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# Un-words and Policy

By Daniel Patrick Moynihan

WASHINGTON—Years ago Disraeli, in one of the novels, remarked that "Few ideas are correct ones, and none can ascertain which they are. But it is with words we govern men." There can be no doubt that words are important in government and they are especially so in the delicate area of foreign policy negotiations. It is for this reason that I have been troubled by what appears to me to be the undisciplined use of language with which American spokesmen and principal officers of the government have addressed themselves to certain foreign policy problems.

In particular, I am concerned with the phenomenon dealt with so brilliantly by George Orwell in his classic essay, "Politics and the English Language." More specifically I should like to call to the attention of our diplomats [an] important point made by Dr. Fred Charles Iklé (formerly a professor of political science at M.I.T. and lately director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency).

Some years ago, in a paper on American difficulties in negotiating with Communist countries (published by the Rand Corporation), he pointed to the process whereby we come to adopt the language of our adversaries in describing political reality. He gave to this process the intriguing term "semantic infiltration."

I quote a passage from the paper. He said: "Paradoxically, despite the fact that the State Department and other government agencies bestow so much care on the vast verbal output of Communist governments, we have been careless in adopting the language of our opponents and their definitions of conflict issues in many cases where this was clearly to our disadvantage. Or perhaps this is not so paradoxical. It might be precisely because our officials spend so much time on the opponents' rhetoric that they eventually use his words — first in quotation marks, later without."

These are concepts which are at the heart of today's major political conflicts. For years now, the most brutal totalitarian regimes have called themselves "people's democracies" or "democratic republics."

The term "people's democracies," according to Milovan Djilas, was coined by Stalin himself and given as part of the title of the new publication that attended the formation of the Cominform in 1947. Stalin wanted us constantly repeating the fact that the Cominform journal "For a People's Democracy" said such and such. Similarly, organizations in various parts of the world which seek to emulate and institute that manner of regime have taken to calling themselves "liberation movements."

Now here is the problem we face today.

For some time, the Secretary of

State, who is a distinguished and capable American statesman, in referring to the parties to the dispute in Rhodesia, has spoken of "the Patriotic Front," on the one hand, and the "Salisbury group," on the other. Now, "the Patriotic Front" is made up of forces supplied by and backed by the totalitarian powers, the Soviet Union and China. The self-styled "Patriotic Front" represents the armed component of totalitarianism, a philosophy which they openly espouse.

However, who would not wish to be with "the Patriotic Front"? Is there a man whose heart is not stirred by the prospect of joining with the Patriots? Who, by contrast, would wish to be with "the Salisbury group"? It sounds like a mining concession put together by investment bankers in London.

On July 17, in a State Department briefing, the spokesman made the following statement:

"There cannot be a peaceful settlement unless the liberation forces and the Salisbury parties are satisfied. What we are seeking is an agreement by all parties to fair elections under neutral transition arrangements."

By using the words "liberation forces" the Department of State spokesman is referring to the guerrillas who are armed by the Soviet Union and China and which certainly espouse a totalitarian doctrine. The spokesman went on to say that we want "fair elections under neutral transition arrangements."

I would argue that the use of those terms, the choice of those words, is fatal to the object of neutrality. When you have described one side as the liberation forces and the other side as a group in the capital, you have summoned all the imagery of political legitimacy of the 20th century and put it

on the one side and denied it to another. That is not only fatal to neutrality but, I suggest, is fatal to clear thinking about this phenomenon.

I do not believe this is a trivial matter. For some years, I have been arguing that the West's political culture is endangered by the fact that the vocabulary and the symbols of political progress are being expropriated by the opponents of our values.

Democracy is under assault from totalitarians masquerading as democrats — just as democratic socialism is under assault from totalitarians masquerading as socialists in Eastern Europe.

Nonetheless, we persist in dignifying these enemies of freedom with the terminology of freedom — so that we persistently misdescribe the political forces arrayed against us.

It is thus important that we convey the impression to the world that we understand the difference between national liberation and the progressive brutalization of politics which is being carried on by the Soviets in the name of national liberation.

I believe we need not be ashamed to express our proprietary interest in the notions of self-determination and representative government. And it is essential to our own well-being in the world that other nations not be permitted to distort these concepts into a shape which would exclude our own democracy from the proper definition.

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I remember S.I. Hayakawa at U. of Chicago talking about "linguistic naivete" before we got into WWII, and coming out with a book on it (LANGUAGE IN ACTION [HB/39, and still popular--36: "the world is becoming daily a worse madhouse" because of "our tendency to think like savages about practically all subjects other than the purely technological"--as (32) a child: "Pigs are called pigs because they are such dirty animals"]). Add to this the deliberate language-pollution of propagandists, both commercial ("advertisers") and political (of which this:):