

DEROGATORY NAMES

Statement

HON PIERRE YANG (North Metropolitan — Parliamentary Secretary) [5.38 pm]: Two weeks ago, on 15 March 2023, I made a statement in this chamber about the word “Chinaman” and Ha Ling Peak in Alberta, Canada. I want to reiterate my congratulations to the Alberta and Canmore communities in Canada, and also to Mr Roger Mah Poy and his colleagues for their work. Canada is not alone in that situation. In fact, there are many places closer to home that also bear the word “Chinaman” in their name. Across the Tasman I understand that there are about 13 place names in New Zealand that include the word “Chinaman”. For example, there is a suburb called Grey Lynn in Auckland within which there is either a former or current locality called Chinaman’s Hill. Grey Lynn is named after former New Zealand Governor Sir George Grey. This is a peculiar situation, because on Google Maps that name cannot be found within the suburb of Grey Lynn. Nevertheless, a quick search on a website called Mapcarta.com reveals that the words “Chinaman’s Hill” feature very prominently in the southern part of the suburb of Grey Lynn. The accompanying text reads —

Chinaman’s Hill is a locality in Auckland, Auckland Region. Chinaman’s Hill is situated nearby to the suburb Grey Lynn and the neighbourhood West Lynn.

On moovitap.com there are a couple of sentences that read —

Directions to Chinaman’s Hill (Surrey Crescent) with public transport

The following transport lines have routes that pass near Chinaman’s Hill

It lists a number of bus routes. Surrey Crescent is a street in the southern part of Grey Lynn.

On the National Library of New Zealand website there is some information about Chinaman’s Hill, and I quote —

Chinaman’s Hill, Grey Lynn

Date 1993-03-17

Description The 100-year old gatehouse to the farm on Chinaman’s Hill in Grey Lynn has been converted fo use as a co-ordinator’s office for Village Green that is planned near local shops. Some historical details of the building given.

...

Source Auckland City Harbour News, p 1

From Auckland Libraries

On wikimapia.org there is a description of the origin of the name Chinaman’s Hill —

So named because in this area around 1900 were located several market gardens operated by Chinese immigrants

There is more to this story. Auckland Transport, which is an Auckland council-run agency responsible for transport services in the local area, had two bus stops called Chinaman’s Hill on both sides of Great North Road in Grey Lynn. Despite the suburb being called Grey Lynn, the bus stops were named as Chinaman’s Hill. According to an article on New Zealand’s news media website Stuff, which has a monthly audience of more than two million, an Auckland resident, Leon Tan, asked Auckland Transport to rename the bus stops in 2015, quite a few years ago. Leon Tan was quoted as saying —

“I feel offended by that term, as a Chinese person. Chinaman is an offensive and derogatory term that evidences normalised racism in New Zealand.”

...

“Racially offensive bus place names is where everyday normalised racism begins, and it should really end today,” he said.

“It might be a blind spot. People don’t really [know] how offensive these things are when they are not members of that group. I do think it will be good for people in Auckland to discuss this and talk about these things.”

He suggested that Auckland Transport use “Chinese Market Hill” for the two bus stops instead of that derogatory term. Nevertheless, Leon’s plea to Auckland Transport was rejected. He got a perfunctory and rather disgraceful response, which ran as follows —

... the name was a reference to the 19th century when the area was commonly known Chinaman's Hill for the Chinese market gardens located there.

Because the name was historical, there was no plan to change it ...

Leon did not give up. After the Christchurch mosque shootings, Leon took up the matter again—according to him, as part of a wider conversation about racism. This time, Auckland Transport corrected its mistake of a few years before, and I confirm the report of the news site that the names of those two bus stops were changed in March 2019 and they are now called Grey Lynn School bus stop. I want to commend Leon for his effort and his tenacity in pursuing this matter when he hit a brick wall with Auckland Transport.

Here is another example. At Tiritiri Matangi Island in Auckland's Hauraki Gulf—I apologise if I have butchered these names—a bay on the east coast of the island is called Chinaman Bay. There is an online petition calling for the removal of the derogatory term and its replacement it with a traditional name. The online petition states that the bay —

... is named using an antiquated and racist term ...

why not rename it Piwakawaka bay ...

... Chinaman Flat and Chinaman Stream are also official names of land features in New Zealand. These too should be addressed ...

... we are trying to fight to stop the normalisation of racism in New Zealand. Let's continue that by thinking about some of the terminology on our maps.

This petition was initiated by Rebecca Connor, and I would like to thank her for standing up for social justice and against racism.

As I said in my previous contribution, the word "Chinaman" was a racist word 200 years ago. It is a racist word today. It is my intention to make further statements in the near future on place names in Australia that include the term "Chinaman". As for today, I am pleased to see that more and more people in New Zealand have become aware of how derogatory and offensive the word "Chinaman" is, and are shining a light on this important issue and working in their community in New Zealand.