

New York Times calls for exclusion of Kucinich and Sharpton from debates

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In a January 28 editorial, (“Defrosting the Primaries”), the *New York Times* called for candidates Dennis Kucinich and Al Sharpton to be excluded from future debates in the contest for the Democratic Party presidential nomination.

The *Times* writes: “Representative Dennis Kucinich has every right to keep campaigning despite his minuscule vote tallies, but he should not be allowed to take up time in future candidate debates. Neither should the Rev. Al Sharpton, who is running to continue running, not to win.” The editorial adds, “Sponsors should also consider whether Senator Joseph Lieberman will continue to be a credible candidate”—i.e., they should pull the plug on this unviable candidate.

These recommendations—thoroughly undemocratic on their face—would be remarkable, were it not for the fact that the *Times* has a history of dubbing “not credible” any candidate whom it sees as posing even the mildest challenge to the general consensus politics of the two-party system in America.

A June 30, 2000 *Times* commentary, entitled “Mr. Nader’s Misguided Crusade,” denounced the Green Party’s nomination of Ralph Nader as its 2000 presidential candidate as “a self-indulgent exercise that will distract voters from the clear-cut choice represented by the major party candidates [Al Gore and George W. Bush].” And on August 22, the newspaper called for the exclusion of Nader and Reform Party candidate Patrick Buchanan from the debates, writing that neither “has yet reached the status of a candidate with demonstrated national support.”

The *Times*’ call to bar Kucinich and Sharpton from future debates comes as the Democratic primary race has barely begun, with primary events having taken place in only two states—Iowa and New Hampshire.

These states have a combined population of only 4.2 million, comprising less than 1.5 percent of the US population. The vote totals received so far by what the *Times* considers to be the credible candidates—John Kerry, Howard Dean, Wesley Clark and John Edwards—are themselves minuscule.

Why, then, is the *Times* so quick to demand that Kucinich and Sharpton be excluded from the debates—one of the principal venues for prospective candidates to air their views?

First of all, the notion that elections should be the occasion for a democratic exchange of ideas and opinions—on issues affecting the lives of millions of citizens—is alien to the opinion-makers at the *Times*. But it is not simply that they think a slot in the debates should be provided only to those candidates they believe have a chance of winning.

Contemptuous of elementary democratic principles—in this case the right to debate and vie for a party’s nomination—they believe that such opportunities should be reserved only for those candidates who validate the policies of the ruling elite. According to their skewed concept of “democracy,” democratic rights should be protected only if they contribute to oiling the cogs of bourgeois rule.

Among the Democratic presidential contenders, Kucinich and Sharpton have voiced the harshest criticisms of the Bush administration’s Iraq war policy. The *Times*, as a central component of the political establishment’s propaganda machine, fears that airing such criticisms in national debates may fuel growing popular opposition to the continuing US occupation of Iraq and the ongoing assault on social and democratic rights in the US—policies in which the Democratic Party is fully complicit.

And if this is the attitude of the *Times* toward the

debate within the Democratic Party, it is certain that the newspaper will insist that third-party candidates—particularly from parties calling themselves socialist, Green or independent—be excluded from national debates after the Democrats have selected their candidate.

The *Times*' call for Ralph Nader to be excluded from the 2000 presidential debates was based on the opinion that democracy in electoral politics should only be extended to the competition between the two “major” competitors—i.e., the big-business controlled Democratic and Republican parties. The proposal to exclude Kucinich and Sharpton this time around demonstrates the view that any candidate within the Democratic Party who openly suggests that the war against Iraq is based on lies, or appeals too directly to the popular opposition to the Bush administration's war policies, must also be silenced.

The contempt for democratic rights that exists within ruling circles in the US is indicated by the *Times*' choice of words when they write that “Dennis Kucinich has every right to keep campaigning”—as if that were a question—and describe Al Sharpton as the candidate who is “running to continue running, not to win.” Next will they suggest that only those candidates deemed “credible” by the financial elite be allowed to participate in US elections?



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