

English Spoken Here

By Alex-St. James

Recent testimony before a House Sub-Committee illustrated the apparent acquiescence of our political leaders and the business community's promotion of a multi-lingual future for the United States. Though English remains our common language, large segments of the population do not speak English and are making no effort to learn. Recently, the Congress heard testimony regarding a teenager who applied for a job at a national fast food restaurant chain. Though qualified, his application for employment was rejected because he did not speak Spanish. The explanation he was given was that as an English only speaker, he could not communicate with the other employees who only spoke Spanish. In effect, English-speakers need not apply, was the policy there, *here* in America.

Increasingly, job announcements encourage those who speak a language other than English to apply, while those Americans who speak only English are considered less qualified. This blatant discrimination is appearing throughout the country. The hotel industry often requires that managers speak languages other than English because many of their employees are not required to be fluent in English. The same is true in retailing, manufacturing, the service industry; even public employers often discriminate against fully qualified applicants who speak only English.

The African American community is being hit hard by the demand that we speak languages other than English. In Miami, African Americans have for years been denied access to many jobs. For instance, when applying to drive a city bus, Spanish-speaking drivers are given preference. Major retailers in Miami continue to discriminate on the basis of language. As a result, fewer and fewer African Americans work in retailing and few if any are recruited for management positions. Maintenance and manufacturing companies also discriminate against English only speakers. This growing discrimination is a factor in the high unemployment rate among African Americans, especially young adults in the metropolitan Miami area.

The willingness of employers to hire non-English speakers, and to offer no incentives to learn English, is damaging one of our Nation's most critical characteristics and a basis of our national unity æ the fact that Americans have always been able to communicate with one another, no matter their place of origin. Historically, immigrants with a desire to get ahead, recognized that becoming fluent in English was a key to their success and prosperity. This formula for success is *now* being challenged and the business community bears much of the responsibility. Take for example, WalMart, the world's

largest retailer, with over one million employees. WalMart had hired tens of thousands of illegal immigrants who were taking the jobs of legal residents, thereby rewarding undocumented aliens, who broke our laws, with jobs. Clearly, this was employment discrimination. This retailer's policy of not requiring employees to speak English discriminates against employees and supervisors who speak only English. This is not an isolated situation.

Commerce in many sections of our major cities is no longer conducted in English. The public concern resulting from this blatant discrimination against English only speakers has yet to deter these emerging business practices.

Congress must act immediately to prevent discrimination against residents who speak our common language and none other. Abandoning English in commerce and at the workplace will result in fewer immigrants taking the trouble to learn English and will threaten the unity that our country has enjoyed because of the acceptance of English as our nation's American language.

Legislation must be enacted, if Congress won't act, then at the state level — to prevent employers from discriminating against job applicants who speak only English. Where state law now provides bilingual language services, residents of those states must organize to repeal those anti-American disunity laws. Legislating English as our official language would have the effect of encouraging the use of English and will even the playing field in industries, which currently don't require that employees learn English or speak English on the job. This is of vital importance to the Nation and for African Americans in particular, who through the generations have embraced English as their native language.

Enforcing the use of English as our Nation's official language should not be viewed as an anti-immigrant measure. The rich cultural and racial diversity of our Country is not the issue. The problem is discrimination. Congress must act to ensure that all Americans are treated equally and that in the future, as in the past, we remain an American English-speaking people no matter our national origin or ancestry.

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