

Oliver Stone among the libertarians

Stone defends Latin American leaders, calls Obama 'a weak man' and dishes on Hillary Clinton

By Chris Moody
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WASHINGTON — Seated at a table between a painting of Austrian economist [Ludwig von Mises](#) and a stack of right-wing books with titles like “Why We Must Abolish the Income Tax” and “The Dangers of Socialized Medicine,” Oliver Stone, the iconic Hollywood filmmaker with [a soft spot for Latin American strongmen](#), was in a strange place.

A line of college students attending the “[International Students for Liberty Conference](#),” an annual gathering of college libertarian clubs from around the world, snaked through the Grand Hyatt basement for pictures, autographs and an opportunity to give the 67-year-old Academy Award-winning director an earful.

To the befuddlement of the attendees, many of whom consider Stone a socialist who pals around with dictators (such as the late Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez), Stone had accepted an invitation to speak Saturday at the conference. His panel's focus: “imperial overreach” and “the national security state,” a topic on which even an anarchic libertarian and the staunchest leftist can find common ground.

Stone’s history of [support for](#) former presidential candidate and Texas Rep. Ron Paul notwithstanding, he’s also become known in political circles for his visceral hatred of the modern Republican Party and for defending the administrations of Fidel Castro in Cuba and Chavez in Venezuela. In 2009, he produced “[South of the Border](#),” which offered a generous portrayal of leaders in five Latin American countries, including Chavez and Cuban President Raul Castro.

Stone took a seat on stage next to Peter Kuznick, the co-author of Stone's 750-page tome, “[The Untold History of the United States](#),” a book that journalist Michael C. Moynihan, who once wrote for libertarianism's flagship Reason Magazine, called “ideological drivel” and “junk history” in his [review for the Daily Beast](#). National security journalist Jeremy Scahill, who recently joined the new media group led by Snowden-story breaker Glenn Greenwald, joined the panel.

The discussion, interrupted occasionally by polite applause, showcased the common ground between the left and the libertarians — ground that appears so long as no one brings up marginal tax rates or health care policy. This talk was about foreign policy and government surveillance, and there was much everyone in the room could agree on. For more than an hour, Stone, Kuznick and Scahill excoriated America's military activities abroad, paying special attention to the now two-administration-long policy of using of unmanned combat drones to attack and kill suspected terrorists.

The crowd cheered.

Obama 'stunned us with his lack of spine'

While Stone made his disgust with Republican administrations no secret, he reserved his sharpest criticism for President Barack Obama.

“The man stunned us with his lack of spine. It’s unbelievable. A complete, complete lack of spine,” Stone said. “He’s a weak man.”

When the moderator opened the panel to questions, Luis Barrueto, a 23-year-old Guatemalan student, asked Stone how he could reconcile being so critical of government overreach in his home country, yet so passionately in support of leaders on his continent who were arguably much worse.

While Barrueto spoke, a group of South American students — Humberto Rotondo from Peru, Antonella Marty from Argentina and Gabriel Salas from Venezuela — approached Stone from stage right and [handed him a letter](#) that asked him the same question and accused him of making “propaganda” for Chavez.

Stone slipped on a pair of reading glasses, glanced at the letter and listened to the rest of Barrueto’s question.

“We would like to publicly convey our utter disagreement with your support towards governments that restrict liberties in our side of the continent,” the letter read. “Fortunately, and paradoxically, you will be able to express your opinions freely, even as you support governments that silence everyone who thinks differently.”

“Obviously I don’t agree with you,” Stone said. “I am fine with all of the political opposition to Chavez, so long as it’s done legally. There is a method by which you can protest. But now, the opposition is increasingly behaving like the Republican Party in the United States, where it is trying to block, criticize, destroy, any attempt at negotiation.”

He added later: “Venezuela is a democratically elected government, and these people who keep protesting are sore losers.”

When the panel discussion ended, students and reporters swarmed Stone for on-the-spot interviews, which he appeared glad to offer. After several minutes, handlers guided him up the

aisle toward the door, and Maria Wer, an Ecuadorian student, walked with him and begged him to reconsider his position on the Venezuelan government.

“I’m just asking you to do some more research,” Wer told Stone.

“I *have* done my research,” he said.

Stone stepped out of the ballroom and like a cheerful warrior, engaged more skeptical students before sitting down next to the portrait of Mises to sign books with Kuznick and Scahill.

Stone in person: Hillary Clinton is 'a hawk'

I asked him if meeting the students had changed his mind about any of his positions. No, he said, but he pointed out again how much he liked Ron Paul.

“There’s a lot of his positions I agree with,” he said, before cracking a wide smile. “Clearly his marijuana position.”

I asked about his support for Barry Goldwater in the early 1960s, the ultraconservative Republican presidential candidate who was trounced in the 1964 election against Lyndon Johnson.

“I was a kid,” he said. “But I wouldn’t support him now. I don’t agree with what he was saying.”

Hillary Clinton, a possible Democratic presidential contender in 2016, was once a Goldwater girl, I told him, and asked what he thought of her.

“I don’t. She’s obviously a hawk,” he huffed, before adding, “But better than the Republican, probably.”

Stone lingered at the conference for more than an hour, signing autographs and battling bloggers with video cameras who peppered him with questions for their YouTube channels. The director seemed to enjoy sparring over political philosophy and politics with his throng of inquisitors, who were equally respectful. A shouting match, this certainly was not.

As the crowds thinned, Stone stepped over to a conference booth along the back wall for the Cato Institute, a Washington-based libertarian think tank.

“At least you’re not the *Cicero* Institute,” he said, attempting a joke with the staffers manning the table. They smiled, politely.

Stone perused the literature on the table and left with a [policy paper about drug decriminalization](#) and a [pocket Constitution](#).