



Patience, secrecy in Kochs' complex conspiracy

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In 1933, a handful of wealthy Wall Streeters were upset that the newly elected president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, had dared to tax the rich in order to fund programs to lessen the painful poverty people were experiencing due to the Great Depression. They were so upset that they came up with a ridiculous plan to overthrow Roosevelt and install a military government. Due to their own ineptitude and hubris, their plan failed, and important poverty-busting programs of the New Deal like Social Security, the Works Progress Administration and the Tennessee Valley Authority put people to work, pulled them out of desperate poverty and propelled the country into the 20th century.

It's tempting to brush off 1933's bumbling fat cats — we can just picture them cloistered in their posh private club, smoking \$100 cigars, grumping about Roosevelt and whispering about hiring a private army to overthrow the whole damn democratic process. However, our nation's common good is constantly under attack from plutocrats, kleptocrats and kakistocrats who want to line their pockets at the expense of workaday Americans.

But while the 1933 plot was hairbrained, their plutocratic intent is no laughing matter. Their presumption of class privilege — the warped idea that their great wealth entitled them to rule over and even impoverish the many — is not unique. The Wall Street Putsch died and was buried in 1934, but it is just one manifestation of a deadly serious social disease that has infected the history of democratic struggles.

And now, that sickness has grown more virulent, confronting us in the form of a complex, sophisticated web of efforts funded by brothers Charles and David Koch and their billionaire buddies who share the same set of extreme, kleptocratic beliefs that guided last century's class-war militants, including making property rights supreme over all of the people's political rights and replacing majority rule with a new governing order that empowers the owner class (the "*Makers*," as they dub themselves) to overrule regulations, taxes, unionization and other collective actions that the lower classes (the "*Takers*," or so we're called) try to impose on the property-rich minority.

The Koch coup is not one they're planning to spring someday with a brash, illegal military takeover of Washington. Don't look now, but they've already sprung it! It's a quiet, multifaceted coup that has been underway for some 40 years and has been astonishingly successful ... and

disturbingly legal. Measure by measure, the Koch brothers and their allied extremists have used their fortunes to gain a grip on nearly every level of government (including the courts and whole states like Wisconsin, North Carolina and Texas), corporatized many of our most basic laws and institutions, and largely had their plutocratic wish list adopted as the agenda of the Republican Party. They've been able to come this far because of three factors:

Patience. The Kochs have taken the long view with their ideological power grab. They have been willing to experiment, trying a variety of tactics — large and small, national and local — expanding those that work and abandoning those that don't. And they have used "*patient capital*": giving an idea time to prove itself before yanking funding and jumping to the next trendy idea (Progressive funders: Take note.).

Quiet and compartmentalization. The Koch coup has crept up on us because it abhorred publicity and couched each move as an independent effort by a separate group. The commonality of the changes was barely perceptible for decades and until 2010, when the Supreme Court grabbed the obscure Citizens United case to decree that corporate campaign cash qualifies as free speech. It was only then that progressives woke to the reality that a coordinated corporate assault on democracy itself was being backed by a panoply of Koch groups (at least three of which were prime funders and pushers of the court case).

Scope and scale. Even the word "*vast*" doesn't encompass the immensity of the Kochs' offensive on democracy. The Charles Koch Foundation, the David H. Koch Charitable Foundation, the American Legislative Exchange Council, the Cato Institute, The Heritage Foundation, the State Policy Network, Americans for Prosperity: These are just a handful of the many organizations that the Koch brothers and their buddies fund to dismantle our social safety net and radically change our outlook on "*everybody does better when everybody does better.*"