

REPORT TO: The Honolulu Media Council

FROM: The Committee appointed to study "euphemisms" used in reporting the Indochina conflict.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Council:

At the last meeting of the Council on April 28, 1971, a committee was formed to study charges by Mr. John Witeck, a member of the Council, that news media mis-educate people by using certain "objectionable" terms when referring to the "other side" in the Indochina conflict. The objectionable terms, according to Mr. Witeck, are VIET-CONG, ENEMY (forces, troops, nation), COMMUNIST FORCES, REDS, COMMUNIST CHINA, and RED CHINA. Mr. Witeck suggested that more acceptable terms would be those used by the organizations themselves which are engaged in the conflict, such as, NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT (NFL), PROVISIONAL REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT (PRG), DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM, NORTH VIETNAMESE, PEOPLES REPUBLIC OF CHINA, MAINLAND CHINA, NATIONAL UNITED FRONT (in Cambodia), and PATHET LAO (in Laos.) Our committee was given the responsibility of investigating the validity of these charges and, if necessary, drafting a recommendation for the Council.

Our committee made a study of news reporting in Honolulu by monitoring three stations, two radio stations, two daily newspapers and two wire services from May 12-20, '71. This included KGMB-TV, KHVH-TV, KGMB and KHVH radio, the Honolulu Advertiser, the Honolulu Star-Bulletin, and UPI and AP wire services. As a result of our study we make the following general observations:

- 1.) In reporting news of the Indochina conflict, the terms relied on most heavily in reference to the "other side" are "Communist", "enemy" and "North Vietnamese".
- 2.) The national, international, syndicated and network news services which supply local news media seem to establish the pattern for the use of terminology in reporting the conflict. (For example, the UPI wire service during the monitoring period showed the use of "communist" 121 times as contrasted to 17 instances for the use of "North Vietnamese".)
- 3.) Lead-in stories for wire service or network materials tend to use terms employed in the material itself.
- 4.) The term "Reds" in reference to the North Vietnamese is no longer in common usage either locally or nationally.
- 5.) The term "Vietcong" is still used, but only occasionally.

After discussion, our committee concluded that the basic problem we face is inaccurate and oversimplified reporting by the use of certain "umbrella" terms to cover a wide variety of people, places and events. We do not believe the news media deliberately seek to mislead or "miseducate" people by the use of such terms, but that demands for brevity and ease in reporting dictate the selection of terms. It is, at best, inexact reporting. At worst, it creates and maintains certain negative images in the minds of the listening and reading public. We therefore make the following recommendations:

1. We commend the news media for their reporting on China in recent months which consistently avoids the use of such terms as "Communist" or "Red" in reference to that country. More accurate reporting has led to the use of such terms as "Mainland" and/or "Peoples Republic".
2. We recognize the fact that by-line articles and reports are the responsibility of the writer or reporter and should be printed or given as is, without tampering.
3. On the other hand, we suggest that, according to their own best standards, news media should make their news columns or reports as neutral and objective as possible. They should avoid the use of "umbrella" or catch-all terms which do not accurately and in detail describe the people to which they refer, except where warranted and fully explained. We are particularly concerned with the use of such terms as "communist" and "enemy" which are too easily employed to refer to a wide variety of people and organizations in Indochina. These terms should be avoided as much as possible in favor of more descriptive terms which accurately designate the people or organizations to which they refer. In this

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regard we recommend the following questions as guidelines:

- a. when opposing forces meet, who actually make up the opposing force? What organizations are involved? Does the word "communist" accurately describe who they are? Can everyone who is fighting against the South Vietnamese government be described as a "communist"?
 - b. When death tolls are announced, who actually has been killed? Are they military personnel, or are they civilians? Can everyone who is killed be accurately described as an enemy? Is a person an "enemy" simply because he has been killed by the South Vietnamese? (See Senator Kennedy's sub-committee report on refugees and civilian casualties)
4. In order to bring about greater accuracy in local news reporting on the Indochina conflict, we recommend that local subscribers to wire services and syndicated and network materials (i.e. TV, radio, newspapers) institute a policy of asking for greater accuracy in detailed reporting from the sources of news coverage.
5. Finally, we recommend that, upon its approval by the Honolulu Media Council, a copy of this report be sent to all national services and local news media.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED, ROBERT W. FISKE, HERMAN DOI, JOHN KERNEIL
AH JOOK KU, JOHN WITECK
May 26, 1971 Approved by Media Council June, 71

MEDIA REPORT

NAME (paper, radio, tv station)	DATE (and time)	REPORTER (or news service)	OBJECTION
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Return to Media Committee, 53-109 Kam Hwy Hauula, Hawaii 96717