

## [Are there Hitler-era Nazis in the Koch Family Closet?](#)

Wednesday, 30 March 2011 12:37 Leonard Zeskind

Charles Koch and his younger brother David Koch, and their funding of various political causes over the past thirty-plus years have recently become a matter of public record and concern.

At the moment, the money that the Kochs have contributed to Americans for Prosperity and the money that they have directed toward the election campaign of now Republican Governor of Wisconsin Scott Walker, have brought the Koch brothers rebuke and in some case street protests (in addition to the huge protests and sit-ins directed at Walker's union-busting drive). The source of both Charles and David Koch's wealth is Koch Industries, a privately-held business headquartered in Wichita, Kansas. The brothers inherited an enterprise founded on building oil refineries from their father, Fred C. Koch, a MIT-educated engineer who died in 1967. They have turned Koch Industries into a huge conglomerate, making themselves two of the wealthiest men in the world.

Along the way they have remained active in ultra-conservative politics. In 1977, Charles donated sums large enough to launch the CATO Institute, according to a January 19, 1992 article in *The Kansas City Star* by Matt Schofield. In 1980, David Koch ran for vice-president on the Libertarian Party, pumping in large sums of his own money, according to an October 25, 1979 article in the above mentioned *Star* by Laura Scott. Most conspicuously, the Libertarian Party opposed the Reagan candidacy in this election, with an even more hard-core version of un-regulated, un-taxed so-called free enterprise. Charles and David Koch started a term limits organization called, Citizens for Congressional Reform (CCR), quickly pumping \$400,000 into the operation, according to a November 11, 1991 article in *Business Week*. This group spent more than one million dollars in California, Washington and Michigan until it disbanded, "just after term-limit opponents filed a complaint with the Michigan Secretary of State questioning the validity of the list of donors CCR provided to comply with state law," according to a Summer 1993 article by Amy Young in *Common Cause Magazine*.

There is, of course, much more of this type of activity from the Kochs. Two points stand out from these earlier efforts: They were motivated by a form of conservative-libertarianism that is just outside the "respectable" conservatism exemplified by William Buckley's Cold War-era magazine, *National Review*. And they often aimed their wrath at Republicans; including Ronald Reagan, who has become something akin to a God-Idol on that side of the political universe.

In that sense, the brothers' politics were inherited, like the business, from their father, Frederick Chase Koch. Fred C. Koch was born in 1900 in Texas, the son of a Dutch immigrant, Harry Koch, according to both family lore and a book on Dutch-American entrepreneurs. (Of interest here, he was not of Prussian descent.) And the story has been

told many times about how he graduated from M.I.T., went to work in Texas and then moved to Wichita, Kansas, in 1925 to form, along with a couple of other M.I.T. graduates, an engineering firm that became Winkler-Koch Engineering Company. In 1928, Fred C. invented "a thermal-crack process that squeezed more gasoline out of oil than prevailing methods," according to a November 20, 1994 article by Leslie Wayne in *The New York Times*. When Fred C. started selling his refinery methods, the oil companies struck back with forty lawsuits that Fred C. fought until he won, with a \$1.5 million settlement in 1952.

According to the *Times*, Fred C. Koch was "shut out of the domestic market in the 1930s by these battles," and consequently went to Russia, "where he built 15 refineries." It would be wrong, however, to conclude that he was, "kicked out of the US," during this period, as some have implied. He married Mary Robinson of Kansas City in 1932, and the couple proceeded to have four children: Frederick in 1933, Charles in 1935, David and William, twins born in 1940. He fought the lawsuits during this period, and in the 1940s continued building his business interests in the United States: co-founding Wood River Oil & Refining Company in 1940, buying Spring Creek Ranch in 1941, and in 1945 forming Koch Engineering Company, according to the official company history of Koch Industries. In 1946, shortly after the war, Wood River bought Rock Island Oil & Refining Company.

### **The Koch Family History According to Damien Crisp**

Describing these business interests is necessary as a correction to a view, promoted in "The Kochs, A Nazi Past, Oil & The Foundation of The Rights," by Damien Crisp, that Fred C. Koch was both related to and involved with Hitler-era Nazis. This piece has been widely circulated on the internet.

Several points from Mr. Crisp are of particular relevance and bear quoting:

"Koch Industries is the child of the violence of Buchenwald."

"Where is the connection between the German Koch's (sic) and Fred Koch? Besides evidence the American Koch was related to Ilse's family, Erich Koch (a high level Nazi official in charge of Prussia) invites Fred Koch to sell his oil in Nazi Germany when he is banned from doing business in the US. After the fall of Nazi Germany, Erich Koch and Fred expand the oil empire to the Soviet Union. Erich Koch had been in charge of Prussia for Hitler so his ties to the Soviet Union ran deep."

"American Fred Koch, and through association the Kochs from Germany, establish the John Birch Society in the 1950s in NY, which becomes the policy center for American conservatives."

"Fred Chase Koch (September 23, 1900 - November 17, 1967) chemical engineer founded the TEXACO oil refinery firm that later became Koch Industries (Chevron)."

### The Actual Facts of the Case

Let us begin with the last statement, Fred C. did begin his career with the Texas Company, in Port Arthur, Texas, according to a Koch family foundation history. And the Texas Fuel Company did become better known as Texaco. But Fred C. neither founded it, nor did it later become Koch Industries. Texaco was founded in 1901, one year after Fred C's birth, by four men--none of who were named Koch.

Ilse Koch was mentioned in Mr. Crisp's history as having a family relationship to Fred C. Koch. Ilse Koch was born of a Prussian laborer, and did marry SS Col. Karl Otto Koch. Karl Koch was the first commandant of the Buchenwald Concentration Camp (KZ), where Ilse Koch, as the commandant's wife, earned a reputation for brutality, etc. and was known as the Bitch of Buchenwald. In 1947, at an American military trial, Ilse was sentenced originally to eight years, but soon had her sentence reduced to four. Rearrested in 1949, in 1951 a West German court convicted her of crimes against German nationals, and sentenced her to life in prison. She committed suicide in her prison cell in 1961, according to the very authoritative Encyclopedia of the Third Reich. Fred C. Koch was of Dutch descent.

Ilse's husband, Karl Koch was first a commandant at Sachsenhausen, which it should be noted is just outside Berlin and was a KZ, but not a killing-extermination camp; none of the camps in Germany proper were "death camps," although there was obviously a lot of killing and death there. He became commandant of Buchenwald and later Majdanek, according to Leni Yahil's The Holocaust. Karl Koch was convicted of corruption, etc. by an SS court and hanged to death in April 1945, so he was not prosecuted directly at Nuremberg. (It should be noted that Buchenwald, located outside Weimar, was also not an extermination camp, although many murders were committed there. Majdanek, situated in Poland near Lublin, was an extermination KZ.)

Erich Koch, was first Gauleiter of East Prussia (before Hitler took power), and later after Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, he became Reichkomissar of Ukraine as well, according to Yahil's The Holocaust. He was not indicted or prosecuted at Nuremberg, according to Telford Taylor's book, and Joseph E. Persico's Nuremberg: Infamy on Trial. After the war Eric Koch tried to escape to South America via a submarine, and failed. He was handed over to the Polish government in 1950 by the Brits, and was sentenced to life in prison, where he died in 1986. It would have been impossible for Erich Koch to do any business with the Soviet Union, after the war, as the Soviet's wanted to execute him themselves. See also Christopher Browning's The Origins of the Final Solution, which has several interesting references to Erich Koch's work as a territorial administrator.

In any case, Fred C. Koch had started doing business with the Soviet Union in 1929, and did not need a former Hitlerite administrator of the Ukraine to gain entree.

As to a link between the Hitlerite Koch's in Germany and the American Fred Koch, Erich Koch, who survived the war, was held by the Brits after capture. There were no family connection between the Prussian-German Kochs (and there were several others with that

last name in the Nazi apparatus), and the American Fred C. Koch, who was of Dutch descent.

Fred C. Koch was active in the John Birch Society, according to multiple sources. And he was on the national council as late as 1967, according to both *The Politics of Unreason* and *Danger on the Right*, two authoritative books on the far right in the 1950s and 1960s. So also, from Wichita, was Robert Love of the Love Box Company, which has stayed active in anti-abortion politics. Fred C. Koch was also active in the National Right to Work Committee, according to *Danger on the Right*.

The John Birch Society was founded, however, by Robert Welch in 1958. Robert Welch edited the Birch Society magazine, *American Opinion*, not Fred C. Koch. And the headquarters of the Birch Society was with Welch in Belmont, Massachusetts, not with the Kochs in Wichita.

The fact that Fred C. Koch did not *found* the Birch Society, and was not related to or did business with the Hitler-era Nazi Kochs, does not subtract from the tremendous amount of harm that he did in his time, and that David and Charles have done in ours. It does not help, however, to fight the Kochs with misinformation. The truth is strong enough by itself.