

OFFICE MEMORANDUM - UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO:

Date: February 15, 1956

FROM: Robert P. Speer, Public Affairs Officer

SUBJECT: Press Censorship

The following account of press censorship by the National Government is being reported by despatch to Washington. Since a number of American officials here in Vietnam have expressed an interest in this subject, and the despatch form precludes extended circulation here at the post, I am having it reproduced also in this form.

The despatch, drafted by Robert Gildea, Assistant Press Officer, constitutes a case history of censorship of two papers. It is conceded that political motivation may have made censorship unusually severe for these newspapers, which are organs of the Opposition, but all our information indicates that even staunchly pro-Government newspapers have been receiving almost the same treatment.

It is requested that circulation be confined to senior officers whose duties involve possible relations in the press field.

* * *

On January 31, 1956, Mr. Phan Tung, editor of the Saigon daily, THOI BAO, and the weekly, VIET CHINH, appeared at the Press Office of the U. S. Information Service and stated he wished to determine if the Americans actually realized what was going on regarding press censorship in Vietnam.

He asked if he might be able to tell his story of how he was being "forced out of business by the Department of Information." His reason for coming to USIS was "Diem is being charged with being a puppet of the Americans". If there is a word of truth in this, he said, then perhaps his visit would pay off, in that USIS might pass on the word to Diem that censorship should be relaxed.

When asked how he was being forced out of business, the editor told of the new distribution agency, controlled by the Veterans' Association under General Nguyen Ngoc Le (Chief of the VN Surete'), which now controls all newspaper distribution in Saigon. The editor charged that on many occasions he turns over the daily run of his newspaper to be distributed to the news stands, and that a day later the entire run is returned, and he is told not a paper was sold that day.

The editor said that a small paper such as his cannot stand many applications of this treatment. He said that he is in dire financial straits. His paper, supported by the Cao Dai religious

sect in the beginning, and subsidized to the extent of having 350 copies bought daily by the government, now finds itself in the position of having the government cancel its subscription, and the Cao Dai withdrawing its backing because it no longer can afford to support a newspaper.

He said that the paper always operated at a loss, with the Cao Dai picking up the deficit. The fact that the paper owned its own back shop enabled it to continue in operation because all employees have "tightened their belts" and have been working without salary, since the censors began discriminating against his paper. However he now feels that the paper's days are numbered and he will be forced to suspend in the near future.

He said that another trick the Information Department used was to hold up the return of his page proofs, submitted for censorship, for several hours. The proofs would be returned with vast areas of white space, and notations pencilled in directing the editor to fill these spaces. By the time he had set more type to fill these spaces his paper would hit the streets hours after all other papers had been distributed.

Mr. Tung said that although his supply of newsprint has not yet been curtailed, he has been threatened with this action. Newsprint is controlled by the government.

Tung stated that he spoke also for the daily newspaper QUOC GIA (The Nation), saying that this paper, also an organ of the Cao Dai, was experiencing the same treatment being accorded him.

The editor turned over numerous page proofs, showing samples of the censors' work, and asked that they be forwarded to the proper U. S. authorities to prove his case.

A brief chronological summary of the content of articles censored in recent months follows:

QUOC GIA, October 31, 1955. An editorial urging freedom of the press was censored.

THOI DAI, November 16. A letter of thanks to the editor from the Air Vietnam workers, for the part the paper played in gaining them a wage increase, was censored.

THOI DAI, November 22. An article speculating on when unemployment would end in Vietnam was censored.

In the same issue an article stating that because a people

have the right to vote they don't necessarily enjoy true democracy was censored.

THOI DAI, January 10, 1956. A news story telling of an article which appeared in 'LA LIBERTE' (Cambodian paper), charging Dr. Phan Quang Dan was anti-French, was denied by Dan. This article was censored. The editor said that all mention of Dr. Dan was to be held to a minimum, since Dr. Dan is recognized as one of the leaders of Diem's opposition in Vietnam.

THOI DAI, January 12. A letter from Director of Information for South Vietnam, Pham Quang Bong, written to Nguyen Bao Toan and congratulating him on his election as head of the newly-formed Newspaper Association, was censored by Tran Tam, Director of Press in the Department of Information. It will be recalled that Bong "resigned" a few days later.

In the same issue an editorial, stating that the revolution in Free Vietnam cannot be abandoned until all the objectives have been realized, was completely censored.

THOI DAI, January 13. A lawyer, Hoang Co Thuy, member of the People's Revolutionary Committee, who was alleged to have been a member of the group dissolving the PRC, denied that he was a member of the dissolution group. His letter to the editor was censored.

In the same issue, the main editorial stated that the PRC still had its third objective, establishment of a democratic assembly, to be realized, and therefore it could not think of dissolution. The entire editorial was censored.

QUOC GIA, January 13. A news story telling of a possible strike in the water and electrical company here was censored.

QUOC GIA, January 13. A story charging corruption under Vu Thi Ngai, head of the Phu Tho Orphanage, was censored.

THOI DAI, January 18. An article exposing a corrupt minor functionary, naming names, giving figures and facts "to prove the officials' crimes", was censored. The editor stated this official continues to function in his office.

THOI DAI, January 21. A letter from Nguyen Bao Toan, head of the People's Revolutionary Committee, denying that he was responsible for the sale of theatre tickets last summer to Saigon residents.

THOI DAI, January 25. An eight-column headline saying "The Secret Talks in the White House (Eisenhower-Eden) Will Decide Whether There Will Be Peace or War". Censor's note instructed editor to forget about this type of thing and play up the assembly

elections.

QUOC GIA, January 26. An editorial charging that the assembly that would be elected under the proposed regulations would be a rubber stamp assembly and not one representative of the people's wishes was completely censored.

THOI DAI, January 29. An editorial attacking the election regulations. Editor was instructed to fill in white space with editorial urging support for the "revolutionary" candidates in the coming elections as the only persons deserving support for office.

THOI DAI, January 30. An eight-column headline stating "Bulganin wants a peace treaty with the USA"; the editor was instructed to replace the headline with another urging support for the "revolutionaries" in the assembly elections.

THOI DAI, January 30. A letter of protest to President Diem on the assembly election regulations, signed by Phan Quang Dan.

THOI DAI, January 31. A news story reporting the head of the Revolutionary Committee, Nguyen Bao Toan, as opposing the assembly elections regulations, was censored.

In the same issue an article on "voters' rights" was censored.

THOI DAI, February 1. An eight-column headline telling of the assassination of the South Korean CIC General.

THOI DAI, February 1. A story telling of a man committing suicide because he was "very poor" was permitted to be published after the words "very poor" were eliminated.

THOI DAI's editor told of a story he attempted to publish which exposed the play "Under the Cross" as being a communist vehicle. The article was censored. The editor said the reason for its censorship was because the play's author is a friend of Le Khai Trach and Tran Tam, prominent in the Information Department.