



Read our CEO **Jonny Wilkinson's** regular column in The Northern Advocate

"A Different Light"

A Different Light - 23rd May 2020 – “Reject conspiracy theories, unite to defeat Covid 19”

The origin of the word “Conspiracy” is con – meaning together and spire – meaning to breathe. Breathe together, it’s sort of sounds like a hongi. Just the word - ‘conspiracy-’ does make me flinch somewhat. I think of being brow beaten by people who won’t listen to any ideas that are contrary to the theory are standing by. Conspiracy theories have a long history and they seem to populate whenever a new technology comes to fruition. When the internet came onto the scene, people said it would rot everyone’s brain. When television started they said that TV would rot people’s brains. When radio hit the airways it was predicted that it would rot brains. In ancient Greece it was predicted that reading would rot the populations’ brains.

Some conspiracy theories stand out in history but eventually get debunked.

There are people who believe the 1969 Apollo moon landing was a hoax. I remember someone saying to me “Look at the photo of the American flag on the moon, it’s blowing in the wind, well where did the wind come from if they were on the moon??” This has been emphatically debunked by the American Astrological Association who have explained that a horizontal rod inside the flags gave them this effect in still photos- if they didn’t have this they would have just drooped –hardly an inspiring symbol of American imperialism. The Association have answered other claims in a similar vein, however the conspiracists were agitating in the context of Watergate, which had eroded the public’s trust in Government actions, so they weren’t in a listening mood.

Not long after Princess Diana's death in 1997, in a Paris highway tunnel, conspiracy theories swirled. The father of Dodi Al-Fayed, who was killed along with Diana claimed that the accident was in fact an assassination by British intelligence agencies, at the request of the Royal Family. At Princess Diana's inquest, the coroner stated that "The conspiracy theory advanced by Mohamed Al Fayed has been minutely examined and shown to be without any substance."

Remember the Y2K conspiracy when many feared that when the clocks struck midnight on January 1, 2000, computers would be using an incorrect date and thus fail to operate properly unless the computers' software was repaired or replaced before that date. Other computer programs that projected budgets or debts into the future could begin malfunctioning in 1999 when they made projections into 2000. Well, talk about an anti-climax, Y2K was a real fizzer.

The terrorist attacks of 11th September 11, 2001, were indeed the result of a conspiracy. There's no doubt about it. The evidence makes it clear that it was carefully planned and executed by conspirators. The vast majority of people agree that those conspirators were Osama bin Laden and his gang of hi-jackers. But some believe it was a plan that also included President Bush, Vice-President Dick Cheney and top Bush advisors, who collaborated with bin Laden. This theory seems to have washed away in time.

The world pandemic has incubated more than a contagious virus. It's provided a global context where conspiracies theories have hatched and grown. Even world leaders have hopped onto the band wagon.

President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil has repeatedly promoted unproven coronavirus treatments, and implied that the virus is less dangerous than experts say. He has repeatedly characterized the virus as a "little flu," and said that shutting down the economy would cause more damage than confining only high-risk Brazilians and touted the yet-unproven efficacy of an anti-malarial drug.

President Donald Trump shocked all of us when he said " I see that disinfectant can knock it out in a minute — one minute — and is there a way we can do something like that by injection inside, or almost a cleaning? Because you see it gets in the lungs and it does a tremendous number on the lungs, so it would be interesting to check that." Fortunately, I don't think that many will be persuaded to take such action.

Recently conspiracy theories have gone off the deep end with their beliefs about the 5th generation (5G) cell phone networks. They think this new network is somehow contributing to the Corona Virus pandemic. Despite there being overwhelming evidence that these cell phone towers are not harmful. Our very own Nanogirl (Dr Michelle Dickenson) explained in a recent article in the Herald, that "*The International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) published a public report following a seven-year-long scientific study showing it found no evidence suggesting 5G technologies posed a risk to human health*". The theorists have put this evidence down to the simple fact, that it is a cover up and have taken to burning 15 towers in the last month.

In this time of uncertainty and anxiety we need to stick to the facts and not be tempted to join in with the histrionics of far-fetched theories. When conspiracists burn cell phone towers they put the vulnerable at risk – disabling 111 calls and causing unnecessary stress to those for whom keeping in contact is vital – our whanau, our elderly, our people with disabilities. So, let's not risk the lives of others by burning defenceless cell phone towers at

the stake, in some modern day ill-founded witch -hunt - let's all work together to eradicate our common enemy at this time –that nasty COVID 19 Virus.

Jonny Wilkinson is the CEO of Tiaho Trust - Disability A Matter of Perception. A Whangarei based disability advocacy organisation.