

successfully, therefore, it is important to choose one's words carefully so as to convey the ideas we want to express and avoid misunderstandings.

An Ongoing Process

The development of language is an ongoing process. It is evolving continually as people conceive of new ideas and want to pass them along to others. Many persons, specialists, scientists and scholars, often find existing words inappropriate for their purposes. As they seek to express themselves ever more precisely they enrich our language. Thus, new words are being created every day, some by specialists, some borrowed from other languages and other cultures. To accommodate new ideas, fads and fashions, as well as expanding scientific knowledge, the usage and meanings of old words also change from time to time. Witness the many new words and terms that have entered our language with the Beatnik generation, for instance, and the development of electronics and computers. Some new words and new meanings for old words prove helpful and in time are accepted into language; others tend to confuse rather than to clarify and are eventually dropped and forgotten.

After World War II, the German people found they had not only to clear away the rubble left from the bombings. They had also "to revive

the German language" to undo the damage done by Nazi propaganda. German novelist Hans-Werner Richter noted in a recent interview (*Pan American Clipper*, July 1983):

After 12 years during which German had been distorted to a mumbo jumbo of Nazi propaganda . . . even ordinary words had lost their true meanings. You couldn't use such words as *heart, spirit, blood, soil, folk, country*, because during the Third Reich they had acquired a sense and implication that those of us who returned from the war rejected . . . Then, slowly, we began using traditional words and expressions again, though very cautiously, in order to give them once more their lost meaning and content.

Leonard Read, FEE's President from 1946 until his death in 1983, used to tell a story to illustrate how the words we hear and use can influence not only language but also thought. In 1947, Read attended the founding meeting of the Mont Pelerin Society in Switzerland. Also attending the meeting were Ludwig von Mises, "dean" of Austrian economists, and Walter Eucken, noted German professor and free market economist. Eucken had lived in Germany throughout World War II. Though a critic of the Nazi regime, he had been so well respected that the authorities had left him pretty much alone. Eucken addressed the Mont Pelerin meeting. After hearing him speak, Mises commented to Read, "It is amazing how the Nazi

jargon has unwittingly been admitted into his speech. He always spoke such perfect German and he used to be a good economist." Through its jargon, the Nazi propaganda had even affected the economic ideas of Eucken, one of Nazism's most severe critics.

In the Mises seminars at New York University, which I attended for many years, Mises frequently spoke of the importance of carefully choosing one's terminology. He often warned against using mechanical terms or similes and metaphors from the physical sciences to explain human action. As shorthand expressions, they may be helpful at times to illustrate an abstract point. However, the danger exists that such similes or metaphors may be taken literally. Moreover, they are never really suitable for describing human action, which is always purposive, intentional, never mechanical.

Some words are appropriate, others inappropriate, for expressing the ideas we want to convey. Some may actually conceal and distort the meaning we have in mind. And, as we have seen, some may even change the opinions of those who use and hear them. Among the worst offenders nowadays are words that have been borrowed by economists from the languages of violence, mechanics, the physical sciences and mathematics. Such words may even become "language traps."

Terms of Violence

Consider the word "revolution," with its two basic meanings. The first comes from the verb "to revolve," meaning to rotate around a single point, the second refers to the violent overthrow of a regime. "Revolution" was first applied to the industrial world by writers who noticed the important technological developments of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. They obviously did not consider these developments to be rotating around an axis; rather they used "revolution" to describe the overturn, within a fairly short period, of earlier production methods. "'A revolution is making,' said Arthur Young in 1788 when he saw the textile machines spread from the cotton to the woolen industry." The Marxians later drew a parallel between the technological "revolution" that was taking place and the changes in political and intellectual life which they hoped that "revolution" would bring about.

Careful historians know that the old order was not "suddenly broken in pieces by the mighty blows of the steam engine and the power loom," as sociologist and economist Arnold Toynbee (1852-1883) put it. From 1760 to 1830, industrial production was going through "the slow gradual process of economic evolution. . . . [there was] no sudden shift of scene" but rather "a constant tide of progress and change, in which the