

Opinion

The Battalion

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The Battalion is a non-profit, self-supporting newspaper operated as a community service to Texas A&M and Bryan-College Station.

Opinions expressed in The Battalion are those of the editorial board or the author, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Texas A&M administrators, faculty or the Board of Regents.

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Speaking Russian?

In a speech before the Texas House Committee on State Affairs Monday, Dagoherto Barrera said Americans who speak foreign languages divide the nation and leave it open to infiltration by communists. Barrera's statements expose the "Official English" movement for what it is — discrimination based on speech.

Individuals who speak languages other than English may experience a language barrier in Texas. The purpose of programs such as bilingual education is to overcome these barriers. But narrow-minded thinking such as Barrera's does far more to divide this country than alternative languages.

Barrera told the committee that "erosion of English and the rise of other languages in public life has divided citizens." But such blatant discrimination has done far more to divide citizens in the past and should have a higher priority for eradication than foreign languages.

If the representative's assertions are true and a common language is the only quality uniting our states against communism, if then our democratic principles are useless as a unifying factor, our worries are far greater than what tongues our people are speaking in.

Barrera has a point that many non-English speaking citizens use bilingual services as a crutch to avoid learning English. He is also correct in assuming that the state could save a lot of money if it printed official documents such as voting ballots and court procedures only in English.

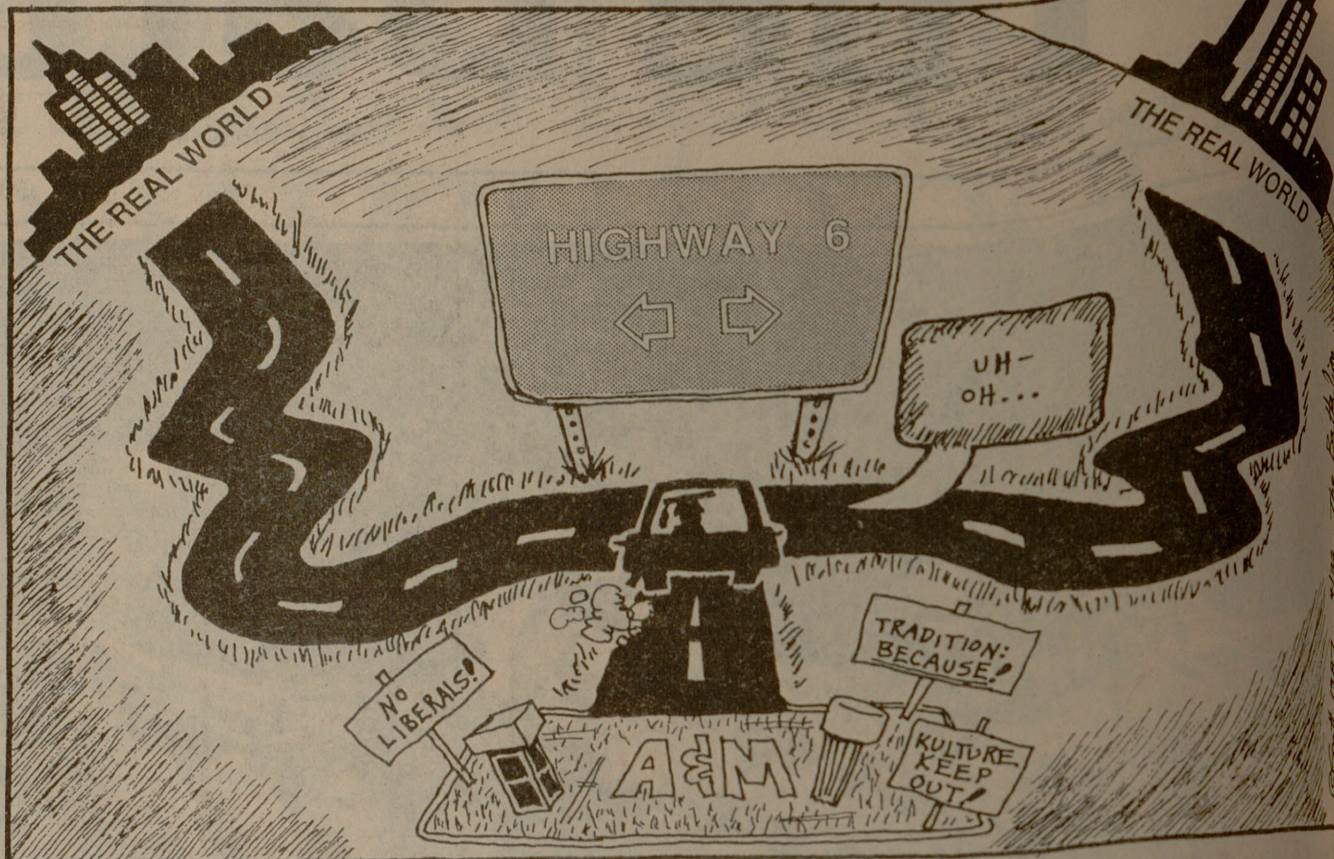
But Texas' lust to save must not override the democratic rights of those citizens who are not yet fluent in English.

How can Barrera's proposal be anything but discrimination? It would mean that a citizen must be able to speak English before being able to read instructions on how to exercise many democratic freedoms, such as the right to vote, or rights, such as proper legal procedures guaranteed by law.

Nowhere is it written that language is a prerequisite for being an American, nor should it be.

Where will the craze for "official" status end? Will the next step be to designate Christianity the "official" religion? Perhaps we could narrow the scope to Protestantism, or even Methodism. Will we then move on to designating "official" food, cars, clothes...

Funny, it's starting to sound a little like that communist infiltration Barrera is so afraid of.



For the right price, book stores might even buy your used car

It's that time of year again. It's the time of year when birds sing happily in trees and kids can't wait for school to let out, true enough.



Mike Sullivan

But it's also that time of year when college students all over this fine nation take their textbooks down to the local bookstores and give — some say sell — their texts back.

You're lucky if you get half of your original purchase price, but, in most cases, your books somehow depreciate more than 100 percent in just under three months.

Obviously, college students are a captive market for textbook stores. And it's equally obvious that bookstore owners and textbook publishers realize this fact.

But what are you going to do when you're required to buy a \$40 text knowing it will be worth no more than half that price — and virtually nothing if a new edition comes out — at the end of the semester? You'll buy.

After several years of such financial abuse, I made some calls to book stores and publishers and got some answers — responses may be more accurate in some cases — to questions about buying and selling books.

The first thing I wanted to know is why some publishing companies seem to come out with new editions so often.

A local bookstore representative told me there could be a couple of reasons for this. She said the books actually may need to be updated, or the publishing company may be trying to squeeze out the used-book competition. The bigger the used market is for a certain text, the smaller the market is for that text's publisher. The solution: make the used books obsolete by publishing another edition and force students to buy new. A simple, yet lucrative, tactic. Take a look inside the front cover of one of your texts — *Cost Accounting: A Managerial Emphasis* (required text for Accounting 329), for example. There has been a new edition published for that book every five years since 1962. It's very considerate of the accounting world to keep such a regular pace for Prentice Hall, the book's publisher. Think about it, though. It seems that five years is just about long enough for a market to become fully saturated with used books, making new books difficult, if not impossible, to sell.

But arguing with publishers gets you nowhere. They're in the driver's seat. So I asked some local bookstore owners how they decide how much to mark up a book and how they decide how much to pay when buying books back.

Of course, the bookstore owners said they must consider their overhead when marking up their merchandise. One store representative told me that to meet costs, they must sell high-priced Aggie paraphernalia — stickers, sweatshirts, mugs, dog collars and cologne. But considering all the suckers who buy that junk at those prices, bookstore owners would be stupid not to capitalize on the inane.

In essence, I got nowhere with the question about markup.

But I did learn some interesting things about selling books back to stores.

Whatever you do, don't sell your books back at any time other than final week. The stores will only pay you wholesale for the books, because they don't know which books will be used the next semester. In other words, you get about \$1.53 for a \$25 book. Of course, if the book isn't going to be used the following semester, or if it's a paperback, \$1.53 will look like a good price.

When finals week does roll around the bookstores will start off paying you 10 percent, or close to that, of your original purchase price — if the book is immediate, of course. As with commodities, however, the books become less valuable toward the end of the week when stores are flooded with them. The best to do is borrow your roommate's books to study for your final, and sell your books back on Monday, or sell your roommate's if his is in better condition.

How much do the bookstores mark up the used texts they buy back from you? Ask them next semester. But remember, they have to cover costs. Aggie stickers and seat warmers don't make the payments on the Mercedes, OK, BMW.

But, as always, there is a better chance. Student Government, here's your chance.

I called some of our burnt-out buddies in Austin, and they've got an interesting program going that's around the bookstore ripoffs. The Consumer Affairs Committee of the university's Student Association put together a student book exchange on campus.

The exchange is a computerized list of student's names and the books they want to sell or trade. It's posted at the beginning of each semester and is updated daily. According to a student representative, the exchange is used by a large percentage of the student body and has been successful in helping students get around the bookstore bureaucracy.

Hell, we've already copied their list, why not steal a good idea?

Mike Sullivan is a senior journalism major and Opinion Page Editor at The Battalion.

News of the day is yesterday's news

One morning, unable to sleep as I wrestled with the cosmic issues of our time, I rose at dawn and went downstairs to wait for the newspapers. I read five of them daily, and that morning I waited for the day to begin, as usual, with the slap of a newspaper hitting the porch. I opened the door and peered out. The car was coming. It slowed and an arm reached out for the toss. "War and Peace" hit the porch.



Richard Cohen

"Hey!" I yelled to the delivery man. "What's this?" He cut his engine, got out of the car and came up to the porch. "You Cohen?" he asked, consulting a sheet. I said I was. "It says you get 'War and Peace.' Then come the complete works of Faulkner. I have you down for 'The Federalist Papers,' the works of DeTocqueville, 'The Castle' by Franz Kafka and all of Trollope."

"But where's the paper?" I asked.

"There is no paper," he said. "There won't be any newspaper for a year. There won't be any news for a year. The world is taking a breather, trying to assimilate recent developments — AIDS, computers, new-wave music, compact discs, Star Wars, glasnost and the madness of the Iran-Iraq war. We need to pause, think, consider and then reconsider."

The delivery man was old and balding and spoke with a German accent. He wore slacks, a baggy sweater and shoes with no socks. His face was wise and softly gentle, and a shy smile peeked from under a bushy mustache. Somehow, you could tell he played the violin.

I picked up my Tolstoy and went back into the house. The truth was I had not read the books the old man had mentioned — always wanted to, but never got to them. Newspapers and magazines always intervened. They were an insistent, clamoring part of my

life, an intrusion that pushed everything else aside. Because of them, I knew everything and nothing — what happened but sometimes not why.

I went to the office where, usually, more newspapers awaited me, but there were none. I looked for messages. There was one saying that my lunch with the staff director for the Senate Select Committee on the 55-mile-per-hour speed limit was canceled. There was another from the director of an art museum. Would I like to attend a noon concert — the Bach B-Minor Mass? Yes, I would.

And this is how it started. I went to museums, and the world of art — a world that means so much to some people — opened up to me. I studied music and turned my attention to religion. I read the major works of Judaism during which I had imaginary conversations with my grandfather, the Talmudic scholar turned plumbing-supply clerk. I studied Christianity and then turned my attention to Islam. In a while, I could read the Koran in Arabic and understood why that language is so special, why it pervades the soul and is unsurpassed in its poetry.

Every week, books hit my porch. I reread Shakespeare, and the language stunned me. I knocked off Proust, Dostoevsky and all the Russian masters — just like that. I marveled again at Henry Roth's "Call It Sleep," consumed all of Shaw and Dickens, read "Ulysses" from the front (yes, yes) and then turned to the poets. My porch welcomed Yeats.

The masters informed me. Much of what the newspapers told me was new, turned out not to be. New issues about justice and morality turned out to be old. Gibon told me about empire, DeTocqueville about America, Madison about government, Sandburg about presidents, Nadezhda Mandelstam about tyranny, George Orwell about journalism, Picasso about lust, Beethoven about daring, Freud about imagination and the Greek tragedies about human frailty.

One morning, expecting some Push-

kin, I rose at dawn and went down to the porch. The car pulled up, and an arm tossed something my way. It was the newspaper.

"Hey, what's this?" I yelled. The old man cut the engine and came up to the porch. "The year is over," he said. "The world has resumed. This is the first of five newspapers today, two on Sunday, plus the usual magazines, including (here he made a face) People." Excited, I looked at the headlines: war in the Middle East, a church-state issue before the Supreme Court, an interview with a surrogate mother named Hagar. "This isn't new," I exclaimed with my newfound wisdom.

The old man shrugged. "There's new news and old news," he said. "Without the present, there is no past. The works of today are the masterpieces of tomorrow." He smiled, descended the stairs and then turned back. "It's all relative," he said with a laugh. Then he got into his car and drove off while, from somewhere, a Bach violin piece, long lost, sweetly pierced the air and then vanished.

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Big hearts

EDITOR:

The article written by Melanie Perkins April 17 stated that the clothing drive sponsored by Omega Phi Alpha service sorority was an overwhelming success, which it was — particularly for those wishing to find a place to deposit their dirty, moldy rags.

My sources have reported that many articles donated were not clothing, but rags. For example, in what way would a dirty sleeve torn from a shirt be of any use to someone needing clothing?

It is a cruel joke, both on the people who work very hard to make donated clothing decent for the needy and on the needy themselves.

Mail Call

My prayer is that the Aggies who donated their rags to a worthy cause make it big in the financial world and never have to ask for a dirty shirt sleeve in order to have anything at all to wear.

Some people are a disgrace — if not to A&M, then to the shame mankind.

As for the sorority sisters who sponsored the drive, you have the gratitude of those who can use the decent clothing, so please don't become discouraged because of the thoughtless actions of a few juveniles in the area who still obviously mess their pants daily.

Carlo Decano '83

Letters to the editor should not exceed 300 words in length. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for style and length, but will make every effort to retain the author's intent. Each letter must be signed and must include the date, address and telephone number of the writer.