

## **ORDER IN ENGLISH, COMPRENDE?**

**By Don Feder**

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A story out of Philadelphia illustrates the left's sneering contempt for those it calls the working class.

Frustrated by Middle American support for conservative causes, elitists have dropped all pretense of solidarity with the masses.

The proletariat and its vanguard aren't exactly in sync. Your average Joe has as much in common with Howard Dean as an elderly women with facial warts has with Paris Hilton.

The people don't have post-graduate degrees in the social sciences. They wouldn't be caught dead watching a Michael Moore documentary. They have a pronounced tendency to love their country, respect America's fighting men, resent the tax burden and attend religious services regularly.

They don't revere the homeless – known to them as “bums.” They aren't losing sleep over global warming, sexual harassment and racial profiling. Few are vegans; those who are won't admit it. When faced with a disturbing development, their first question isn't, “But how will this impact on the trans-gendered community?”

Joseph Vento could have “working stiff” stamped on his forehead. Aged 66 and the grandson of Italian immigrants, Vento is the owner/operator of Geno's Steaks, the Philly steak and cheese emporium he opened 40 years ago. He rides a motorcycle and has the name of his restaurant tattooed on his arm.

A few months back, Vento posted a laminated sign (decorated with American eagles) in the window of his South Philly restaurant: “This is America. When Ordering, Speak English.”

If Vento’s sign had read: “We Reserve The Right To Refuse To Serve Republicans, Gun Owners, Smokers, SUV drivers and Halliburton executives,” the left would be pushing him as Hillary Clinton’s running mate in ‘08.

But any suggestion that illegal immigration is wrong, that immigrants have responsibilities to their adopted country or that America is an English-speaking nation provokes apoplectic rage – along with accusations of nativism, xenophobia and (that old reliable) racism.

Take an alleged news story about Vento in the Philadelphia Inquirer (“An old struggle to adapt to a new country’s ways.”) by – I kid you not -- Galutra Bahadur.

The distortion starts with the headline. Far from struggling to adapt to our “ways,” many immigrants aren’t even trying. Instead, the country is being transformed to accommodate them. Something guys like Vento rightfully resent.

A technique perfected by practitioners of advocacy journalism (otherwise known as propaganda) is quoting authorities who make their case for them, while studiously ignoring the other side.

Bahadur begins by observing that the sign was a “political statement” from a man whose “Italian-born grandparents spoke only broken English.” – as if this was the height of irony.

The point is: Vento's Italian ancestors did learn English – like mine from the Pale of Settlement. My maternal grandfather, Israel Whtiman, worked 12-hour days in a tailor shop but still found the time to learn English. (He refused to speak Yiddish at home because he wanted his children to speak English.) If he hadn't, I'd be altering slacks and pressing suit jackets.

I've never met a "nativist" who objected to an immigrant speaking accented English. What drives us nuts is huddled masses who've been here 5, 10, 15 years and still have the English vocabulary of a 2-year-old. ("Want steak, cheese!")

Coincidentally, all of the experts Bahadur found to comment on Vento's complaint have the same perspective. (I'm sure he tried really hard to find dissenters; perhaps they simply don't exist.) Roger Daniels, a member of the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island History Committee, told the journalist that prior to 1920, America took in anyone who didn't have Bubonic Plague. This is meant to excuse illegal immigration now.

Daniels somehow neglected to note that there were roughly 50 million Americans at the time, the frontier had been closed for only a few decades, our economy was still geared to backbreaking labor and we didn't have an advanced welfare state (with liberty and food stamps for all).

Let's not forget, there was a backlash to previous generations of immigrants too, Bahadur breathlessly informs us.

Kathryn Wilson of the Pennsylvania Historical Society notes that at one time help-wanted ads limited applicants to the native born. Expecting immigrants to speak English is now comparable to Irish-need-not-apply signs. I'm only surprised Bahadur didn't compare Vento's sign to a Klan cross-burning..

In Bhadur's story, Paul Skerry of the Brookings Institute observes that the dominance of Latinos among recent immigrants has created a backlash – again, playing the dog-eared race card.

Nativists have no objection to immigrants babbling in Russian, Vietnamese or Tagalog. It's not that we want to preserve English as our national language, you understand. It's more that we have an irrational aversion to hearing Spanish spoken. Comprende?

Skerry also explains one big difference between when Vento's grandparents came here and today is that in the sensitive, enlightened America of 2006 “many Americans now value multiculturalism.”

There you have it: Immigrants don't have to learn English. To ask them to follow the example of generations of Italians, Irish, Jews, Germans and Chinese is xenophobic and heartless.

Instead, we should embrace language diversity – teach immigrant students as if they were going to school in Bangladesh, provide interpreters for criminal defendants and welfare applicants, and offer ATM instructions in Aramaic and Mayan.

American taxpayers spend hundreds of millions annually providing translation services, printing ballots in 16 languages and giving driver's exams in 22 tongues. (Multiculturalists never question the insanity of facilitating voting by individuals who can't read the Constitution in the language in which it was written, or follow candidate debates on television.)

In a nine-month period ending in March 2003, the city of St. Cloud, Minnesota spent \$200,000 on interpreter and translation services. The Alameda County (California) Medical Center has 18

*full-time* interpreters on its staff, and another 19 on call. The hospital pays each \$18 to \$20 an hour – costs passed on to the gringos.

Massachusetts gives drivers-license exams in 25 languages, beating California's 21. Can street signs in Farsi be far behind?

A federal judge forced New York City's welfare department to provide interpreters and translated documents for those with – what's the PC term? – “limited English skills.” The city must provide documents in every language spoken by more than 100 mooches – excuse me, honest, hard-working folks who come here to do the jobs Americans don't want – supplemented by welfare benefits Americans pay for.

If an immigrant mugs, murders or rapes an American, he gets a court-appointed translator to go along with his court-appointed lawyer. If he visits a hospital, diagnosis and treatment are facilitated by translation services. When applying for welfare, food-stamps or AFDC – they can fill out forms printed in their native tongue. In most states, the hard-working immigrant family can have their children educated in their language of choice.

To paraphrase that Russian comedian – “ America, what a (*stupid*) country!”

In consequence of the foregoing, the number of “Americans” who don't speak English at all increased 176% between 1980 and 2000.

In 2000, 21.3 million residents of the United States were classified by the Census Bureau as “limited English proficient” – meaning they spoke English “less than very well” – meaning their English was limited to a few key phrases like “Welcome K-Mart shoppers” and “Super-size it?”

Pleas for foreigners to learn the lingo are usually phrased in terms of what's good for them. For instance, in 1999, the average immigrant who spoke English well earned more than twice as much as the immigrant who didn't speak it at all (\$40,714 vs. \$16,345)

Frankly, I care more about us than them. There are two concerns here – the moral and the practical.

If I moved to Mexico, I'd be expected to learn Spanish, pronto. If I took up residence in France and didn't parlez-vous, the French would have me spitted.

On a practical level, language fragmentation (the direction in which we're moving at breakneck speed) leads to national dissolution. From Canada to Yugoslavia, there are no successful multi-language states. People who can't communicate with each other either separate or start killing each other.

You have to be a diversity-worshipping multiculturalist to miss this.

Those Americans who aren't quoted in Philadelphia Inquirer stories about immigrants learning English have a slightly different perspective. Okay, they have a radically different perspective. Joe Vento isn't a lonely guy.

- According to a June 2005 Zogby Poll, 79% of Americans favor making English our official language, as do 81% of first- and second-generation Americans.
- In a 2001 Gallup poll, 96% of respondents said it was essential for immigrants living in America to learn English

- Almost two-thirds of foreign-born adults admit it's reasonable for immigrants to be expected to learn English
- A majority of states (27) have official English laws. There would be 28, except Arizona's was overturned by its state supreme court in 1998.
- On May 18, 2006 – in one of its rare intelligent moves – the U.S. Senate approved an amendment to its immigration-reform bill making English the official language of the United States of America and declaring that there is no affirmative right to receive services in a language other than English. The vote was 62 to 35 in favor of the measure.

Says Vento: “They want us to adapt to these people. What do you mean ‘Press 1 for Spanish’? English, period. Case closed. You better make it the official language.”

Along with his Philly steak-and-cheese subs, Vento serves up heaping portions of common sense.

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