

June 20, 1986

La Frontera is not a new issue to Herman Baca, chairman of the Committee on Chicano Rights (CCR). It is an issue that he has lived with for over 15 years. His print shop 'Aztec Printers' will attest to that. It is literally submerged with box after box of cases, data, laws, and important history on the evolving problems with the border.

Baca and the CCR have earned a national and international reputation as knowing what they are talking about when it comes to "La Frontera". Locally, that recognition is given rather grudgingly. A staunch defender of Chicano-Latino human, civil and constitutional rights, Baca and the CCR has given no quarter when it comes to defending those rights. As a consequence, he has been quoted (in such media as) the New York Times, The Washington Post, TIME Magazine, NEWSWEEK, El Día, Mexico City, El Excelsior, Mexico City, The London Observer, England, La Prensa, Brazil, NBC, CBS, and ABC to name a few.

Baca clearly states the position of the "victim," the Mexican, the people of this country.

The Issue

Q— Mr. Baca, is there something new in the Immigration issue?

A— It has been building up for the past 17 years, the hysteria has been orchestrated, by the 'drumbeaters', for the INS/Border Patrol and vested corporate interests of this country.

The 'drumbeaters' led by the likes of Sheriff Duffy, Chief of Police Bill Kolender, Supervisor Susan Golding, INS Commissioner Ezell, the U.S. Attorney General Edwin Meese and many others are responsible for the rising level of hysteria in this country.

Q— What have they been saying?

A— In the last couple of months we have had Sheriff Duffy publicly advocate the ridiculous and absurd proposal that one Marine should be stationed every 15 feet, day and night, along the U.S.—Mexican border. A simple calculation indicates that Duffy's proposal would mean that 704,000 Marines would have to be assigned along the border per shift. If we carry out Duffy's absurd proposal for day and night shifts, it would take 2,112,000 Marines to patrol the border. This is the kind of so-call "intelligent" dialogue that we are having to resolve the issue of the undocumented worker.

Paranoia Being Raised

Q— Why do you think, the level of hysteria and paranoia is being raised?

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Ezell Short On Math

A— The 'drumbeaters' are fighting for the economic interest that needs thousands of workers, as cheap as possible. We are talking about the labor needs of Agri-Business, the Motel-Hotel Tourist industry, the Garment industry, restaurants, bars, nightclubs, the auto industry. The 'drumbeaters' are raising fears in American society because the last thing they want is legalization. It serves their purpose to have "bracero" type programs.

Every piece of legalization that has come before the U.S. Congress has been crafted to institutionalize the exploitation of the Mexican worker. Immigration is not the issue. Cheap labor is!

The American media, with few exceptions, has not carried out its role as the fourth estate. It has printed, published and distributed widely the unverified statements made by these 'drumbeaters'. As long as the word "illegal alien" appears in the story... they have printed it without verifying what is being said.

The Copley Press, especially, is guilty of the worst type of Yellow Journalism that I have ever seen. Not since the Hearst press instituted Yellow Journalism against 'Mexicanos' in the 40's, with the Sleepy Lagoon cases, have I seen this type of Yellow Journalism.

Q— Any other instances of paranoia?

A— Let me call attention to the absurd statements made by chief of police, Bill Kolender. He claims that a large proportion of the increase of crime in San Diego is caused by illegal aliens. This is the most cowardly type of scapegoating. It is easy to blame a defenseless victim who has little or no rights, no organization or political muscle to defend themselves. It would behoove Kolender to look at his own department for any failings in the system rather than blaming illegal aliens for his shortcomings.

Q— Any others?

A— Supervisor Golding just proposes suing the U.S.

Government to collect up to \$60 million that she says the illegal aliens cost the County of San Diego. She stated this publicly in spite of the fact that every report from the County's own studies have stated to the contrary. It is a proven fact that the undocumented workers puts more into the tax coffers than they take out.

Ezell Short On Math

Q— Just how many so called illegal aliens cross the border?

A— Ezell, the INS Western Regional Commissioner, is busy telling the media that the Border Patrol apprehended 70,000 illegals during the month of April 1986. He also stated that for everyone caught 5 got away. According to Ezell's figures, 350,000 illegal aliens crossed the border illegally during April 1986. This means that one third of Tijuana was abandoned in one month! Golding on the other hand, not to be out done, claimed recently that for every illegal apprehended, 10 got through. This means that 700,000 illegally came to the United States in the month of April. By June, at this rate, Tijuana will be a ghost town!

Q— Why do they say this?

A— Their aim is to get the Congress to institutionalize a form of slave labor for America's corporate interests. By creating a floating pool of cheap labor they stand to make billions. Worst of all, in the process they maintain America's 20 million Chicanos, Latinos, and Hispanos in a second class status.

Labor Shortage

Q— Ezell says that they take jobs away from American workers?

A— He lies. The facts are; that by the year 2000 (14 years from now), according to current research, America is going to have to import between 5 and 15 million foreign workers to man our factories. Zero population has us to the point where we have a labor shortage in this country. Most of this labor will come

from Mexico which has a surplus labor supply and is in the midst of a depression.

The problem is: how do we get cheap labor and at the same time be able to push them out of the country once we don't need them? That is where the Wilson amendment comes in: the "Bracero Program of the 80's" Wilson would have 350,000 'guest workers' be imported. The hypocrisy of American policy is that they know they need these workers to maintain the present economic growth. But, they are fearful of these workers becoming American citizens. They want a cheap exploitable labor force, with no rights, and that the country can deport whenever they wish. That is why immigration legislation is the slave issue of the 20th century. They are trying to do with Mexicanos what they did with the Blacks.

Q— How does this effect American citizens who are of Mexican descent?

A— Whose homes do they raid? Whose factories do they raid? Who gets deported without due process? Mexican Americans along with Mexican citizens. We are indistinguishable from the Mexican worker crossing the border today. The mounting hysteria against them impacts against us. It works to take from us the gains that we have made in the past 50 years... we lose our rights. It is exemplified by the push to make English the Official Language, to eliminate Spanish language ballots, stop bilingual education, destroy affirmative action programs etc.

What we have is a situation where any person of Mexican ancestry is going to be open to attack. Not only legal attacks but also, police attacks because of their perception that "there is an invasion going on the border"... that this somehow equates with crime.

Some White Americans are frightened, terribly frightened of seeing Democracy actually exist in the Southwest. This is where the Latinos-Chicanos will soon be the political

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Chicanos Resent Undocumented?

majority.

Q— Then this is not just an immigration problem but a labor problem?

A— It really is a labor issue and they know it. But they are covering it with the rubric of immigration.

Chicanos resent the Undocumented?

Q— Isn't it true that some Chicanos-Latinos are also resentful of the Mexican undocumented workers?

A— That is also true. Some Chicanos-Latinos are resentful. But you must understand, that we are not immune to the daily bombardment of the right wing propaganda that is carried by the local media. They also believe to some degree the propaganda that is daily being fed to the American public. Many believe the lies. Some groups should know better like the Blacks, the Jewish and religious communities.

We are caught in a contradiction of being resentful because we tend to uncritically accept the daily negative propaganda about ourselves. But at the same time, we realize that today's undocumented are not doing anything different than our fathers, grandfathers and grandmothers did. So we are bothered by the treatment that they receive at the hands of the INS and other police agencies. Deep down-in-side, we carry the memory of the misery, discrimination, the racism that our ancestors suffered in the U.S.

Q— Those that call themselves Hispanics, do they support your efforts?

A— On the issue of immigration they have no choice. Their public and private statements are one of total opposition to proposed legislation.

Q— Do you believe that a new immigration bill will pass?

A— Historically, I don't believe they can win. Our numbers are growing. We have a long history of struggle against this kind of legislative oppression. This is not the first time. We have had to struggle against legislative oppression since the ending of the U.S.-Mexican War. We suffered in the 1930's with the repatriation when thousands of Mexican Americans were illegally deported.

Q— It's cyclical?

A— Yes. The same thing also happened during the fifties under the Walter McCarran act and the McCarthy communist hysteria. The reality is that our numbers keep getting bigger. The organizations keep getting louder and bigger. They may get rid of bilingual education but they can't get rid of bilingual people.

The historical dynamics is that they need working people.

They don't have sufficient working people in this country. What happens next is going to depend on U.S. policy makers and the American society.

Simpson-Rodino Bill

Q— On the immigration bill, why are workers going to be punished and not the employers?

A— The legislation or current laws do not have punishment for anything that the system does to the undocumented or that occur on the border. Humberto Carrillo, a child, was shot by the INS on the border. We are still awaiting the outcry from an Anglo organization to condemn a representative, a member of their society, for shooting a child. What if the opposite had happened? The Anglo community knows exactly what it is doing. They have been practicing it for the last 140 years. The only ones that have not been listened to in the immigration issue, are those that are most affected by it. When is the last time that anyone talked to an undocumented? When do they talk to someone in the Chicano community?

Q— Why has the Simpson-Rodino Bill not passed?

A— There are competing interests. Agri-Business is a very, very politically powerful lobby in Washington. It is one of the largest industries in this country and consequently carries a lot of clout in Congress.

Other secondary labor market industries also want access to a cheap labor pool, with no strings attached. They also lobby against the Bill.

Is the immigration issue just an American issue?

A— No. There should be bilateral, binational negotiations between the provider nations and the receiving nation. All elements of the issue should be addressed. . . otherwise we are doomed trying to find simplistic solutions to complex problems. Until this occurs, I don't see that any legislation is going to change anything. We are dealing with a labor process shared by the two countries, Mexico and the United States. Confrontation and repression are not the wisest ways to solve the problems. The first step, I would suggest, is to search for humane and fair solutions with open dialogue between the different parties involved. A step towards beginning the dialogue would be to reduce the significance of the INS/Border patrol, who are the purveyors of fear, hatred and antagonism between the two countries.

(To be continued next week with another point of view)