



If the Koch brothers take over Cato? Get a real job, suckers.

MARCH 23, 2012

By David Brin

Much in the news is an effort by the Koch brothers - coal barons David and Charles – to seize complete control over the Cato Institute, which has long touted itself as the leading libertarian think tank in the United States.

Staffers and fellows at Cato have been beating the drums of insurrection, calling for support and funds to stave off this blatant takeover by extreme-right oligarchs. And many – even liberal intellectuals - have come flocking to the cause, offering support. Is this just a case of “the enemy of my enemy is my friend?” Or are there layers beneath layers? Does it even matter?

First: fair warning. Though I oft call myself “a type of libertarian,” I’m not today’s typical variety. Yes, I tout Adam Smith widely and feel we’d all benefit – especially liberals – from re-immersion in the profound common sense of “the First Liberal.”

Moreover, I am the only sci fi author who ever keynoted part of a political party’s convention – the Libertarian Party – at which half the audience gave me a standing ovation, defending me from being lynched by the other half! (The latter, Rand-Rothbard half has – alas – taken over the movement, with calamitous consequences.)

Have a look at how libertarians might save their cause... plus some fresh ways that they – and liberals and conservatives – might view the political landscape.

But back to this attempted putsch to take over the Cato Institute, and the “brave resistance of its scholars.”

Who are the villains?

We start with the most blatant fact – that the Koch brothers, together with Rupert Murdoch, Roger Ailes, Grover Norquist and Prince Waleed, have been core promulgators of America’s current, lobotomizing Civil War, which has demolished the nation’s traditional notions of negotiated pragmatism. A big part of this has been the anti-future, relentless War on Science.

As their frenzy to degrade science metastacized, it turned into a campaign against every “smartypants caste” or knowledge profession in American life. Their other goal – destruction of the U.S. Civil Service – would then leave just one elite standing. The same elite that crushed liberty and markets in every other culture for 6000 years. The same oligarchic elite that Adam Smith publicly despised in *Wealth of Nations*, calling it the basic enemy of true capitalism and the age-old oppressor of mankind.

The damage that these half dozen men – plus a few dozen more – have done both to the people of the United States and to Pax Americana is too spectacularly consistent to have been anything but deliberate.

Ah, but having said that, is the Cato Institute really worth getting in a froth over? I consulted and wrote for them a few times, back in the last century, before I came to see how shallow was their commitment to Smithian libertarianism or the fundamental goal of encouraging creative competition in society.

In fact, parsing down their messages, we find that encouraging creative-competition is the very *last* thing on their minds.

Ignoring those 6000 years during which markets were always destroyed by oligarchic cliques, Cato helped to spread the modern mythology that freedom is all-and-entirely about idolatry of unlimited private property. Government and only government is inherently evil, anti-market or anti-liberty. If you point to history... any history at all... or to the actual words of Adam Smith, they change the subject with stunning alacrity and truly awesome verbal agility.

In other words, the oligarchic right never had better whores than the intellectual courtesans at Cato. Polysyllabic prostitutes eager to twist their tongues around fresh rationalizations for a new feudalism.

Read the article. Scan what percentage of Cato's donors and board members ever gave to genuinely libertarian causes, as opposed to a Republican Party fast spiraling into aristocratism and know-nothing, anti-intellectual populism.

Example: The “case” for privatizing Social Security

Take Cato's relentless campaign to privatize Social Security. Funny thing about that. Both times that it came near passage... in the late '90s and 2005... it would have dumped 100 million naive sheep into the stock market just in time to re-inflate a failing valuation bubble, letting oligarchs dump half a trillion dollars in unwanted shares onto “greater fools.”

On both occasions, within a few years, most Americans' portfolio values would have been slashed in half. And maybe it should have happened! The Democrats should not have prevented it. The ensuing turmoil and anger – perhaps reaching French Revolution levels – might have “solved the oligarchy problem” for a generation. A bit (a lot) more severely than I'd prefer. But at least there'd be no debilitating, lobotomizing, Murdochian “culture war” by now.

Let's be plain. The role model for this “privatization” (of social security) was the selling off of Russian state assets after the fall of Communism, in which the shares distributed to each Russian citizen soon were snapped up by a few dozen savvy insiders who became today's famous Moscow Oligarchs.

Some of the richest plutocrats in the world arose from insider manipulation of the unwisely executed privatization of state assets... and NOT the creative-competitive delivery of innovative goods and services. If you call such monopolist-moguls “capitalists” who deserve their vast lucre, then you add to the spinning in Adam Smith's grave.

And make no mistake, this timing was no coincidence. The “let's privatize Social Security!” movement only gained its full head of steam... propelled by the Kochs and other eager-funders... after they witnessed how well things went over in Russia. It was their role model. And Cato led the charge.

Okay, so now we should weep and gnash our teeth, because these guys now face final takeover by the Kochs, who effectively owned their brothel already and are now simply ending the pretense of independence? The hypocrisy? Because the dukes' court apologists might now have to drop the play-act... and admit – like Blanche Dubois – that their gentlemen callers actually owned them, all along?

Don't bother, fellows. Try this instead. Go out into the market you claim to love, and get actual jobs, delivering goods and services.

Weep for Cato. Crocodile tears.