

---

## In Memoriam: Henry B. Gonzalez

---

# A Democrat of Courage And Passion Dies

by Harley Schlanger

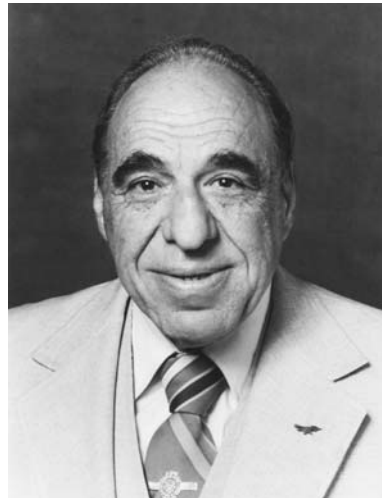
One of the last of the FDR Democrats from Texas passed away Nov. 28, as retired Congressman Henry B. Gonzalez died, in San Antonio, at 84 years old. He was elected to the U.S. House in 1961, the first Mexican-American elected to Congress from Texas, and served until January 1999. During his 38 years in the Congress, he developed a reputation as a maverick, who stood up against the special interests of Wall Street, and as a fighter for the interests of the poor. At the end of his life, he was critical of those Democrats who embraced the "Southern Strategy," saying often that one Republican Party is more than enough.

Gonzalez first achieved notoriety as a Texas State Senator in 1957, when he conducted a one-man filibuster against racist legislation. According to a report in the *Texas Observer*, Gonzalez spoke for 22 hours, challenging the entrenched racists in the Texas Legislature. "Who speaks for the Negroes?" he asked. "Who speaks for them? Why do one-tenth of the people of Texas have no representatives in the Legislature? Why do they get the lowly jobs always? Is Texas liberty only for Anglo-Saxons?" At the end of the debate, he concluded, "What a noble opportunity to enlist in a cause that's eternal, the maintenance of the dignity of a human! For whom does the bell toll? You, the white man, think it tolls for the Negro. I say, the bell tolls for you. It is ringing for us all, for us all."

### An Inner-Directed Leader in Congress

In the Congress, Gonzalez served as a watchdog against Wall Street's special interests. He was one of only four Congressmen who voted against the pivotal banking deregulation bill, Garn-St Germain, when it was passed in a special midnight session in 1981. (The others who voted against it were Jim Wright and Jim Mattox, also from Texas, and Jim Leach of Iowa.) He was an outspoken leader of the opposition to Jimmy Carter's Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker, and the interest rate hikes he imposed on behalf of "controlled disintegration." At a Congressional hearing on Volcker's policies in San Antonio in 1982, he silenced a hostile audience of Texas S&L officials, insisting that they listen to the testimony against Volcker's policies presented by me, in my capacity as a LaRouche spokesman. Gonzalez punctuated the testimony by saying that he did not disagree with anything I said.

During the S&L crisis, Gonzalez fought an often lonely



battle, along with Jim Wright, to try to force regulatory agencies to distinguish between those who took advantage of deregulation to steal, and those homeowners, farmers, and small businessmen who were victims of the legislation. And in September 1993, he invited *EIR* financial correspondent John Hoefle to present testimony to the House Banking Committee,

which he chaired, calling for regulation of derivatives. During the session, he praised Hoefle's writings in the *EIR*, saying, "I've been reading Mr. Hoefle's articles for two and one-half years. He gets information I have been unable to get."

Among the many critical battles he took on, were those against the imperial regime of George H.W. Bush. In November 1990, as Bush was preparing to unleash a war of genocide against Iraq, Gonzalez introduced a bill of impeachment against him. After the war, he was the first to introduce legislation to end the economic sanctions against Iraq. Typical of his disgust with the kind of phony patriotism the senior Bush and his Southern Strategy co-thinkers employed, was his denunciation of the poseurs who were praising the flag from the floor on Flag Day in 1993. Members of the House, he said, are acting "like a good little herd, reminiscent of the Hitlerian period: *Sieg heil, sieg heil.*" When angry Republicans demanded that he be censured for his comments, he showed that, even at almost 80 years old, he would never back off from a fight, responding, "It must have hit pretty close to those goose-steppers."

Though Gonzalez refused to be pigeon-holed as an Hispanic (he refused to join the Hispanic Caucus), he was proud of his heritage, as a descendant of the original Spanish colonists who settled the Mexican state of Durango. He was well-read, and proud of his 22,000 volume library, with works in English, Spanish, and German. In speeches, he often quoted from Cervantes' masterpiece *Don Quixote*. He once told me that, while he usually identifies with the author of the work, he at time feels like Don Quixote, and, at other times, like Sancho Panza.

He was once asked, while serving as a City Councilman in San Antonio (from 1953 to 1956), if he was frustrated at often being the lone vote in 8 to 1 decisions. No, he said, "The vote that carries the weight of moral conviction behind it, it has been my observation, is a vote that eventually triumphs."