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Oxford Word of the Month – June: picfac

noun: a photo opportunity, especially as used by politicians.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

In the lead-up to the 2010 election, a journalist expressed frustration with prime minister Kevin Rudd's preference for a particular kind of media opportunity:

I don't know why he is there, who he thinks he is, or what he thinks a Prime Minister's job involves. It actually means he can and must do things, big things, which can shape the country he leads and not just spin from one pic fac to another. (Geelong Advertiser, 4 February 2010)

The picfac is media-speak for *picture facility*, a media event that allows photographers and camera crews to shoot photos and video. Unlike a press conference or doorstep, the picfac precludes questions and interviews. It is typically, if not exclusively, used in a political context. Media organisations are informed that such an event will take place, and that it is a picfac only. The purpose of a picfac is to generate images for the nightly news, in order to keep a politician in the public eye—without the risk of fielding questions.

Both *picture facility* and its abbreviated form picfac (or pic fac) are Australian media terms; picture facility dates from 1990, and picfac is recorded in the same year. In 1990 commentators were already sneering:

You'll note how rarely they meet real people. It's all radio and television and 'picfac' opportunities. ... Bob [Hawke] has his big Greenie Day with Jacques Cousteau in Hobart today while Andrew [Peacock] mixes it with the fruit and veg in Melbourne. Anything for television. (Sydney Morning Herald, 24 February 1990)

A recent novel (written by a journalist) illustrates the political artifice of the picfac. A fictional prime minister, anticipating fallout from a security crisis, considers a media strategy:

*Perhaps the PM in the counter terrorism nerve centre, planning and coordinating raids with the counter terrorism squads. There's an idea. Sleeves rolled up – getting to grips with the crisis. ... They'd do an all-in picfac... . No questions. Just get the TV cameras in there. Get on the front foot. (M. Brissenden, *The List*, 2017)*

Picfac began life as Australian media jargon. It's not yet clear if it will become more widely used in Australian English, but it perhaps tells us something about the nature of contemporary politics.

Picfac will be considered for inclusion in the next edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*.

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