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## "A Different Light"

### **A Different Light – 6<sup>th</sup> July 2024 – “ Nobody uses the ‘n word’ anymore”**

Nobody uses the ‘n word’ anymore. People long ago stopped using the word ‘gay’ in a derogative fashion. Society in general, thankfully, has a sense of language which is not appropriate in any circumstance. So, to put it mildly, I was shocked when I heard that an elected councillor wrote an expletive-laden rant to a neighbouring council in which he asked: "What the f\*\*k are you r\*\*\*\*\*d, s\*\*\*\*\* c c\*\*\*s doing?". These words are so antiquated that some people on X (formally known as Twitter) have asked what the ‘s’ word was, including erstwhile Seven Sharper, Hilary Barry. So, for those of you, who maintain a modern obliviousness like Hilary, the ‘s’ word was ‘spastic’ and ‘r’ word was, yes, unbelievably ‘retarded’.

Personally, I find the word ‘spastic’ repulsive in a toe-curling way. Even when it’s articulated by a medical professional, I flinch, let alone a local body politician trying to make himself heard.

Having lived with Cerebral Palsy all my life one could say I am hyper aware of the derogative nature of the word ‘spastic’. The last time I was called ‘spastic’ to my face was in the early 80’s at a Sweetwaters Festival by an intoxicated teenager, who said “look there’s a spastic”. Forty years later, here I am, hearing it being used by an elected official. WTF!

The Hamilton City councillor Andrew Bydder made the derogatory comments in an online submission to Waipā District Council over the placement of a third bridge in Cambridge where he lives. He doubled down when he was exposed- unapologetically opining that he was only sorry he had associated ‘retarded’ people with councillors. Thus, he further demonstrated his intent to use derogatively ableist language to deliver a corny school boy quip. It seems that he is so fixated on his right to freedom of speech, that he lacks all self - awareness of just how grossly insulting he is being to a large number of people.

The Royal Commission of Inquiry, into the mosque shootings, recommended broadening a proposed Hate Speech Law to include religious groups. The proposed hate speech law was an opportunity to also protect other groups, such as members of the Rainbow community and disability groups. This Bill was halted by the former government last year. A pity! On a positive note, our new Minister of Disability Issues, Louise Upston, showed real leadership when she called out Bydder recently. She rebuked him saying, *“Words matter, and using derogatory terms that are vulgar and disrespectful to the disability community just to get attention is not acceptable.”*

Historically, language has been used to oppress and marginalise disabled people. The word ‘handicap’ came from the days where disabled people had to beg to survive holding a ‘cap’ or hat in their hand, hence the word ‘hand-i-cap’. The word ‘lame’ is commonly used in sentiments such as “that idea was a bit lame” or “that was a bit of a lame duck”. It’s become so ingrained in our everyday language we don’t notice it. So I guess it’s only fitting that we thank bigot Bydder for bringing this filthy muck out into the open again, to remind us that there’s often a need for a dirty old rug to have a shake out into the daylight once more.

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