

Debate Post

United States: the Koch brothers, anti-Obama oil companies

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June 16, 2021

Measuring 2 meters, weighing \$ 50 billion and trying to hasten the downfall of Barack Obama in the 2012 election is probably not the best way to go unnoticed. Discretion is however one of the obsessions of David and Charles Koch, two brothers aged 71 and 76. Barons of petrochemicals, they hold, together, the third fortune of the United States, after Bill Gates and Warren Buffett. In the shadows, they are polishing a project that is dear to them: to seize the American right so that it advocates the systematic reduction of the role of the state, to stir up the populist insurgency of the Tea Party and to put an end to it – “C ‘is a matter of life and death for our country “, they say – with the” socialist drift of the United States “.

Secret side, it is missed. The faces of the Kochs and their name (which is pronounced Ko-ouk) have been spread for several months on all the banners of the indignant of the Occupy Wall Street movement: both embody, in the eyes of the American left, the pure evil. Last June, their giant heads floated 100 meters in the air on an airship sent by Greenpeace over a fundraising gala organized by these “political and environmental polluters”, accompanied by four words in huge letters: “Koch Brothers. Dirty Money”.

Five years ago, however, it took their photos to appear in Forbes magazine’s Biggest Fortunes chart on the same page as a star like Oprah Winfrey for the media to finally ask about their lives. Charles, the most taciturn, then opened to journalists his office in Wichita, Kansas, headquarters of Koch Industries; inherited from their father in 1967, this empire now has 70,000 employees and has annual sales of \$ 100 billion. The second private unlisted conglomerate in the country, Koch Industries owns 8,000 kilometers of pipelines as well as dozens of power plants and refineries, from Alaska to Texas, to which are added factories producing everyday items as varied as toilet paper and carpet, not to mention the meat. The group also owns the worldwide license for Lycra, king of synthetics.

Charles Koch’s lair houses the books of his venerated mentors: FA Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, Leonard Read, nineteenth and twentieth century economists whose writings are at the source of the libertarian movement, a partisan line of thought of an absolute capitalist laissez-faire.

The brothers have a definite influence on the Tea Party

In New York, David prides himself on the same readings, but he leads a less austere life. Before her marriage in 1996, at age 55, to Julia Flesher, the splendid daughter of a scrap king of Arkansas, then aged 32, the playboy's "penthouse" was the obligatory stage of the candidates for the title of Miss America. Although more talkative than his brother, he hardly leaves his 800 square meter New York apartment on Park Avenue, his dreamy French mansions and his lavish yacht. A golden routine broken only by his works as a cultural philanthropist, valued at half a billion dollars over the last ten years, and by his co-management of Koch Industries. "This is the biggest company, he jokes, that no one has ever heard of." Till today.

In early November, a monster demonstration called "Occupy the Koch Brothers" surrounded a Washington conference center, as David closed a two-day convention of his militant foundation, Americans for Prosperity (AFP), with a toast to the memory of the former president Ronald Reagan and by dubbing Herman Cain, who was then one of the candidates for the primaries of the Republican Party, darling of the famous Tea Party. "The Kochs and I are brothers of another mother," Cain called out to the crowd, watched enthusiastically by David Koch, who applauded him heartily.

For the detractors of the two brothers, their ascendancy over the Tea Party demonstrates the organized nature of this supposedly spontaneous movement.

"They transformed the Republican political landscape"

In fact, the group Americans for Prosperity (AFP), founded in 2004 by David to promote "public education on economic issues" and now 1.5 million activists, predates the emergence of Tea Party. But AFP facilitated the emergence of it by financing, during the 2010 congressional elections, for an amount close to 40 million dollars, the candidates for the Republican local primaries deemed closest to the movement.

At the time, the commercials on the radio already denounced the "socialism of Barack Obama": a way like any other, in times of crisis, to heat up public opinion white ... " The Koch brothers and their donor friends have completely transformed the Republican political landscape, assures Rob Stein, Democratic consultant in electoral financing. The "Grand Old Party" of long ago has given way to a "great new alliance" between the libertarians, the Tea Party and the Christian Right; all united by a sense of economic vulnerability due to the crisis, and by their visceral hostility to the government, to taxes and to Obama. Today, this new alliance is the most powerful force in the world. American politics. " And it is to her that the Koch brothers, supported by their network of billionaire friends, intend to devote \$ 200 million as the next presidential election approaches. An unprecedented sum.

The Kochs subsidize 17 conservative think tanks

They offer more: ideas. David and Charles founded the Cato Institute in 1977, a highly respected Washington research and analysis center that advocates libertarian precepts and alternatives to state interventionism. This nuanced intellectual flagship, moreover opposed to Bush's Iraqi adventure, is not the only one to benefit from the largesse of the Kochs.

The Institute for Humane Studies, for example, funds scholarships for research on countless topics relating to free enterprise and "too much state". In addition to 17 conservative think tanks

subsidized by the Kochs, the main idea factory remains the Mercatus Center: 50 analysts, economists, former senior officials of the Republican administrations dissect there, in their premises at George Mason University, in Arlington (Virginia), the smallest public regulations in force in order to denounce the costs for society and businesses, building ready-to-use files for use by elected representatives of Congress.

Environmental issues are of particular concern to the Koch brothers, whose company was convicted in the 1990s of some 300 accidental oil spills. This probably explains why their foundations paid 10 million dollars in 2010 for the organization of a “spontaneous” referendum against a California law aimed at reducing greenhouse gases and awarding public subsidies to alternative energies. Over the past ten years, the Kochs have contributed 55 million dollars, according to Greenpeace, to a campaign to combat “global warming myths”, widely reported in the conservative media and on the Internet.

Worried about Koch extremism? Their conservative credo, however, is only a pale reflection of that of their father, Patriarch Fred Koch. Born in Texas in 1900 to an immigrant father from the Netherlands and an American mother, this engineer moved to Wichita (Kansas) upon graduating from the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1922. His First patent, a process that halved the costs of refining, won him the concerted attacks of rival US oil giants. Ruined by a series of bogus trials, betrayed by local politicians, Fred preferred to leave the homeland of free enterprise to offer his services, between 1929 to 1933, to Stalin’s Soviet Union, in need of oil expertise!

Is it shame to have contributed to the power of the enemy? Or the memory of his engineering friends murdered by the KGB? The consultant of the Reds turned into a fierce anti-Communist, joining the Birch Society network in 1950, a cénacle at the origin of the follies of McCarthyism, which went so far as to see President Eisenhower as an agent of the Soviets. “Let’s face it frankly, our father’s anti-communism was paranoia”, dares David Koch, in an extremely rare and oh so tactical confidence to New York Magazine, in February 2010. The interview aimed to soften the image of David , accused of supporting the clamor of the Tea Party against the “Marxist plot” of Obama.