

Editor — When the head of the French news agency in Vietnam reported a few weeks ago that Vietnamese Montagnards were supporting the PRG in the battle for contested provinces, he was shot to death by the Saigon police. Other foreign journalists who have tried to report the truth from Vietnam have been lucky enough only to be expelled. Vietnamese newspapermen who offend the Thieu regime are arrested and beaten, as Congressman Pete McCloskey recently verified. Consequently, the latest press reports from Saigon that Communists have been murdering refugees in cold blood should be examined more closely.

Why are so many people fleeing their homes in sheer panic? During the recent fighting, as in the past, capture of territory by the PRG inevitably brings saturation bombing by the South Vietnamese.

When the provincial capital of Ban Me Thout fell two weeks ago, Thieu's air force came back to bomb the town and surrounding villages into rubble, killing hundreds of civilians. Last Monday, AP correspondent Denis Gray reported that South Vietnamese

bombers were wiping out villages and hamlets near the Cambodian border after the PRG had captured them. The terrified survivors had to flee into Cambodia. The people in the current battle areas have learned only too well to take their chances on the road rather than die under the bombs.

The mass exodus of civilians serves Thieu's purposes well, since it deprives the other side of population and provides convenient cover for retreating Saigon troops. When civilians are caught in the crossfire, Saigon can blame the carnage on Viet Cong cruelty.

The plight of the refugees is tragic beyond words. The exploitation of their misery for propaganda purposes is another example of the dishonest, corrupt, and cruel nature of Thieu's government.

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