

ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE COMMUNITY COMMENT:

Mike Goldsby, August 9, 2018

President Trump has repeatedly called “the FAKE NEWS MEDIA the enemy of the people.” He has used this term at his pep rallies and on Twitter as well. In July, he did not like the critical reaction to his meeting with Vladimir Putin and Trump tweeted “The Summit with Russia was a great success, except with the real enemy of the people, the Fake News Media.” The New York Times noted Trump's use of this phrase coincides with his “moments of peak criticism”.

The New York Times wrote “Enemy of the people is a phrase “typically used by leaders to refer to hostile foreign governments or subversive organizations. It also echoes the language of autocrats who seek to minimize dissent.”

There is a rich history of the phrase being used by dictators and fascists. The Chicago Tribune says it actually was first used in the Roman Empire, by the ruling class to describe Emperor Nero. He was a disastrous leader, vacationing when he should have been leading.

In 1882, Ibsen wrote a play titled “An Enemy of the People,” about a person who is run out of town for writing an article critical of the government. Adolf Hitler was apparently a big Ibsen fan and he used the phrase to describe the Jews and to justify their destruction.

In Russia, Lenin and later Stalin both used it to stomp out dissent. Mao used the term as well in China. The Chicago Tribune finishes the article with “Today, enemy of the people is still deployed. But mostly, you hear it from dictators. Heads of former Soviet countries are particularly fond of it. It's never before been uttered by the leader of the free world. One more way in which Trump's presidency truly is unprecedented in U.S. history.”

Several figures close to Trump have disagreed with Trump. First Daughter Ivanka Trump, Senior Advisor Kellyanne Conway and even Republican Senator Lindsay Graham all have stated the press is not the enemy of the people. Graham said, “I think the press in America is a check and balance on power. Sometimes you can be a pain in the ass, but you're not the enemy of the people. As a matter of fact, without a free press, I wouldn't want to live in that country.”

Trump tweeted Thursday, after his daughter's interview, "They asked my daughter Ivanka whether or not the media is the enemy of the people. She correctly said no. It is the FAKE NEWS, which is a large percentage of the media, that is the enemy of the people!"

Trump uses the phrase to stoke anger and distrust at his pep rallies. The crowds get whipped up and scream at the media representatives in attendance. Staff at both CNN and MSNBC have received death threats in the past week.

In The Guardian, Emma Graham-Harrison writes "America's founding fathers considered the press so important to freedom they had fought to win that they put protection for journalists into the constitution, in the famous first amendment. In using a term embraced by dictators and authoritarian regimes around the world, Trump is showing disturbing contempt for that tradition of treating a vibrant media as a key pillar of democracy."

This is Mike Goldsby for Community Comment.