



Phillips/Powderhorn Nokomis Riverside

News

Things don't go better with Koch

by *Jim Hightower*

The Koch boys—Charles and David—have been setting up, financing and orchestrating a nefarious network of far-right front groups for more than three decades. They have quietly poured tens of millions of dollars from their industrial conglomerate, foundations and personal fortunes (now topping \$21.5 billion each) into Americans for Prosperity, the Cato Institute, the Federalist Society,



FreedomWorks, the Heritage Foundation and dozens of other political organizations, as well as funding and “educating” malleable politicians eager to serve the rising plutocracy. From Reagan’s presidency forward, their extensive network has been steadily (and often stealthily) sliding the brothers’ wildest laissez-faire fantasies into law.

To see how this mass of money twists government into an anti-democratic instrument of the corporate will, look to Wisconsin. As widely reported, the badger state’s new GOP governor, Scott Walker, has gone off on a deranged, unprincipled, relentless and apparently illegal right-wing holy war against teachers, firefighters, and other public employees—including eliminating their fundamental democratic right of collective bargaining. His autocratic extremism has made him wildly unpopular in his own state and nationally infamous, but less well-known is the fact that Walker is a hopeless Koch-head.

An ambitious but unknown county executive in Milwaukee prior to 2010, this guy climbed into the governor’s chair on a stack of Koch money. The brothers’ corporate PAC was Walker’s single biggest donor in last year’s election. Also, David himself gave \$1 million to the Republican Governors Association, a donation that leveraged an RGA expenditure of more than \$3.4 million in Wisconsin to help elect Walker. In addition, Americans for Prosperity (AFP)—a front group created, financed and directed by David—put hundreds of thousands of dollars of electioneering support behind Walker’s gubernatorial bid.

Then came the cashing in of those chips. The head of AFP (a former Jack Abramoff lobbying partner) says that even before Walker was sworn in, he was urging the new gov to stage a political showdown with Wisconsin’s public employees. Also, to keep a tight rein on their boy, the Kochs quietly opened a seven-person lobbying shop one block from the state capital. And, as soon as the corporatized governor took office, another Koch front, the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), moved in to guide his anti-labor agenda and to push for corporate tax cuts, de-funding Wisconsin’s healthcare program, and weakening state environmental protections. The brothers have more than a purely ideological interest in all of this. Their \$100-billion-a-year conglomerate, Koch Industries, owns substantial timber, oil, coal and pipeline facilities in Wisconsin, so it is looking for a nice return on its investment in Walker’s anti-government extremism. For example, one stunning provision slipped into the bill to gut worker rights gives Governor Walker unchecked power to sell off any publicly owned utilities to private interests on a no-bid basis. Guess what corporation happens to be in the utility business? Right.