

Mexican American Political Association

May 17, 2007

Greetings! The Revenge of Zorro on Immigration Reform.

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Are you ready for the Zorro visas? I mean Z, as currently being hammered out in the U.S. Senate, a bipartisan effort to craft new immigration reform legislation before Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev) imposes his arbitrary deadline to introduce legislation similar to that approved by the Senate last year. The essence of the current immigration debate, in fact raging for the past fifteen years, essentially is the management of an amble, but vulnerable, labor supply for corporations, large and small, urban and rural, and on their terms. At the heart of all the proposals this is the bottom line. And, this can be observed in the initiatives submitted by both Republicans and Democrats. The general framework of all legislative proposals to surface on both sides of the aisle are heavy enforcement measures in exchange for some form of regularization of the estimated 12 million undocumented already in the U.S. and a massive contract-worker program as a way to enroll future flow entrants. The quibbling between the two parties as they work to reach a deal is more around the edges of the framework - the specific terms, the parameters of each measure, and the "triggers." But the equation of onerous enforcement for regularization has never been in question, and the Washington-based lobbying groups that pretend to represent the interests of immigrants, have never questioned it either. Why wouldn't they find this Faustian deal acceptable when they are actually sponsored and subsidized by the very corporations that clamor for the low-wage contract- labor program contemplated by the proponents? And they are even referred to as the "stakeholders" by some of the legislators. Degrees of vulnerability and uncertainty in this modern era labor management experiment can be observed in the details of the debates - six years versus eight prior to qualifying to apply for permanent residency, touch back and return or adjust status within the U.S., varying steepness of multiple fines, learn English and civics, criminal background checks, a tortuous point system premised on levels of education and skill set, proscribed from receiving any social safety net benefits, go to the back of the visa wait line and wait some more, pay all back taxes, contract workers recycled out of the country after completing the term of their contract or allowed to remain and stumble onto the path to permanency, and much more. These are all punitive messages and measures directed against acknowledged hard-working immigrants for having entered the U.S. without inspection. Their penance, notwithstanding that they were drawn by the ever increasing demand for their labor and expelled from their countries of origin, particularly Mexico and Central America, due to the failures of neoliberal

economic policies. And, the proposed restrictive enforcement measures will only heighten the tenuousness of the immigrant's existence in the future. For example, enhanced employer sanctions for hiring persons without documents, mandatory verification of all prospective employees based on a federal centralized database, a border wall, a steep increase of border agents, local law enforcement collaboration with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency, streamlined legal removal, criminalization of future non-inspected entrants, and rapid expansion of detention facilities. And, we thought we defeated Sensenbrenner. The surnames of the authors may be different - Gutierrez, Flake, Reid, Specter, and the bill numbers changed, but the parameters of the deal are within the same ballpark of comprehensive reform. No matter how many times comprehensive is repeated in the press releases of the advocates of this type of "reform," it will never make it fair, humane, or rational. While President Bush and Attorney General Alberto Gonzales were conducting immigration raids throughout the country to whip all parties into line to accept their version of "guest-worker" servitude, thousands of grassroots immigrant activists, attorneys, and immigrant organizers were working to forge a consensus on a fair immigration overhaul. They call it the "Unity Blueprint for Immigration Reform." And, while it may not have a legislator-author, it is an honest reflection of the aspirations of the humble immigrant worker. In fact, the document was not completed until it had a broad hearing amongst the immigrants themselves. The blueprint proposes a rational allocation of visas on an annual basis based on both the need for labor and the desire to reunify families - relative and employment derived visas. The government knows with all certainty what these numbers look like, but allocates a far inferior number of visas, thus, the creeping growth of the undocumented population over the past twenty years. Why not meet the demand with a corresponding number of permanent resident visas? But, that would be too reasonable and rational. The permanency of the visa guarantees the worker a better prospect of protection under federal and state employment statues, and makes him less malleable in the eyes of the employer. This would be the real revenge of Zorro, though.

Join us in this prolonged campaign for driver's licenses and visas for our families. The first step in making change is to join an organization that pursues the change we desire. We welcome you to our ranks.

Other organizations leading this movement include: Hermandad Mexicana Latinoamericana, Mexican American Political Association (MAPA), MAPA Youth Leadership, Liberty and Justice for Immigrants Movement, National Alliance for Immigrant's Rights, and immigrant's rights coalitions throughout the U.S..

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