

9

The Tulsa Tribune

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MAKE TULSA A GOOD CITY FOR YOUTH

Tulsa, Oklahoma, Friday, February 11, 1944

We shall never understand one another until we reduce the language to seven words.
—KAHLIL GIBRAN.

THE SEQUOYAH SYSTEM

ROBERT L. OWEN, three times a Senator from Oklahoma and now in the 88th vigorous year, has evolved a "global alphabet" which he hopes will not only permit the billion-odd illiterate people on this earth to read and write their own languages fluently, but will enable them to understand and use basic English, the proposed international language.

Senator Owen's work, which is getting some attention in Congress, is built around symbols for 18 consonant sounds and 15 vowel sounds. The U sound in the word "too," for example, would be expressed with a figure like a U. The U-sound in "but" would employ the same figure with a small loop on the left arm. The U-sound in "you" would have a loop on the right arm. All signs would be made of the simplest possible straight or curved lines.

By the use of such a system the reader would be required only to memorize the sounds expressed by each sign, repeat the sounds aloud, and he would find himself speaking the words.

Consciously or not, Senator Owen is treading a path blazed by Sequoyah, the great Cherokee teacher, more than 150 years ago. Back in his native tent village in Georgia the young Indian examined with curious envy the "talking papers" of the white man. Knowing no alphabet, he set out to make one for his people. After patient practice he concluded that the human voice could make 88 sounds, so he set about gathering suitable symbols. He borrowed all 26 of the English letters (although the sounds he made them represent had no relation to the English sounds) and he invented 62 more signs.

When Sequoyah's work was finished a Cherokee had only to memorize the sounds represented by the 88 letters and on reading them aloud he would find himself speaking his native tongue. Sequoyah made the Cherokees the first educated tribe of Indians in America, and a large and respectable Cherokee literature quickly resulted.

Senator Owen's alphabet is simpler than Sequoyah's. It should be twice as easy to learn. The fact that it eliminates all silent letters would permit condensed printing.

There is a pretty big idea here. People who are already literate might object to learning a new alphabet, but more than half the population must start from scratch. By executive order 15 years ago Kemal Ataturk caused the Turkish people to junk the cumbersome Turkish alphabet and adopt the Roman letters. Since then literacy has trebled in that country. Why couldn't an even simpler phonetic alphabet do the same for the benighted billion?

Phonetic Alphabets ^{Push. Post}

In the last 2 decades 350 nationalities have adopted phonetic alphabets which an individual can learn in one day and immediately read and write his own language or dialect. It is rapidly abolishing the illiteracy, ignorance and poverty of people in Asia.

The Russian Soviet Republics, under the guidance of Lenin and Stalin adopted the phonetic alphabet as a means to immediately overcoming illiteracy of the Russian people, who had been kept in ignorance by their highly cultivated, literary educational leaders.

By the phonetic alphabet 30,000 new books per annum are being printed phonetically, teaching the Russian people all the arts and sciences, modern technology, chemistry, agriculture, animal industry, increasing their production over 400 per cent within a few years in spite of previous ignorance and poverty. What the phonetic alphabet is doing for Russia it is doing for the people of India also and for the Philippines and Africa and of South America.

The American press has an opportunity now of informing the American people of the supreme importance of the phonetic alphabet as a mechanism for overcoming ignorance and poverty and creating enlightenment and abundance. The global alphabet, devised by an humble servant of the American people, is an improvement on all other phonetic alphabets by extreme care in the forms employed in the 33 letters used. Such forms beginning and ending on a central writing line are stenographic. With the global alphabet a Russian could write his own language three or four times as fast with a pen as he can now by printing his letters with a pen, the global alphabet letters consisting of only one or two strokes of the pen. Such letters are more legible than the English letters, the Roman letters or the Russian letters. American children 8 to 10 years of age can learn the global alphabet in one day, some of them in one hour. It will enable American children to write their own language intelligibly and legibly and five times as fast. The global alphabet requires only half the paper to write on or to print on.

ROBERT L. OWEN

Washington, Jan. 10.