amounts of money to help fund the conservative flood tide that is sweeping through state legislatures right now, I just don't find it plausible that two brothers from Wichita, Kansas, no matter how wealthy, can be responsible for this explosion of radical conservative legislation. It also goes without saying that Scott Walker cannot be single-handedly responsible for what we're seeing either;”

Cronon goes on to explain just how influential ALEC has been in drafting boilerplate polices the mostly Republican legislators the Koch brothers financially supported, like Wisconsin governor Scott Walker, to the tune of \$48,000. Cronon explains:

“The most important group, I'm pretty sure, is the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) ... Its goal for the past forty years has been to draft “model bills” that conservative legislators can introduce in the 50 states. Its website claims that in each legislative cycle, its members introduce 1000 pieces of legislation based on its work, and claims that roughly 18% of these bills are enacted into law. (Among them was the controversial 2010 anti-immigrant law in Arizona.)”

To be a member of ALEC one need only be a Republican legislator, (although some Democrats are allowed for a fee), or a rich corporate contributor. Along the Koch Industries, UPS, State Farm Insurance, Wal-Mart, Pfizer, Coke Cola, Johnson & Johnson, AT & T, GlaxoSmithKline, PhRMA, and Kraft Foods are all listed as members of ALEC's private enterprise board. Professor Cronon is right to point out that there is no business or legislator has single-handedly created this hostility to toward unions, environmental protections, social justice, and a host of other progressive values. It is a network of corporations working hand in hand to undermine the social safety net of our nation.

However, no business is more emblematic of this vast right-wing push toward fascism and the corporate state. After all, the Koch Brothers own father openly supported fascism and the John Birch Society. The brothers were indoctrinated by their father's ideology and became strong supporters of the John Birch Society.

Rob Stein, a Democratic political strategist who has studied the conservative movement's finances, stated the Kochs are "at the epicenter of the anti-Obama movement. But it's not just about Obama. They would have done the same to Hillary Clinton. They did the same with Bill Clinton. They are out to destroy progressivism."

According to the Center for American Progress, since 1990, the Kochtopus donated \$11 million directly to federal candidates, with 89 percent to Republicans. In the midterm elections alone, the Kochtopus gave \$2.1 million. They donated to 62 of the 87 member of the House Republican freshman class. In addition, they spent money on 12 of the new members of the U.S. Senate.

What makes the Koch brothers and Koch Industries so unique and emblematic is the extent of their ideological network. Their Kochtopus of think-tanks, lobbying front groups, Astroturf / Tea Party "boots on the ground" organizations, along with a small army of legislators in their hip pocket makes the Koch brothers are a force to be respected and feared. Koch funded policy wonks wrote much of the language found in the *Citizen United* decision, which gave corporations the right of personhood. This has given the Kochtopus free reign to secretly fund hundreds of political attacks adds against their political opponents. The Kochtopus will create dozens of papers with phony, drummed up statistics from a host of Koch funded think tanks and lobby groups. Koch funded Republicans will then use those fabricated statistics in their stump speeches. Then a second Koch funded Astroturf group will then quote the Republican candidate or the study in a series of attack ads. Once the original study has been proven to be false, it will have already too late, the damage from the Kochtopus attack has already been done.

According to ThinkProgress.org:

“When the Supreme Court took up the *Citizens United* case, Koch-funded front groups filed a series of amicus briefs arguing that unlimited corporate money in politics is protected by the First Amendment. For example, the Cato Institute, founded and financed by the Koch brothers, submitted a brief that called for “unfettered” corporate “speech” and the Institute for Justice, founded and financed by David’s brother Charles, submitted a brief claiming that campaign finance laws prohibiting unlimited corporate money “trump the First Amendment.” Koch-funded groups later lobbied aggressively to oppose efforts to provide transparency for the new tidal wave of corporate spending.”

Since *Citizen United*, the Koch brothers have been actively engaged in indoctrinating their own employees. This week, *The Nation* published an article titled [Big-Brothers Thought Control](#). The article reveals that on the eve of the recent midterm elections, the Kochtopus sent out over 50,000 urgent letters to each and every one of the U.S. employees instructing them how to vote. According to the article:

“Legal experts interviewed for this story called the blatant corporate politicking highly unusual, although no longer skirting the edge of legality, thanks to last year’s *Citizens United* Supreme Court decision, which granted free speech rights to corporations.

“Before *Citizens United*, federal election law allowed a company like Koch Industries to talk to officers and shareholders about whom to vote for, but not to talk with employees about whom to vote for,” explains Paul M. Secunda, associate professor of law at Marquette University. But according to Secunda, who recently wrote in *The Yale Law Journal Online* about the effects of *Citizens United* on political coercion in the workplace, the decision knocked down those regulations. “Now, companies like Koch Industries are free to send out newsletters persuading their employees how to vote. They can even intimidate their employees into voting for their candidates.” Secunda adds, “It’s a very troubling situation.”

The Nation article goes on to point out that while it is illegal for unions to engage in this sort of blatant political propaganda, the *Citizens United* case frees up the corporations. And the Kochtopus has immediately taken advantage of this:

“With *Citizens United*, it seems, the country is heading back to the days of court-enforced corporatocracy. Already, workers at a Koch subsidiary in Portland, Oregon, are complaining about being subjected to political and ideological propaganda. Employees at Georgia-Pacific warehouses in Portland say the company encourages them to read Charles Koch’s *The Science of Success: How Market-Based Management Built the World’s Largest Private Company* and to attend ideological seminars in which Koch management preaches their bosses’ “market-based management” philosophy.

Travis McKinney, an employee at a Portland Georgia-Pacific distribution center, says, “They drill into your head things like ‘The 10 Guiding Principles of Koch Industries.’ They even stamp the ten principles on your time card.””

Over the last twenty years, the Kochtopus strategy has been to build, both vertically and horizontally, a movement that supported their right-wing extremist agenda. While the goal sounded ambitious to the Koch brother friends, with the help of the Tea Party movement, the Kochtopus has achieved this very ambitious goal.

The Center for American Progress list repealing health reform, denying climate change, fighting Wall Street reform, dismantling collective bargaining rights, keeping corporate money in elections, and fighting internet neutrality as some of the top funded policies currently wrapped in the Kochtopus’ tentacles.

One of the best ways to fight against the Kochtopus’ assault on social justice and democracy is to boycott some of the products they produce. For example, Georgia Pacific makes Dixie Cups, bath towel products under the labels Vanity Fair, Angle Soft and Quilted Northern, and paper towel products like Brawny and Sparkle. Other popular products the Kochtopus manufactures include Lycra and Stainmaster Carpets. To see a more complete list of Koch Industry products to boycott visit this website: <http://www.chailife.com/2011/02/boycott-koch-industries-avoid-these-brands/>