

**“BRILLIANT”**

George Monbiot | *The Guardian*

**“ESSENTIAL VIEWING”**

David Suzuki | Author, Environmentalist



## FILM SYNOPSIS

In the summer of 2009, shortly after Barack Obama and a Democratic Congress swept to power promising a new era of hope and change, a citizens' protest movement emerged out of nowhere threatening to derail their agenda. Some said this uprising was the epitome of grassroots democracy. Others said it was a classic example of 'astroturfing' -- an elaborate corporate public relations effort designed to create the impression of a spontaneous uprising. Curious to find out for himself, Australian filmmaker Taki Oldham goes undercover into the heart of the movement. He visits raucous health care town hall meetings where irate voters parrot insurance industry PR; learns that home-grown "citizen groups" challenging the science behind climate change are funded by big oil companies; and infiltrates a tea party movement whose anti-government rage turns out to be less the product of populist rage than of corporate strategy. In the end, *The Billionaires' Tea Party* offers a terrifying look at how corporate elites are exploiting the anxieties of ordinary Americans -- capitalizing on anger, resentment, and paranoia to advance a narrow, often anti-democratic, agenda.

### PRAISE FOR *BILLIONAIRES' TEA PARTY*

"Brilliant."

- George Monbiot | *The Guardian*

"Essential viewing."

David Suzuki | Author & Environmentalist

"Journalism at its best. I wish every American could see it before the election. I just watched it and am even more concerned about the future of our democracy than ever before."

- Wendell Potter | Author of *Deadly Spin: An Insurance Industry Insider Speaks Out on How Corporate PR is Killing Health Care and Deceiving Americans*

## INTERVIEWEE BIOGRAPHIES

### **MARK CRISPIN MILLER | Professor, New York University**

Mark Crispin Miller is a professor of Media, Culture and Communication at NYU and author of numerous books. A leading expert on modern corporate propaganda and its use by the public relations industry, Miller is now at work on *The Marlboro Man: An American Success Story*, to be published by Yale University Press in 2011.

### **WENDELL POTTER | Former Health Insurance Executive**

Wendell Potter is a former head of corporate communications at insurance giants Humana and Cigna. Since retiring in 2008, Wendell Potter has worked as an outspoken critic of corporate PR, and especially of the use of 'astroturfing' and other misleading tactics used by his industry. He has testified before Congress and become a regular media contributor. *Time* magazine called him "the ideal whistleblower." His most recent book is *Deadly Spin: An Insurance Company Insider Speaks Out On How Corporate PR is Killing Health Care and Deceiving Americans*.

### **JAMES HOGGAN | Author of *Climate Cover Up***

James Hoggan is president of the Vancouver public relations firm, James Hoggan & Associates, publisher of the Desmog Blog and author of *Climate Cover Up* (2009). For a number of years, he has tracked the PR campaign on behalf of polluting industries to deny and delay action on global warming. He is both in awe of and horrified by what he calls the largest and most insidious PR campaign ever carried out.

### **KERT DAVIES | Research Director, Greenpeace**

Kert Davies is currently Research Director for Greenpeace in the United States. He was the Director of Greenpeace's Global Warming and Energy Campaign for two years and Science Policy Director at Ozone Action prior to that. He is the architect for the well-known ExxonSecrets.org campaign and the recently launched StopGreenWash.org. He has degrees in Environmental Studies from Hampshire College and the University of Montana.

### **BRENDA EKWURZEL | Climate Scientist and Assistant Director of Climate Research and Analysis**

Brenda Ekwurzel is a climate scientist with the Climate and Energy Program at the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS). She is leading UCS's climate science education work aimed at strengthening support for sound U.S. climate policies. Prior to joining UCS, Dr. Ekwurzel was on the faculty of the University of Arizona Department of Hydrology and Water Resources with a joint appointment in the Geosciences Department. Earlier in her career, Dr. Ekwurzel was a hydrologist, working with communities to protect groundwater sources, at the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection. She holds a Ph.D. in isotope geochemistry from the Department of Earth Sciences at Columbia University's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory and conducted post-doctoral research at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, in California.

## NOTABLE QUOTES FROM *THE BILLIONAIRES' TEA PARTY*

MARK CRISPIN MILLER: "Propaganda is all the more credible for not seeming to be propaganda at all... of getting around [people's] natural resistance to being told what to do by a powerful forces. Well, in the political realm, we have the really insidious practice of fake grassroots agitation. We call it 'astroturf.' The people who are chosen to represent the group are paid – they are hired precisely because they look convincingly of the people, but if it weren't for the entities that are pumping money into them and are starting them in the first place, they wouldn't exist."

WENDELL POTTER: "Terms like 'government takeover of the healthcare system' is one that has been used many times to scare people away from reform, and it's misleading. No plan before Congress would have come anywhere close to a government takeover, but nonetheless it's a term that the industry knew would be effective. Slippery slope toward socialism in the United States – socialism still has this connotation, something that is akin to communism, if not even worse. So using the word socialism in the United States, the people who put those sentences together do it for a purpose, and they know that will evoke a certain emotion."

KERT DAVIES: "The Kochs and their allies deliberately founded these groups to intervene in government, to reduce taxes on corporations, to reduce the impact of environmental laws – and all of this of course benefits their business."

BRENDA EKWURZEL: "All the leading experts of the world that get together and make scientific statements about climate change, they all agree that climate change is real. It's unequivocal, and they're very worried about the lack of action on the parts of weaning ourselves off of fossil fuel."

JAMES HOGGAN: "It was a media campaign – they wanted to create doubt in the minds of journalists, they wanted to create doubt in the minds of the public – and they did a fantastic job of that. And your average person would never know. They just see some articulate guy, may even be a scientist, basically being shills for industry. People like Fred Singer; he was a guy who worked for tobacco – now works on climate change. But because they have a lab coat and have a Ph.D., people believe them."

MARK CRISPIN MILLER: "We are drowning in propaganda, drowning in it. And I'm not just speaking figuratively. I think it's threatening our lives. It's cutting off our air. It's making real democracy all but impossible. It has brought the planet to the point of ecological destruction. It's had no positive consequences whatsoever because it doesn't serve the people. It serves other interests."

JAMES HOGGAN: "I've come to believe more and more as I've been studying this problem that the real currency in democracy is honest information. That if you are on a mass scale able to pump out false information, then the whole democratic system kind of breaks up. And yet these people have a perfect right to do it and hide their involvement in it."

KERT DAVIES: "And now you have very motivated people out across the country who are activists, who are willing to fight for what they think is rights for themselves, but in fact it's forwarding a corporate agenda – that is to stop regulations, to stop taxes – and they're not gonna stop in 2010. They will continue to the 2012 elections."

## NOTABLE QUOTES FROM TAKI OLDHAM, PRODUCER

“Most people, myself included, are naturally suspicious of government. And the ability to protest is the sign of a healthy democracy. But I was wary of the way in which these free market groups have guided the tea partiers to oppose keys element of the Obama agenda, healthcare and climate legislation, especially the use of corporate funded big government rhetoric from the old Citizens For A Sound Economy days, designed to appeal to the American spirit of individualism and evoke the spectra of communism – themes which became the driving force of the tea party movement.”

“While many individuals are struggling, each of the Koch brothers has seen their personal wealth increase by an estimated 4 billion dollars in the last year alone, helped not only by their ongoing efforts to delay a climate bill, but also to foster doubt in the underlying science.”

“The emergence of Tea Party politicians and rise of political stars like Sarah Palin embodies a rising ‘us and them’ culture in America. But if this rise in political polarization has been fed by the free market propaganda machine, equally important is the role of the conservative media, none more so than the nation’s most watched news network *Fox News*. 24 hours a day they pump out pro-business, pro-Republican talking points.”

“Watching Beck’s paranoid populism and race-baiting goes a long way to explaining some of the more extreme views in the Tea Party movement.”

“Having successfully steered protestors to revolt against the entire Obama agenda in the name of freedom, phase two was to succeed where the Kochs had failed in 1980 -- to build a free market movement capable of staging a revolution at the ballot box.”

“For me, the newfound zeal for the Kochs’ radical free market ideology is the real revolution of the Tea Party movement. It has nothing to do with people in old costumes, or waving flags or holding protest events. But it is a revolution that has everything to do with hidden corporate agendas, complicit media players, seasoned propagandists, a highly coordinated network of free market groups, and most of all a pair of brothers with a dream create a privatized America.”

“What about the freedom of individuals to make up their own mind through reason and rational debate? What about the freedom to trust that grassroots movements are just that and not tools of the wealthy? And what does this say about the state of American democracy?”

“As the Tea Partiers march on toward 2012 and their goal of taking out President Obama and installing politicians who will pave the way for private enterprise to replace government, my only message to them is be careful what you wish for – because you just might get it.”

## CONTACT INFORMATION

### **TAKI OLDHAM | Director, Camera operator, Editor, Producer**

Acting as investigative journalist, narrator, and central character, Australian filmmaker Taki Oldham's journey to uncover the truth about 'astroturfing' forms the central narrative of the story. In order to infiltrate the highly guarded world of public relations front groups, Taki went undercover as a free-market loving Australian university student, creating a fake blog and a fake study grant as part of his cover.

### **MEDIA EDUCATION FOUNDATION | Educational Distributor & Sales Rep**

The non-profit Media Education Foundation (MEF) is the nation's leading producer and distributor of educational videos designed to inspire students and others to reflect critically on the structure of media industries and the content they produce. Founded in 1991, MEF's mission is to answer the challenge posed by the radical and accelerating corporate threat to democracy.

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## CREDITS

Camera/Director/Editor/Producer | Taki Oldham  
Voiceover Recording Engineer | Davide Carbone  
Additional Editing | Bergen O'Brian  
Additional Graphics | Daniel Nicholas

A Larrakin Films Production

2011 • 54 minutes • Digital/HD/1.78:1 • Color • NTSC • Beta/DVD/DVcam • Aspect Ratio 4:3 • Stereo •  
English/English Subtitles