

LA RAZA UNIDA PARTY IN CALIFORNIA

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is not to give a historical perspective of the Raza Unida Party or to analyze the concept theoretically but rather to examine the feasibility of a Raza Unida in the State of California, tempered by the experience of Raza Unida elsewhere and cognizant of the political realities of California politics and the divergence of philosophical thinking and political awareness among the Chicanos in this State. Thus, the paper will focus specifically on the Los Angeles County area with an eye toward the entire state, for if the party is to become a successful reality, it must be a coordinated, statewide effort.

Because Raza Unida is such a recent development, the extent of information available is very limited. Therefore, the paper will not be full of research material and footnotes but will reflect a very contemporary analysis based on three months of active work with Raza Unida in California and a broad range of experience and interviews with Chicano and Democratic party leaders.

### WHY RAZA UNIDA?

There are three main arguments that have been used by Democrats and others to discourage Raza Unida from developing in California. First, it is said that Raza Unida in Southwest Texas has the clear advantage of numbers. With the Chicano population constituting a numerical majority in most Southwest Texas counties, it is merely a matter of time before Raza Unida can take over elective offices in those areas. It is argued that in California no such concentrations exist, at least politically (due to gerrymandering), and that the Chicano would do better by concentrating his efforts in making an impact on the Democratic Party. Second, it is cited that the Democratic

Party in Texas is more racist and inflexible and that in California the liberal wing, through organizations such as CDC (California Democratic Council), has been able to influence the party and make it more reflective to minority needs. The third argument is that no ethnic political party has been truly successful in electing candidates to office in the United States.

Each of these arguments needs to be examined more closely. The population distribution of the Chicano in Texas is different from California, but in no way does it diminish the potential effect that RUP could have on political elections in California. The difference is that the party will take another form in California. In Southwest Texas complete control of the political offices will eventually result, whereas in California the organized vote could be used to extract concessions from the major parties.

However, the supposed differences between the Texas and California Democratic Party are more imagined than real. The Democratic Party has taken the Chicano vote for granted. In Los Angeles County between 90 to 92 percent of the Spanish-surnamed registered voters are Democrats. No attempt has been successful thus far in changing the voting pattern of the Chicano. The Romo for Governor candidacy, under the Peace and Freedom Party and endorsed by MIPA, was an attempt to reverse the "secure" Chicano vote. Romo failed, unable to muster 1 percent of the votes cast. The assumption that Chicanos are sure Democratic voters is true, and for that very reason the Democrats have not delivered for the Chicano. The opportunities to deliver have been there, but they have been passed over.

The failure of the Democrats to provide Chicanos with adequate political representation is the best example to illustrate the lack of responsiveness. In 1960 and again in 1966 (Senate redistricting according to the 1965 Supreme Court decision of 1-man, 1-vote) the Democrats were in control of the Legislature. In both cases the Chicano concentrations were gerrymandered so that no district had a Chicano majority.

The city of Los Angeles has about 400,000 Chicanos (about 20 percent of the total population) but does not have one Chicano city councilman out of 15. The County of Los Angeles with over a million Chicanos has no Chicano county commissioners, and the State with nearly three million Chicanos (almost 15 percent of the population) has two Chicano Assemblyman out of 80 (neither of who depend on Chicano majorities to get elected) and no Chicano state senators. Chicano concentrations exist in several areas which, if districted properly, would have Chicano majorities. (See attached fact sheets.) Thus, the Democratic Party has demonstrated great inflexibility and outright discrimination in dealing with the Mexican.

It HAS become apparent, despite a strong and forceful statewide effort, that in 1971 the Democratically controlled Legislature will protect incumbent Democrats in Chicano gerrymandered districts. Before the U.S. Commission of Civil Rights State Advisory hearings in January, 1971 in Sacramento, Jess UNruh called the Chicano "politically naive" and "unaware of the political realities" when asked if the legislature would move to redistrict against incumbent Democrats.

Also, in the past, because of residency requirements, literacy tests, and English proficiency, a very small percentage of eligible voters were

registered to vote. The Chicano has been an impotent political force and the Democrats have never had to be responsive to Chicano needs.

The third argument misjudges the RUP concept, for the party is not necessarily an end in itself. The value of Nationalism, both the culture and the language, are well recognized as excellent tools to unite our people. The Chicano vote when it is organized and deliverable can begin to search for alliances with other ethnic groups or economic interests which reflect similar problems and goals.

#### RAZA UNIDA IN OAKLAND

There are as many interpretations of what RUP is and should be as there are factions in the movement. Some, such as the Oakland area, envision it as a party which has "decided to reject the existing political parties of our oppressors" and use the party "as a unifying force in our struggle for self-determination." The Preamble continues that the liberation will be by "any means necessary" and that the party will "not support any candidate of the Democratic or Republican parties or any individual who supports the parties." The membership is limited to people of La Raza only. They see Raza Unida as a revolutionary front. However, there are organizations in the Chicano movement which are revolutionary fronts already. Why do we need another one?

Although one of the principal objectives is to unify La Raza, we know that from the outset, the Preamble will alienate most Chicanos, many of whom are still traditional strong Catholics who cringe at the very mention of the word Chicano. How does the RUP in Oakland propose to unite these factions?

Indeed, on the basis of the preamble it will be difficult to bring Chicanos together.

It is contradictory at one point to recognize "electoral activity" as an aspect of "involving La Raza" but yet be unwilling to deal with any party. If it is going to be a revolutionary front why deal within the system at all?

Why is the party limited to Raza only? Is Oakland suggesting that absolutely no one who is not a Chicano neither understands nor has lived through the same problems, or that all Chicanos understand the issues in the movement and share a commitment? The party should be a Raza party, but those who share our plight and are willing to help in our struggle should be permitted to join, knowing fullwell that it is a Chicano party. Let us not confuse the issue: we are talking about self-determination and not racism-in-reverse. Racism is an Anglo characteristic; the Mexican cultural tradition is not racist. We must never allow ourselves to react the same as our oppressors.

Although many do not disagree with the analysis or some of the conclusions of the Preamble, many would take issue with the tactics. Let's face it: now is not the time for a revolutionary front! Our people are not ready for it--yet.

The NLF in Vietnam was not formed until 1960 after nearly 15 years of armed struggle. A revolutionary front will not succeed unless initially you have a high degree of political awareness. Our people are a long ways from that level of consciousness which would allow a revolutionary front to exist and flourish.

Further, the forces of repression are tooling up for such a front. When it does develop, it will more than likely have to operate clandestinely.

In short, if the Preamble is adopted statewide, RUP as a uniter, as a viable and powerful force in California politics, as a developer of political awareness, as a means for self-determination, predictably, will never come about; and "the full and total participation of La Raza in the struggle," something which has never been a reality, will become a dream of the imagination of the romanticist.

#### HOW SHOULD WE ORGANIZE RUP IN CALIFORNIA?

If the RUP is to be successful in California, the movement needs to move very cautiously during the planning stages. Great polarization now exists in the ranks of the movement; some speculate that because of a lack of ideology, direction, and economic base, the movement is beginning to turn into a fad. The in-fighting which has so bitterly divided La Raza must be avoided, at great costs and through compromise, lest the party be doomed before it gets off the ground.

The RUP needs to be organized around issues that have the broadest **BASE** possible to include all Chicanos who are interested in the future of their **people**. The party should not represent the ideology of any one group; there should be **NO** monopoly of ideas over the party by anyone. The goal is to unite the Chicano, and it can only be accomplished if at the beginning philosophical discussions **on** ideology are avoided altogether. Differences in ideology are what **have** polarized us so. The party should focus on very specific recommendations **on** particular issues. For example, in education

open admissions is a tenable position with broad acceptance in the movement, and it is a revolutionary position--the end to an elitist educational system and a structural change in a major institution. It is a specific issue with universal acceptance which all could work toward on a united front. These are the sorts of issues which will bring unity to the Chicano and success to the party. The platform positions in time will unveil the ideology and the direction the party will take.

At this point it doesn't really matter what personal philosophy people have, whether they are "marxists," "third worlders," or "cultural nationalists." When it comes down to getting jobs for our people, feeding the hungry, or solving the tremendous drug problem, ideology is not as important a factor as organization. Sure, ideology is important and sound theory relevant to our movement must be developed based upon the history of movements elsewhere, an understanding of why we are in the conditions we are in, and the reality of our situation, <sup>AND THAT</sup> will come later, only, if we succeed in organizing ourselves into a united front.

It should be made clear that the primary objective should be to unite. Once the Chicano is in the party, then the process of education begins, the level of consciousness is raised, the ideology of the party becomes clearer, determined by the people, directed by the leaders.

There is little doubt that if the Chicano vote can be organized a powerful political force would develop in California politics. Potentially the RUP could determine the results of statewide and possibly national elections. Holding the balance of power, the vote could be used to gain:



concessions from the major political parties, which would be consistent with the ideology of Raza Unida, resting control in the hands of the Chicano communities. Where the Chicano population constitutes a majority in a district, the RUP will elect candidates to office.

Several have raised the question that with a lack of ideology at the outset, what will prevent the RUP from being co-opted and from becoming another organization with token goals? This danger is a real threat to every movement anywhere, and the establishment of a revolutionary ideology at the beginning will not guarantee that it will not happen. The Revolution of Mexico has long been dead, yet every six years the leaders of the PRI travel the width and breadth of the country espousing revolutionary rhetoric, hypocrisy carefully couched by flowery words. The best guarantee against a sell-out is accountability, and the selection of leadership with vision, commitment, and a real understanding of our situation. Compromises are going to have to be made along the way, both within the movement and outside the movement, but at least with Raza Unida we will be speaking from a position of real power: the power of several million votes across the Southwest. So compromises will have to benefit the Chicano communities. The political process responds only to power, not to justice or fairness or moral rightness. So, with Raza Unida when our bluff is called, we will not respond with rhetoric as we have in the past, but with action.

A final word about Chicano politicians: elected Chicano officials do not depend on the Chicano to get elected. Therefore, they reflect not Raza interests but interests of a liberal Democratic constituency. As

Bert Corona has said, "You can count on ~~the~~ Chicano politician to vote the right way, but in terms of building organized grassroots political power, his contribution has been very limited, <sup>AND</sup> that is <sup>WHY</sup> ~~we~~ we need to change things." So when the time to put ~~himself~~ himself on the line comes or to organize a movement, he simply doesn't do it because his constituents may be offended. Chicano politicians need to be accountable to the Chicano, and with Raza Unida that would be the case. More Chicanos in the political arena is not the answer; ~~More~~ more committed Chicanos who reflect Raza interests and are accountable to the Chicano are needed. We don't want more token Chicanos.

El Partido de la Raza Unida is the answer for our God given destiny: autonomy, freedom, and an end to exploitation. *MAY IT BECOME A REALITY.*