

# DAILY KOS

## Jane Mayer's Dark Money: an Eye Opener

Madeleine Kando

March 12, 2017

I always knew that money was a big influence in politics, but I took it as a given, an unpleasant fact of life, like the harsh winters in New England. But after reading Jane Mayer's '[Dark Money: the Hidden History of the Billionaires behind the Rise of the Radical Right](#)', I realize that there are different types of money spent on politics. Hard money is regulated and has to be accounted for, but soft money, also known as dark money, is not. This type is now so entrenched in the American political system, that it would take an earthquake of enormous force to dislodge it.

Of course, the biggest players in the story of dark money are the Koch brothers. I was not aware of the extent to which they are responsible for the rightward trend in American politics and how far they are willing to go to advance their political ideas, not to mention their fortunes.

They have been at it for almost half a century, inheriting their libertarian (if not anarchistic) views from their grandfather, Fred Koch, whose rabid anti-communism did not prevent him from making a fortune building refineries for Stalin and later made lucrative business deals with Hitler, whom he greatly admired.

Koch Industries' corporate rap sheet is miles long. They were found guilty of countless health violations, causing the death of several employees. They were convicted of falsifying emissions output figures at their refineries; they willfully disregard safety regulations, which they consider 'socialistic'. 'My freedom is more important than your life' should be the industry's motto.

What is most shocking is how they have abused the tax-exempt status of non-profits, the so-called 501(c)(4). These organizations collect hundreds of millions of dollars in secret contributions and rather than spend it on social welfare projects, they spend it on influencing politics. Under the guise of generosity, they have weaponized philanthropy.

### **The Kochtopus**

But this is just one of the tentacles of what is referred to as the Kochtopus. This beast reaches in practically every corner of American society. Media pundits like Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh are its megaphones; it generously funds numerous think tanks like the Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute and the American Enterprise Institute to give it a veneer of scientific respectability. It has set up fake grassroots projects, making it seem like the Koch brothers' ideas have popular support, and with its lobbying efforts and limitless contributions, it makes sure that candidates get elected that will pass favorable legislation (read Paul Ryan, Scott Walker and Karl Rove). It has influenced judges' rulings (Citizens United) and last but not least,

it has established an Academic beachhead, to influence the minds of young people.

The military calls this a full-spectrum dominance, 'when air, surface and sub-surface as well as the electromagnetic spectrum and information space of a battle area is under an army's control'.

Why do the Koch brothers and people like them abhor paying taxes, abhor government? Nobody likes to pay taxes, (although some of my Dutch friends have no problem at all with it, since they know that ultimately, it will benefit them.) For people like the Koch brothers, however, it is a moral duty to avoid paying taxes; they see it simply as defending their property rights.

Charles Koch likes to refer to the philosopher Maimonides, whom he obviously misquotes when he says that 'the highest form of charity is to dispense with charity altogether.' In fact, Maimonides said that, although 'the highest form of sharing is giving money to enable an individual to be self-reliant, the responsibility to help the poor is unequivocal and absolute.'

The other big contender in the fight of the super rich is inheritance tax. Not only are these fights fought against the government, but is often fought amongst siblings, out of greed. One member of the Koch network tried to adopt her ex-husband, so that she could claim him as one of her children, in order to enlarge her share of the family trust. Sharing was never easy for the Koch brothers, be it a treat with friends or an inheritance. Their answer was: 'We just want our fair share - which is all of it.'

After the financial collapse, the power of the Kochtopus went into overdrive. The Koch funded think tanks, advocacy groups and talking heads created a new narrative that convinced many that it wasn't a lack of government regulation that caused the crash, but too much government involvement, which had made it easier for low-income Americans to buy homes, proof that the free market still worked. If you have enough money, you can rewrite history itself.

This total rewriting of history which cuts a path to re-shaping the social contract in America has now culminated in the accepted belief that free markets and zero government intervention will make people HAPPY, whereas big government leads to tyranny, Fascism and even Nazism. It tells you that minimal wage will cause higher unemployment, a sense of dependency and depression and that global warming is good because it lengthens the growing season. In response to the EPA's regulation on air pollution, the Koch brothers argued that smog blocks the sun, which causes fewer cases of skin cancer.

### **The United State of ALEC**

One of the Kochtopus' more powerful tentacles is ALEC (American Legislative Exchange Council), a group of corporate lobbyists and Republican legislators who write bill proposals, which then get voted on in the states' senates. ALEC is behind numerous laws that benefit big business and harms the rest of us. The push to slash federal funding for Medicaid, Food Stamps and privatize Medicare all originate with ALEC. By instituting tax cuts for the wealthy and gutting labor and environmental regulations, ALEC is quickly acquiring the same amount of political power as our two political parties. \*\*

It is a sad state of affairs when two unelected billionaires can dictate what is best for 300 million

Americans. How did we let it get this far? With the Kochtopus' reach, extreme libertarian views are no longer seen as a fringe but part of a 'balanced' discussion of what is 'good' for our country.

In April 1938, President Franklin Roosevelt sent the US Congress the following warning: "The liberty of a democracy is not safe if the people tolerate the growth of private power to a point where it becomes stronger than the democratic state itself. That, in its essence, is fascism."

It is time we took that warning seriously.