CODOFIL'S CHIEF ASKS MILITANCY

Step Needed to Preserve Ethnic Languages, View

Educators must become politically militant if ethnic languages are not to disappear in the U.S., a politician told a group of teachers Sunday in New Orleans.

James Domengeaux, president of the Council on the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL), addressed the opening session of the three-day national convention of the American Association of Teachers of French at the Fairmont Roosevelt Hotel Sunday afternoon.

"Organizations like yours must become militant and demanding," Domengeaux said. "The dying ethnic languages in the U.S. must be rejuvenated and it must be done rapidly."

Domengeaux explained that the rejuvenation program in French that CODOFIL has devised. The state agency is working to establish French-language programs in Louisiana public schools from the first grade up, he said.

The agency also has teacher and student exchange programs with both France and Quebec, Canada, Domengeaux said, and is now assisting the state university system in founding a French quarterly journal.

One major problem for CODOFIL has been the noncooperation of many educators in the state, according to Domengeaux.

"Teachers don't like politics in education," the former state legislator said, "but sometimes it is necessary."

Domengeaux urged the educators to pressure state legislatures and the U.S. Congress to institute language programs similar to that of CODOFIL in the nation's public schools.

He emphasized that such a program is "of vital national interest."

"Language is the key to understanding between peoples," he said. "As our ethnic languages die out, we will become more and more provincial and less understanding of other nations and cultures — in a shrinking world where such understanding is ever more necessary."

Perhaps a million and a half Louisianians still speak French, Domengeaux said, and CODOFIL is trying to use this "extraordinary asset" as a base for a "renaissance of the French language" in the U.S.

"French-speaking Louisianians and other ethnic-language speaking Americans have been the victims of the melting-pot concept, a philosophy well-intended but ill-advised," Domengeaux said.

"This melting-pot concept sought to create one nation and one people by smothering all ethnic differences," he added. "This philosophy regretfully lost sight of the fact that one language culture complements another.

"We are only now recovering from the stigma and sense of inferiority that this traumatic philosophy caused," he said, "but we must act rapidly if ethnic languages in the U.S. are not to become the exclusive property of the linguistic aristocrats in our universities."