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“Our Donations Are Different”

Monday, January 31st, 2011

[Tim Carney points out](#) the absurdity of protesters funded by billionaire George Soros picketing the Koch family this weekend for corrupting the political system with its billionaire money. The moral rectitude on display is either hilarious or nauseating. Not sure which.

Carney also makes an interesting point about the lefty organization the Center for American Progress. The organization [decries the “hidden influence”](#) of corporations on the political process, and lashes out at the way the Kochs “covertly” influence politics by donating to nonprofits (scare quotes because there’s never been anything all that covert about it), but the Center for American Progress itself *doesn’t release the names of its donors*.

Now most of us at Koch-funded *Reason* don’t believe that think tanks, non-profits and advocacy groups *should* be compelled to release the names of their donors. (I don’t say “all” because I haven’t talked to everyone about this issue, and believe it or not, we are allowed form our own opinions!) Yet in the interest of transparency, we ourselves publish in our magazine the name of anyone who have given us at least \$1,000. (It was in the April issue last year.) So in sum: The lefty group that decries the covert nature of free market donors keeps its own donor list secret, while the free market group that defends the right to make political donations anonymously not only allows access to its donor list, it actually publishes the list for anyone to see.

One other thing. While clicking around on coverage of this weekend’s anti-Koch protests, I stumbled onto [this article](#) about the Kochs by Yasha Levine (of the [“the TSA backlash is a libertarian conspiracy!”](#) fame). Though it engages in much of the usual anti-Koch conspiracy mongering, the article also actually includes some sound criticism of Koch Industries, including the fact that the company engages in a lot of rent-seeking, dictator coddling, and other practices that aren’t remotely free market. (I won’t vouch for the validity of all the allegations. Just saying that if they are true, they’re legitimate criticisms.)

What’s hilarious, though, is that Levine points out in several places that the Koch-funded Cato Institute publishes papers and op-eds decrying some of the very anti-market policies the Koch company takes advantage of. Levine thinks this makes Cato a bunch of hypocrites. I

suppose that's one way of looking at it. Of course, you could also say that it's a pretty good indication that Cato is guided by a core set of principles, and isn't afraid to advocate those principles even when doing so butts up against the interests of one of its more influential donors.

Note the lose-lose scenario. You're either in the service of your corporate paymasters, or you're hypocrites for taking positions that your donors don't abide in the real world. (But don't mind me, I'm just [the useful idiot](#) in all of this!) I suppose the honorable thing would be for those of us in the free market movement to refuse to take any donations from anyone who has ever worked for a business or corporation, or inherited any money from someone who did (wonder if the Center for American Progress will offer to give back [that sweet Walmart money](#) in kind?). Of course, that would basically put anyone who has any money to donate off-limits. Which would mean no more free market advocacy. Hey, maybe that's the point!

(Obligatory disclosure: I work for *Reason* magazine, which is published by the Reason Foundation, which gets money from the Koch family. Before that I worked for the Cato Institute, which also receives funding from Koch (and also Soros!). I am grateful to the Kochs for partially funding my six years of work on police and prosecutorial misconduct, police militarization, wrongful convictions, and criminal justice reform.)