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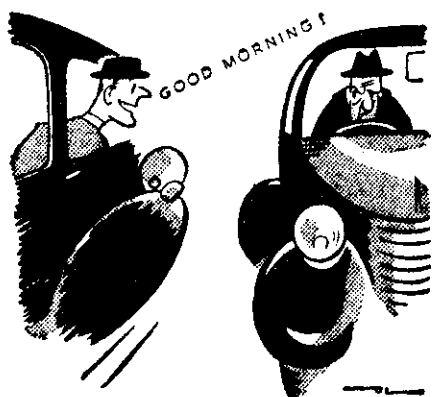
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MUST WE CALL PEOPLE

(From an ABC talk by CAPT. C. R. BENSTEAD, R.N.)

THE other day, when I answered my telephone, a sweet female voice informed me quite seriously that my transportation was at the door. What she meant was that the car had arrived. Clearly my informant saw nothing pompous or funny, or even inaccurate in calling a car a transportation, and she would doubtless have been annoyed if she has guessed that the startled "My what is at the door!" was due to any cause other than bad hearing. No, like so many others, she had merely fallen victim to the fascination of the long word.

You must have noticed it—this craze for verbal absurdity that no longer allows us to meet or call on anybody (we must contact him, of course), and prefers to finalise something rather than complete, finish, or end it.

Nor is that all. Oddly enough, this habit of speech, which so lightly discards the language that sufficed for Shakespeare and the translators of the Bible, is then called progress.

At present it is more noticeable in the written word than in the spoken, probably because writing is the more leisurely undertaking and gives the greater opportunity for showing off.

It is, in fact, a curious thing, the effect that trying to write has on quite normal people. And you've doubtless noticed

that, too. People who can express themselves simply and adequately over a glass of milk become almost meaningless as soon as they pick up a pen—especially if they belong to a Government Department.

Touching the Ceiling

Not long ago a town clerk set out to ask me how many men I wanted for a civil defence job. He said: "Please state ceiling figure of personnel requirements." Pretty, isn't it? And so magnificently defiant. Clearly, my town clerk had thrown off the shackles of the classroom with its excellent little rules about preferring the short word to the long, and the simple to the far-fetched, and in the careless rapture of his new-found freedom was scaling the most perilous heights of literary expression—touching the very ceiling in fact.

We may laugh at it, of course, but is not this tribal jargon of Government officials—and to a lesser extent, journalists and authors—a thing to be stamped on heavily? I think so—if only for the reason that, if we don't, we shall soon find everybody preferring the long word to the short, the far-fetched to the simple, and worse still, never using one word if they can possibly use half a dozen.

You don't believe me? Well, look round.

For a start, we may be pardoned for thinking that those in authority decided to fight this second World War—or should I say "combat this global conflict"—not with ordinary men, but with a special breed known as male personnel.

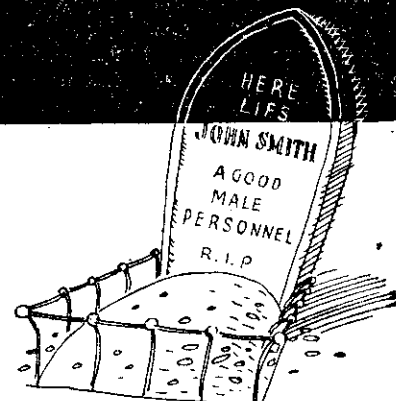
Civilians, too, being a nuisance in wartime, were cunningly replaced by civilian personnel. And now that the global conflict is mostly over and the strength of the fighting forces—I beg your pardon: "the combat teams and task groups"—can be reduced, we are confronted with the "civilianisation of personnel."

No, I'm not joking. I really did discover that gem—"civilianisation of personnel"—in the arid waste of a government order quite recently. So you see, we are no longer discharged; we are "civilianised."

"A Pleasing Piece of Personnel"

Yet nobody, even in his civilianised senses, would dream of saying he contacted a pleasing piece of personnel, however delightful the experience. No, he would say he met a pretty girl, a tasty morsel, a dinkum Sheila, or even a fag hag, if the prevailing slang so prescribed (and mark well that slang is often amusing and virile and always remote from the pompous and ineffective circumlocution which is jargon).

PERSONNEL?



"Churchyardisation"

He would in fact talk about men and women—about people, or even persons. Never about personnel. Why, then, banish men and women from the Forces?

Before long, if we're not on our guard, we shall have some Government Department rewriting the Bible to read: "Be strong and show thyself a male personnel."

Dreadful Future Awaits Us

Now look at this silly word "combat" which dominates the war scene. It simply means "fight." If we are going to use it as an adjective, we should at least talk about combatant teams and so forth. Nobody talks about the exploits of our fight pilots in their fight planes. Why, then, combat? Unless something's done, we soon shan't be able to have a fight at all—only a combat.

And we shall equip the Air Force with bombers and combaters, and then go to church and lustily sing: "Combat the good combat, like some old wombat." Clearly, a dreadful future awaits us.

Now take our old friend "anticipate." It means "to seize beforehand." It does not mean—and if we are to have a word allowing us to take preparatory action so as to be ready for an event, it should never be made to mean—"expect."

There is, in fact, a wealth of difference between "anticipate" and "expect." Suppose, for example, we announced not that John and Jane expected to be married, but that John and Jane anticipated marriage. Think of the rumpus there would be!

Yet only the other day I read in the headlines of a Sydney newspaper—a newspaper that would doubtless defend "bid" instead of "attempt" and "mystery" instead of "mysterious" on the grounds of brevity—I read in those headlines, I say, that an announcement about the armistice with Japan was anticipated in a few hours.

With great respect I suggest that although we may anticipate the declaration of peace by planning—or should I say "blue-printing"—our celebrations,

(continued on next page)