



A New Voice for a Changing South

FACING SOUTH

VOICES: Privatizing America for their majesty, Kings Charles and David Koch

By Joe Atkins, *Labor South*
February 17, 2012

OXFORD, Miss. -- I'm having this nightmare, a kind of weird, modern-day version of the movie *I Walked With A Zombie*.

Armies of well-dressed, fresh-faced Republican legislators, many of them newly elected, march dutifully off to some remote island, where twin voodoo kings put them all under a dark spell. As they prepare to leave, their eyes bulging with voodoo magic, they swear to do the kings' bidding throughout the unsuspecting world.

As I open my eyes, I realize to my horror that it's true! It's not a nightmare. It's really happening!

The legislators are ALEC members, the twin kings are Charles and David Koch (*in photo*), and the spell was cast on Amelia Island off the coast of Florida, where the kings gave the order to push charter schools, vouchers, the ultimate privatization of schools, prisons, and anything else standing in the way of the almighty Corporation.

Like all zombie worlds, this one is full of secrecy and mystery. What I can tell you is that ALEC, or the American Legislative Exchange Council, gets 98 percent of its funding from top corporations like British Petroleum, State Farm Insurance, Walmart, and, of course, Koch Industries, one of the nation's largest private companies with vast holdings that include a relatively close chlorine-dioxide facility in New Augusta, Miss.

ALEC develops "model" legislation for the mostly Republican legislators who are wined and dined at its indoctrination camps, the most recent of which was a "K-12 Education Reform Academy" at the Ritz-Carlton in Amelia Island Feb. 3-4. The press, teachers and students were excluded from the highly secret meeting. However, the agenda at all ALEC meetings is clear.

Like the billionaire Koch brothers who've been its most prominent benefactors, ALEC wants taxpayer dollars (yes, they like taxpayer dollars) steered from public schools toward charter schools, school vouchers, and other measures that ultimately lead to privatization. An ideal ALEC school would preach the glories of unregulated capitalism and the evils of government and particularly labor unions.

ALEC's tentacles reach far. An estimated 43 percent of Ohio legislators are members. Anti-union measures in Ohio and Wisconsin have ALEC's fingerprints all over them. Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels, who recently signed a "right-to-work" measure into law, wrote the foreword to ALEC's "Report Card on American Education," a manifesto that places union-busting over test scores in its school evaluations.

Georgia, Louisiana, Florida, and Oklahoma are among the states that have passed specially crafted ALEC legislation on education issues.

Here in Mississippi, a perfect breeding ground for ALEC/Koch ideology given its tortured history regarding public education, a movement is already well underway to starve the beast of government to make way for a privatized world.

ALEC members in the Mississippi Legislature include the following state representatives: Bill Denny, Mark Formby, Bobby Howell, Sam Mims V, Randall Patterson, Jessica Upshaw and Tom Weathersby. All are Republican except Patterson.

State senators who are ALEC members include: Nancy Adams Collins, Joey Fillingane, Dean Kirby, Will Longwitz, and Melanie Sojourner. All are Republicans.

Schools and prisons are current top priorities for ALEC and the Koch brothers. However, their long-term goals are more encompassing. David Koch once ran for president under

the Libertarian ticket, calling for an end to Social Security, the minimum wage, gun control, and the personal and corporate income tax. They despise government regulation as much as they do labor unions. Koch Industries in the 1990s had to pay a \$30 million fine because of multiple oil spills.

Is democracy an ultimate target? Voter ID and similar voter suppression bills are indeed part of their agenda. The Koch brothers' grandfather, Harry Koch, was a 19th century big business-boosting newspaper editor who once called democracy "mobocracy." At the Koch-funded Cato Institute, one scholar recently wrote in defense of monopolies. Fred Koch, father of the Koch brothers, built refineries for Stalin. The brothers themselves have had a long business relationship with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Iran.

Benito Mussolini, a successful politician until his fellow Italians hung him upside down in a public square in Milan, once said this about fascism: "Fascism should rightly be called corporatism, as it is the merger of corporate and government power."

Fascism in a country that fought and won a bloody world war against it 70 years ago? Now that would be a real nightmare.