

to set in, I was invited to join the Association of Raza Educators. I agreed with the mission wholeheartedly but the goals were and still are far from being achieved. However, one thing was for sure, the members of the organization were honest forces who were willing to dialogue and struggle in defense of our pueblo; a true collective that included all voices including my own. We have learned, we have shared, and everyone has benefited; our students, our parents, our community, and ourselves.

Now in my fourth year in ARE San Diego leadership, I have seen many educators come and go. Some visit once and never come around again, others join for a series of months only to disappear with time, while others remain no matter how hard the struggle may become. It seems as if anger has been the catalyst for many to join our organization. For some this anger stems from an individual perspective, how they have come under attack and/or how they are frustrated with others. While others are angry because of how our families, our students, and our communities come under attack. Those who stay, have not only been angry, but believe in collectivism, which requires compromise, patience, and struggle – and those who have left, in my opinion, lack the willingness to set aside their petty individual differences and see beyond the struggle as something much greater than ourselves.

WHAT IS REAL UNITY AND ORGANIZATION?

In order to address the concerns raised by this teacher, we need to understand what is true unity, organization, and accountability. Unity is the “state of being one” with others. It means being together, working together, and “being collective” in the decisions we make. In political struggle (movement), unity is best represented by organization.

As we witness the worsening oppressive conditions facing our communities, the question of unity of those involved in the struggle for justice and self-determination becomes more and more important. Hence, the ability to unite becomes a critical question for our movement.

Since the Chicano Power Movement of the late 60’s and early 70’s, the cry for unity has been at the forefront of those involved in the struggle. Yet, creating unity has been an objective that has rarely been achieved. What we have seen, in most cases, has been a dysfunctional or “superficial” unity.

The history of our struggle is filled with examples of how this lack of real unity has led to failures and defeats. Organizations have been destroyed, battles lost, events canceled, errors committed, activists burnt-out, and opportunities lost, due to lack of unity among those in struggle. Therefore, the question before us is what is unity and why, if everyone agrees to its importance, has it been so difficult create? We believe that the answer is found in the liberalism or the ignorance in our relationship to this particular question.

The reason this unity we speak of has been so elusive throughout decades of struggle is due to what many in the movement call “liberalism” – a practice that manifests itself by letting things or people slide for the sake of peace, friendship, being liked by others, cowardice, or selfish reasons. In our drive to create unity and not hurt anyone’s feelings, we deny the existence of contradictions in individuals with whom unity is impossible. On the other hand, some of us are simply ignorant of the concrete elements that must exist within a group or organization in order to have a functional unity.

We put forth that unity must be based on four basic elements:

- Political Principles
- Accountability and Discipline
- Democracy/Collectivism
- Honesty and Sincerity

What happens when these elements do not exist within a group who claims to be “united”? The following are just but a few examples:

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- The group becomes a “cover” for the opportunists (people use the organization or “unity” for their own individual gain or selfish interests);
- Often times in an effort to appease those with whom we have no political unity, the group comes to wrong conclusions or decisions;
- We waste precious time discussing issues with people who are really not about unity;
- For the sake of unity, we compromise too much, leading to actions that become politically meaningless;
- Everyone puts in hard work into the struggle, but the opportunists take all the credit and benefits;
- We witness how once a decision is made collectively, those who are individualistic and non-collective, end up doing whatever they personally chose to do anyway;
- Individualists and dishonest forces are rarely self-critical, as they only see faults in others, but never in themselves.

THE MOVEMENT IS NOT ABOUT INDIVIDUALS; IT'S ABOUT ALL OF US

Unity is what we strive for, but in this process, do we find ourselves “catering” to those opportunistic forces that only take action when they come under attack? As we struggle to work with teachers who view ARE as too radical or too militant, we find ourselves trying everything in our power to be inclusive. We find ourselves working with educators who either don't know what unity, organization, and accountability is, or are opposed to it.

As we sit with colleagues, as we converse with other educators, and as we march down the streets of San Diego in defense of our communities, we begin to wonder – what do we need to do to get the thousands of Raza teachers, counselors, and other educators from all backgrounds to stand alongside our youth and their families in defense of what is rightfully ours? A reality free of fear, free of ICE terror, free of attacks against our students and community; a reality where what we learn reflects the lives we live.

We need unity, but it seems that others are only willing to unite under their

conditions. Therefore, we try to accommodate them in hopes that they will actively participate. We go to the extent of scheduling events at dates and times that they can attend even though those may not be ideal for the purpose of the action. Even though this is a concession other educators make for the sake of “unity”; we never see the educators we catered-to defending the rights of the families and community from which their students come from. When we march in front of our schools or district offices to demand our educational and human rights, rarely are those educators in attendance and of no surprise, their students aren't either.

Would the students have attended if they were aware or given rides? Are their students even aware of the events? Are they denied information? Are they told not to become too politicized? If so, who is oppressing our youth? Is it the system or is it “Raza” teachers and other “progressives” who have gained access only to deny the next generation the opportunity to fight by denying a possible path to struggle? How can we call ourselves progressive teacher activists or call ourselves “Chicana/os”; if we don't defend our youth and instead “remain politically neutral”?

During the recent struggle at a local University to oppose policies that would severely limit access to Raza and poor/working class students, most high school educators and the student groups that they sponsor, again, were not present – even though many had promised to be there. Those in attendance are to be respected because they stood in solidarity with our youth.

This call is not about us, or you! This is about a movement that is dormant and needs to be awakened; it's about the liberation of our people. We can't wait until we live in a completely fascist state or have lost complete access to the University. Unity is the only path towards our liberation and organization is the highest form of unity. As the great peoples' historian Howard Zinn reminds us, “Keep in mind that great movements in the past have arisen from small movements, from tiny clusters of people who have

gotten together here and there. If you have a movement strong enough, it doesn't matter who is in the White House, what really matters is what people are doing, what are people saying, what are people demanding!" [2]

CONCLUSION

If we agree that change only comes when people build communities of struggle, then we understand that unity is essential for the liberation of the oppressed. "Organization is not only directly linked to unity, but is a natural development of that unity." [3] When organizations and individuals take advantage of the movement for their personal interests, the goal of liberation will always be beyond our reach. It is here where we must confront the questions of liberalism and honesty.

Liberalism, as defined previously, has reduced the movement to activism without context, direction, or accountability, and thus impedes unity. In essence, this lack of unity is synonymous with a lack of organization. Due to prevalent fear and/or lack of honesty, we see the absence of accountability within our movement; an accountability that can only take place within a collective where individuals must make concessions in exchange for unity.

Instead, what often happens is the dialogue needed for reflection is overlooked. The fear of realizing how we perpetuate negative tendencies can impede one's contribution to the movement. "Yet, if we are to build a broad-based movement for social change these concerns must be addressed." [4]

Many educators have not contextualized the concept of social justice, yet they find themselves working for this necessary reality within their classroom or in an organization. Honest self-reflection, dialogue and action must take place before an individual can positively contribute to a struggle for political change. The most essential part of this self-reflection must uncover one's need to leave behind their individualistic tendencies in exchange for

unity with others, an honest unity that can only take place where accountability is commonplace. This space can only be found within an organization filled with honest forces driven by corazón; love for their people.

One must be up-front and courageous when encountering this fear of self-reflection. It is an uncomfortable task, but if individuals truly believe that this movement is necessary, then it will not be seen as a burden. If liberalism is a disease that has had a negative effect on unity, then honesty is its prescription. Ultimately, lack of, and/or fear of honesty is what immobilizes an individual, an organization and a movement.

This article is a call for honest, open dialogue. Some individuals and organizations have conveniently taken benefits of camaraderie and collective work without having to contribute to a liberating praxis. These are the same groups and individuals that owe their very existence to years of struggle and political organizing by previous social justice organizers. Reflection at an individual and organizational level is necessary to advance our movement. We need to end liberalism, be honest, and join any honest organization in the struggle for justice and liberation of our students, our families, and our community. Unity – Organization – Liberation!

¡La Union Hace La Fuerza!

NOTES:

1. What the Association of Raza refers to as a push out rate is what most believe is a drop out rate. A.R.E. believes our youth are pushed out of school as opposed to dropping out.
2. Howard Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*.
3. Paulo Friere, *Pedagogy of The Oppressed*.
4. Laura Pulido (2006). *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left*. Berkeley: University of California Press.