

Jim Hightower's Lowdown on the Koch Brothers

by Polly Mann

That's Charles and David Koch of New York City and Wichita, Kansas, respectively. Manhattan residents should be accustomed to billionaires, even those worth \$21.5 billion each, as David and his brother are. But what do you suppose the 107,000 residents of Wichita have to say about their billionaire Charles, who occupies, along with David, a position fourth from top in the ranking of the richest people in the nation?

The April 2011 issue of Jim Hightower's the Lowdown (a four-page monthly newsletter) discusses the famous—some say infamous—Koch brothers. They own Koch Industries, one of the largest privately held companies in the world. Papers, studies, dissertations, and probably books could be written about what their money could do to solve tremendous problems like world hunger or rebuilding Haiti. But that's not what these boys are about. They're after power and the accumulation of even more wealth. They're responsible for a nefarious network of far-right front groups and they've been directing millions into political organizations as well as to politicians themselves.

Twice a year Charles throws a party at Rancho Mirage, California, for 150 or so billionaire friends to meet and mingle with GOP elected officials, Supreme Court justices, and other comrades, such as Glenn Beck. They hobnob and plot political strategies for the following year, and pledge goodly sums to get it done. But at this year's gala a surprise awaited the guests. Common Cause and several other grassroots groups had organized 1,500 of their detractors to welcome them. The invited guests did their best to hide from the outsiders. Corporate executives, protected by baton-wielding sheriff's deputies in riot gear, hid behind walls.

Had he not been tied down at home, Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, a Koch protégé, might have been at the party. The brothers are responsible for the establishment of two offices in Madison to help the governor with his agenda, which is anti-labor, anti-health care, anti-environmental protection laws and anti-corporate tax cuts. These offices consist of 1) a seven-person lobbying office and 2) the American Legislative Exchange Council (check it out). The Koch organization, Americans for Prosperity, put up \$342,000 for one ad alone to demonize Wisconsinites who were protesting Walker's unprecedented power grab.

How did the Kochs make their money? Koch Industries covers the waterfront – energy (oil and gas), refining and chemicals, minerals, fertilizers, forestry, consumer products, polymers and fibers, and ranching. Among its holdings are Georgia Pacific paper products and Georgia Pacific lumber and building products—plus, of course, many more.

A year's subscription to the Lowdown is just \$15, a sum this article alone is worth.
The Hightower Lowdown, P.O. Box 20596, New York, NY 10011.

Polly Mann is a co-founder of WAMM and continues to be active with the organization. Her column appears regularly in the WAMM newsletter, at www.worldwidewamm.org in the Middle East Committee section and on the WAMM Blog.