"English Only" divides, not unites

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Contents

Voting in Los Angeles.

to forbid any law which would "diminish or ignore" the role of English, and give any state resident the right to sue whenever he/she believes the law is not being properly enforced.

Nationally, the English Only movement is the brainchild of former California Senator S.I. Hayakawa and John Tanton of Michigan, head of the Federation of Americans for Immigration Reform (FAIR), which advocates brutally restrictive immigration legislation.

The English Only movement is part and parcel of the current anti-immigrant/anti-minority hysteria blowing like a foul wind across the land. Witness the massive factory immigration sweeps, cold-blooded shooting of Mexicanos at the border, the recent veto of a bilingual education bill by California's Gov. George Deukmejian, and the passage of the racist Simpson-Rodino immigration bill. And remember the horrifying incident in 1984 when an anglo man slaughtered 21 Chicanos and Mexicanos at a San Diego area MacDonald's, believing the cruel lie that they were responsible for his joblessness.

English Only — racist and divisive

Like every other right-wing campaign around social issues, the English Only campaign is full of lies and false assumptions. The most outrageous lie is that multilingualism "divides" this country, leads to separatism and "threatens" the dominance of the English language in the U.S.

It's true the U.S. population is diverse, and it is also divided. But it's not bilingual advertisements for Wheaties and bilingual ballots that divide the country. Rather, it is the systematic oppression of the minority nationalities in all spheres — economic, social, cultural and political.

It is inequalities that divide the country. Minorities earn less than two-thirds the per capita income of whites. Their children go to inferior schools. They are underrepresented at every level of government. As for language, the language and culture of minority peoples is degraded, ridiculed, and treated as inferior to Anglo American culture and the English language.

Furthermore, there is no danger that "hordes of non-English-speaking immigrants" are going to swamp the U.S. and wipe out the English language. One 1985 survey showed that 98% of Latino parents want their children to learn English. The 1980 census shows that over 90% of Latinos five years or older speak English in the home. And this fall, the Los Angeles Unified School District turned away 40,000 applicants for adult education English classes! Non-English-speaking minorities know very well that one needs to understand and speak English in order to function in the U.S.

But these arguments of "divisiveness" and "eliminating the English language" are only a smoke screen. What they really fear is the rapid growth of the Latino and Asian population and their persistent, ever more successful demand for political power.

The capitalists are especially concerned about the Chicano Movement for self-determination, which threatens the cozy status quo. Anglo American capitalist domination of the political structure in the Southwest has enabled them to pass strict anti-union laws in most of those states, to pay low corporate taxes, to rape the environment and rob the

mineral wealth of Chicano and Indian lands, and to pay far lower rates of unemployment, welfare and disability benefits than in the Midwest and Northeast. Chicano demands for power and self-determination threaten their paradise.

California is a large and important state to the capitalists. It is also a state in which minority peoples are expected to be the majority by the year 2000, with Chicanos and Latinos alone making up one-third of the state population. It's no accident the biggest test of English Only to date is coming down on the California ballot.

The solution? Language equality

The only road to national unity is consistent democracy! Life has proven this time and again.

Look at Switzerland, which for nearly 400 years has had three official languages and two official dialects. There is no national division in Switzerland, no "secessionist" movements. On the contrary, Switzerland is considered to be unified and democratic precisely because its citizenry is multilingual and multicultural, with a deep appreciation and respect for the various peoples who make up their country.

Or let's take the right wing's favorite example of language disunity — Quebec. Quebec is a bilingual province of Canada, founded by French-speaking Quebecois, but dominated for generations by an English-speaking Canadian ruling class, which had English as its official language. In the 1960s a powerful separatist movement developed in Quebec among the French-speaking Quebecois. In the 1970s, when the Parti Quebecois finally won control of the provincial legislature, the first thing they did was to make Quebec bilingual — French and English.

The result has been exactly the opposite of what the "English Only" partisans say. Now that French is no longer suppressed and English is no longer compulsory, the separatist movement and the language conflict in Quebec are practically dead. Once again, greater national unity is brought about not by force or compulsion, but by democracy and equality.

The real issue here is: should a people be compelled to give up their own language and culture; should any language be privileged over others; should any language be forcibly imposed upon others?

Anyone who believes in democracy would have to answer no to all the above.

Furthermore, even if someone does not want to learn English, he or she should not be prevented by any law from working, going to school or participating in the political process. This country's resources should not be spent trying to enforce an insane language law, but in doing everything possible to allow its various peoples to participate in the economic, social and political life. This would include bilingual education, bilingual ballots, and multilingual police, fire and emergency services — all of which Prop. 63 would threaten.

Prop. 63 represents one more reactionary cloud on the U.S. horizon which threatens the unity of working and oppressed people in our common struggle for justice and equality. We must dispel this cloud by fighting for the equality of languages and complete democracy.

English-Only measure killed in New Mexico

"I am proud of the New Mexico legislature for *not* following in the footsteps of California concerning 'English-Only.' In New Mexico, we respect each others' rights," said Raymond D. Sanchez, Speaker of the House, to *Unity*.

He was referring to a unanimous 70-0 vote in the New Mexico House of Representatives on February 5 against a state constitutional amendment to make English the state's official language.

"Under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, bilingual rights were protected," explained Isabelle Ogaz Tellez, chair of the National Education Committee of the American GI Forum, to *Unity*. "The 'English-Only' people claim to uphold the U.S. Constitution, but . . . they are really 'speaking with a forked tongue' because 'English-Only' would deny us freedom of speech. They have no appreciation of the richness of our language and culture."

New Mexico's population is 37% Chicano-Latino and 8% American Indian. About 30% of the state legislators are Latino. Opposition to the measure was so overwhelming that Republican legislator Marty Lambert, the bill's sponsor, herself voted against it and called on other lawmakers to do the same. Even Republican Governor Garrey Carruthers termed the bill "offensive" to Latinos and American Indians.

Sunbelt states stun "English-Only" drive

Ed Gallegos

***DENVER** – From January through March, "English-Only" bills — measures to declare English the state's official language — were defeated, withdrawn or blocked in Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Texas and Oklahoma.*

U.S. English, the organization spearheading the "English-Only" movement, has mounted its latest campaign by way of the statehouse. Leaders of the drive have expressed their desire to ban bilingual ballots, bilingual education and other democratic rights and services. They are targeting the Sunbelt states of the Southwest, where the Chicano/Latino population is expected to grow to 40 million by the year 2000.

Spanish is an integral part of life in Colorado and the Southwest.

Opponents of "English-Only" plan to continue fighting any further attempts to disenfranchise Chicanos and American Indians on the basis of their native language.

Broad and early opposition

Opposition in these Sunbelt states has been broad and early, in efforts to prevent what happened in California, where an "English-Only" measure made it onto last November's ballot and passed.

Chicanos and American Indians have played a leading role. In Oklahoma, the opposition was led by state Senator Kelly Haney, a full-blooded Seminole Indian, defeating the measure by 22-4 in mid-February. In New Mexico, where Chicanos are 30% of the state legislators, the house unanimously defeated a similar measure February 5, just days after it was introduced.

In Texas, Al Luna, chair of the Democratic Hispanic Caucus, announced on March 2 — the same day the "English-Only" bill was introduced — that he already had 60 committed votes to defeat the measure.

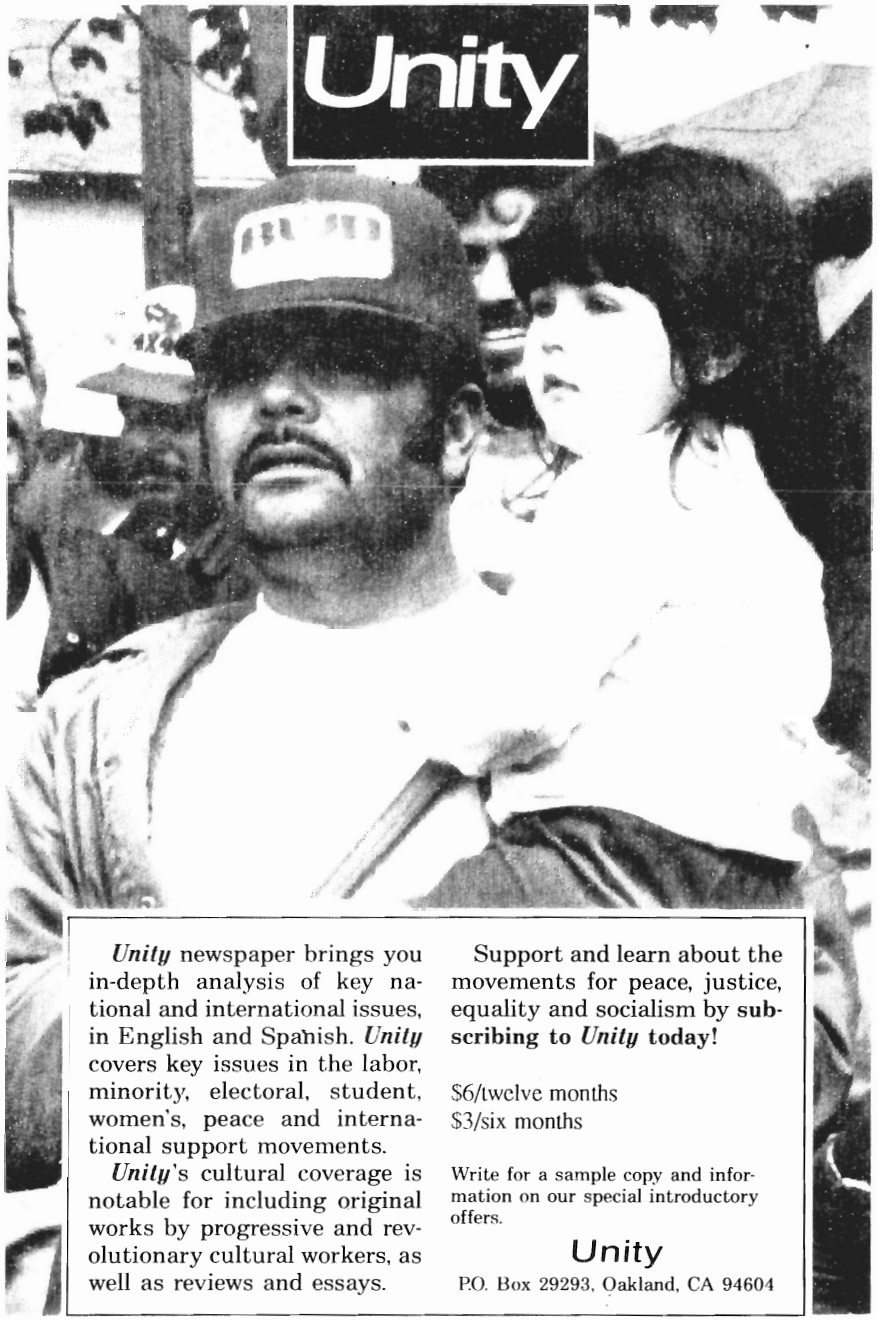
Chicano activists in Colorado also got an early start, calling for a coalition immediately after an "English-Only" bill was introduced in the state legislature. Coloradoans for Language Freedom has united a broad range of teachers, activists, elected officials and community people, and has won support from Chicano, Asian and Jewish organizations in the Denver area. The coalition is widely credited with forcing the sponsor of the bill to withdraw the measure on March 6.

Some creative tactics have also emerged. In Arizona, Raúl Grijalva, of the Task Force for Language Freedom, told *Unity* that the group organized "a drive to have the Tucson City Council pass a resolution declaring Tucson a multicultural city. This has helped isolate U.S. English here."

But "English-Only" forces have not given up their fight in these states. Colorado lawmaker Barbara Phillips, who was forced to withdraw her "English-Only" measure, is now threatening a statewide ballot initiative. In response, Coloradoans for Language Freedom is stepping up efforts to reach all corners of the state, and mount a grass-roots fund-raising drive through the end of summer.

In Arizona, an "English-Only" bill died in a house committee, but a similar measure is now in the state senate, which will decide whether to place the measure on the November 1988 ballot.

However, in Texas, only state legislators can amend the state constitution. With the "English-Only" bill blocked in the legislature, Elsa Nava of MALDEF in San Antonio told *Unity*, "We believe that 'English-Only' is now dead in the state of Texas."



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