

Socialist debates Democrats, Libertarians at University of California-Davis

Keaton Eisner
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Kevin Carney, the president of the Students for Social Equality (SSE) and a law student at the University of California-Davis, debated representatives of the Democratic and Libertarian parties at an election forum held on the university campus October 25. The event, which was jointly sponsored by the La Raza Law Students Association and the SSE—the student organization of the Socialist Equality Party—was attended by more than 80 people and was covered by the Spanish-language television station Univision.

The debate participants—Carney, Sean Dabel of the Yolo County Democrats and Stefan Spick of the Libertarian Party—were asked questions about the war in Iraq, the state of the US economy and social conditions, immigrant rights and civil liberties.

In response to a question about the invasion of Iraq, Carney explained that the SSE demands the immediate withdrawal of US troops from Iraq, Afghanistan and the entire Middle East. He further called for the release of all prisoners taken in these conflicts, reparations for those countries victimized by US policy and compensation for the families of American troops killed in combat. Carney also argued that those responsible for waging this war of aggression be placed on trial for war crimes.

Responding to Carney, the Democrat Dabel rejected the idea of withdrawing US troops from that country on the grounds that “we would only leave Iraq a more dangerous place.” While stating that he opposed the Bush administration’s “rush to war” without a multinational coalition of support, he cited the “Pottery Barn analogy—you break it, you buy it”—as justification for the continued occupation of the country. “We bought Iraq. We have to stay, and we have to finish it,” Dabel said.

A more apt analogy, Carney responded, might be one

in which a thief goes into a house to steal something, discovers the house is occupied, ends up killing several people and decides to resolve the problem by murdering the remaining witnesses as well. The continued occupation of Iraq, which can only occur through the subjugation of the Iraqi people, means that “what the Democratic Party is suggesting is that the remaining survivors be killed,” explained Carney.

When questioned about what steps their parties would take to improve the US economy, Dabel pointed out that the economy was in its worst state in 72 years and declared that Americans are “living beyond our means.” He supported the adoption of a “pay as you go” approach to federal spending and called for a repeal of the Bush administration’s tax cuts.

In response, Carney explained that “working people are not living beyond their means,” but rather “social conditions in the United States are awful” for a substantial percentage of the population. The problem does not lie in the spending habits of ordinary people, but rather in an economic and political system that rewards the wealthy and big business, he insisted. Carney further stressed that the only real criteria used by the Democratic and Republican parties for how to resolve America’s economic problems was how it affected the wealth of the financial elite, whose interests both parties represent.

The Libertarian Spick responded to the question of the deteriorating economic situation in the US by telling students attending a publicly funded university that in addition to energy being deregulated (a policy that in 2001 led to massive price gouging in California and drained the state treasury of \$15 billion), health care and education should be entirely privatized.

In answer to the moderator’s question about what measures should be taken to improve social conditions

in the US, Carney emphasized that there could be no resolution to the social crisis of American society within the framework of the capitalist system, which places corporate profits above human needs.

He then went on to point out that the continued political domination of the two-party system and the subordination of working people to the policies of the Democratic Party meant that the real interests of the working class could find no voice in official politics. Carney explained that the purpose of the SEP's 2004 election campaign was to lay the groundwork for an independent working class movement. He pointed to the tens of millions of low-paid workers in the service and retail industries as only one example of a layer of the population completely disenfranchised by the existing setup.

In response to the question about social conditions in the US, Dabel reiterated the line of the Democratic Party, holding up John Kerry's health care plan as a model of progressive policy. Spick responded by insisting that using the government to solve social questions is "exactly what we are against."

On the subject of US immigration policy, Carney stressed that the SEP rejects the designation of any human being as "illegal." He described the immigrant population as one that "collectively works as a super-exploited workforce" and called for full citizenship and rights for all immigrants living in the US.

Acknowledging that immigrant workers play a major role in the American economy, Dabel proposed the creation of a guest worker program as an eventual "path to citizenship" for some and clamping down on the hiring of undocumented immigrants. The Libertarian Spick said that while he agreed with Carney's insistence that human rights are universal, this did not extend to economic rights.

The final question at the event dealt with the escalating attacks on democratic rights.

When the participants were asked about their stance on the USA Patriot Act, Dabel maintained that the measure—for which Kerry voted—was not the issue, but rather how it had been applied and abused by Attorney General John Ashcroft.

Carney stressed that the reactionary character of the USA Patriot Act and the abuses of democratic rights that have flowed from it were not simply the consequence of Ashcroft's appointment, but rather an

expression of the mounting social conflicts within American society. Carney insisted that the attacks on civil liberties were bound up with the unprecedented growth in social inequality in the US and the attempt by the political establishment to prepare for the mass social opposition that will inevitably arise as a result.

At the conclusion of the debate, Carney, who speaks fluent Spanish, was interviewed by Univision. He told the millions of viewers of the popular channel that the SEP's campaign was "not about race or identity, but the issues facing all working people." After the event, several students expressed interest in finding out more about the SEP and becoming involved with the SSE at UC Davis. The debate was covered prominently in the campus newspaper.



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