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By Richard Gambino

A stock language has evolved in government over many years, a language that makes it impossible to discuss, let alone fix or evaluate, questions of official and public political or moral responsibility.

We are increasingly compelled to follow public events through the medium of this newspeak.

More than ever before in American politics, language is used not as an instrument for forming and expressing thought. It is used to prevent, confuse and conceal thinking. Members of each branch and agency of government at every level, representing every hue of political opinion, habitually speak a language of nonresponsibility.

Euphemisms and palliative phrases are a favorite form of evasive language. "To select out" someone means to dismiss him from a job. People "misspeak" themselves; they never say foolish or deceptive things or (heaven forbid!) lie. Everything from nonsense and propaganda to vicious slanders and incitements to violence is described as "rhetoric." Similarly any falsehood, no matter how malicious, and any indoctrination, no matter how unconscionable, is "consciousness-raising."

An error in planning or prediction is not a "mistake," for this term raises depressing questions of person-

al competency and accountability; it is a "shortfall." Those in authority and their cronies never make inaccurate, perhaps purposely deceptive, estimates of public expenditures; instead we have "cost overruns."

With metaphysical judgment, officials, bureaucrats and office seekers tell us what are "acceptable rates" of crime, unemployment and casualties. The mugged, the raped, jobless people and those killed and maimed in battle need not reply.

The abuse of metaphors and similes to coat questions with obscuring layers of sugar or poison has created an art form, an idiot poetry. Practices are "ventilated,"—that is, skirted and not examined or exposed.

Money is "laundered" and people are "brought forward"—that is, made patsies. Information is "developed" as in a darkroom or laboratory, saving the speaker from explaining whether he means compiled, sought, filed, pursued, fabricated, altered, concealed or revealed.

Whereas others spy, our officials conduct "electronic" and "visual surveillance," especially when spying on us. Evil people cover up, lie and bribe. Our leaders, "contain situations" like so many protective dams. This is particularly true when they are involved in a "game plan" (conspiracy). Politicians and bureaucrats are too pure of soul to use provocative expressions or loaded terms. They would never deprive children of school funds

or poor people of proper housing. They merely "trade off" highways for schools and missiles for slums.

Perish the thought that they would do anything so personal as make choices and have goals. No, they merely "announce" "priority determinations" and "terminal objectives," and thereby inflict diseases upon the public. Of course when something is shown to be wrong it is done so only "in hindsight."

The use of misplaced technical jargon taken from specialized fields is very popular, serving as it does three marvelously useful purposes of evasion. It creates codes that mask the nature of what is happening. Jargon that is legitimate elsewhere also lends an aura of respectability to dubious behavior. Finally, it serves an old priesthood mystique: Those privy to the code enjoy a special, privileged, sophisticated status making them superior to us ordinary people.

Thus, any published bit of nonsense is a "print-out." Plans are not made as well as possible; instead, "scenarios" are "programed" toward "terminal objectives" in an effort to "maximize" "output" in "a zero-defect system."

The use of neologisms is gaining ground. Things are forever being "optimized," "randomized," "finalized" and "federalized," rather than being decided, acted upon or resolved. People no longer talk on the telephone; they "deal with each other telephonically." And one's opinion is "the quality of one's mind."

The last, but by no means least used, art of evasive language is the use of stock phrases (preferably made up of multisyllabic words) and circumlocution.

Every inflated committee is a "task force." If something is to be "taken under advisement" and receive a "thorough and complete study" and is "referred through proper channels" to "issue in a position statement," it has been hastily swept under the rug and will never again be mentioned.

No bureaucrat deals with patterns, ways, means, values and numbers but with "norms," "parameters," "variables," "inputs," "outputs," "context fields" and "quotas."

No one with political panache wrestles with problems. He "meets the challenges" and "deals with crises"—the more the better to hide behind. Failure in this effort may lead to a "widening credibility gap," that odiferous witch's brew of exposed lies, deceptions and distortions.

All this is what Shakespeare called the never-ending "insolence of office."

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