



Derek Shearer

Photo by Kirk Hirota

'Socialist agitator' strives for 'Economic Democracy' in U.S.

By Costas Christ
Of the Emerald

To some he's a "socialist agitator." To others, he is a light of hope. His name is Derek Shearer and his message is "Economic Democracy."

"As an economist I recognize the need for coordinated economic planning, but as a political activist I object to a technocratic top-down approach to solving economic problems," Shearer says.

Shearer was on campus Thursday to present his lecture "Is There Life After Reagan: Prospects for a Progressive America in the 1980s."

According to Shearer, the economic recovery under Reagan has been a recovery "of a funny kind."

"What we're recovering from is a recession that the Reagan administration led us into. It has meant high levels of unemploy-

ment — in fact, the unemployment rate today is higher than it was when Reagan took office," Shearer says.

"It is certainly a recovery — a Reagan recovery. Clearly the people who lost their jobs are not better off," he says.

Like many in his generation, Shearer participated in the anti-war movement of the 1960s and was active in progressive student politics. He still works for what he believes in.

"I take democracy seriously. This means working to make people's daily lives as meaningful and as democratic as possible," he says.

Shearer is clear on the kind of changes he would like to see take place in this country.

There should be public spending to create jobs and stimulate economic growth, greater public control of capital investment through state and local development banks, democratic planning programs at the neighborhood, city, state and national levels and economic growth guided by social and environmental considerations, he says.

Shearer has worked hard to put his ideas into action. In 1981, he helped bring a progressive city government to office in Santa Monica, Calif. Three years later they still hold a majority on the city council and

their programs, such as rent control and neighborhood decision-making in development projects, have had a lasting effect.

But it hasn't been easy. "We've been called socialists, communists, fascists and Nazis," he says. "It's funny because I don't see how it's possible to be all of those things at the same time."

To those who believe that the strength of the conservative corporate structure in America will always crush opposition to its policies, Shearer says that the key to change is commitment.

"You must make a life-long commitment," Shearer says. "What you do now is not going to bring a revolution next year but hard work and good organization will bring important results in the long run."

"There are many examples of individuals who've made a difference. Look at what Rosa Parks achieved by refusing to give up her bus seat to another passenger simply because he was white and she was black," he says.

"I tell my students to learn how things work and then you will be able to make changes. It's also important to have a sense of humor. Wasn't it Emma Goldman who said 'If I can't dance I don't want to be a part of your revolution?'"

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