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5-2010

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Catalano, Theresa and Catalano, Luigi, "SB 1070 Immigration Bill in Arizona" (2010). *Faculty Publications: Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education*. 101.
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SB 1070 Immigration Bill in Arizona

Thursday, May 13, 2010, by Theresa & Luigi Catalano, Tucson, Arizona

Theresa Catalano has written an article for EveryOne Group's website about Law SB1070 that was recently passed in Arizona - a law that facilitates control over immigrants, at the same time violating their human rights. President Obama has already expressed a negative opinion of this law, considering it unconstitutional.

Unlike Italy, the United States has a long history as a country of immigration. Most Americans need only go back several generations to find the story of their ancestors and how they came to the United States to look for a better life. While there has always been some anti-immigrant sentiment in the U.S., currently it is stronger than ever, and has recently resulted in the passing of SB 1070 in Arizona. This bill signed by Governor Jan Brewer on April 23, 2010 states that "for any lawful contact made by a law enforcement official or agency.... where reasonable suspicion exists that the person is an alien who is unlawfully present in the United States, a reasonable attempt shall be made, when practicable, to determine the immigration status of the person".

For Italians and many other countries around the world, the routine checking of identification is nothing out of the ordinary. In the United States, this is not so, and is part of the underlying principles of freedom that form a basis for many conservative groups across the country. Regardless of the Governor's promise to provide training to prevent racial profiling, this law will unfairly punish people based on their ethnicity, race or language. In the state of Arizona, where people have been recently given the right to carry concealed weapons without a permit, it seems odd that lawmakers would want more power given to the government.

This however can be reconciled by the fact that lawmakers did not pass SB 1070 for voting Arizona citizens, but for those who have no political capital; undocumented immigrants. While it must be acknowledged that there does exist a criminal element that enters Arizona illegally, this law criminalizes all immigrants many of whom have committed no crimes other than being unable to support themselves and their families through of no fault of their own. These workers search for a better life in the United States risking their lives crossing the deserts of Arizona. Despite common propaganda widely published in the media, these workers make significant contributions to the state and national economy, and for many years Arizona and other state businesses have profited from their low-cost and exploitable labor.

Due to the economic downturn in the United States undocumented immigration has slowed dramatically since 2007.¹ The question then remains, why now? Why has immigration come to the forefront so dramatically in the last month? The answer lies in the politicization of immigration. With elections approaching in November, 2010, the Republican Party has nothing

to lose, especially when their target is a voiceless minority without voting power. Just as in Italy, media bias and ability to build mental images of specific groups has helped to criminalize immigrants in the minds of the public. But this time people with power are fighting back.

Since the passing of this bill lawsuits have been filed by numerous opposition groups including local Tucson police officers and city council members. Mobilization of civil rights groups and other community, faith, business and law enforcement groups as well as elected officials have resulted in more than 80,000 petition and postcard signatures, thousands of emails and phone calls to the Governor's office and boycotts of Arizona businesses.² Referred to as a "misguided effort" by the Obama administration, critics of this bill oppose it on humanitarian grounds, and because of its legal and financial consequences if it is enforced.

While it is my opinion that this bill will be overturned before it goes into affect on July 29, 2010, comprehensive immigration reform that is just for all people still needs to occur at the national level as soon as possible. This reform among other things should protect the rights of migrants from exploitation and provide a path to legalization for immigrants whose contributions to the economy benefit the entire country.

Although Italy has only recently become a country of immigration, its immigrants face similar conditions of discrimination and racial profiling, exacerbated by the current administration. Italian citizens should pay close attention to the detrimental economic effects SB 1070 has begun to have (and will continue to have until it is repealed) on the Arizona state economy, and view recent events in this state as a learning opportunity and an example of how businesses and humanitarian groups can band together to fight discrimination against a people without a voice.

1. Council on Foreign Relations Independent Task Force Report No. 63, (2009).
2. from the Tucson Citizen, (April 23, 2010)

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