

BROCK'S BANTER: Lèse-majesté: American Style

By Brock Weir

Once upon time, not so long ago, in a community not so far away, there lived a councillor and a reporter.

This reporter diligently attended each Council and General Committee meeting, took copious notes and had an audio recorder at the ready just in case some pearl of wisdom escaped his ears.

At the end of the day, these notes were compiled and cross-referenced to the audio, resulting in articles on what local politicians were doing with the votes of the public.

Councillors of the day generally liked the gems this reporter used to illustrate the topics of the day, presumably happy to see their views in print for the constituents they served ? verbatim and unvarnished.

But, there is one in every crowd; one councillor, long since moved onto other endeavours, who momentarily thought differently, raising concerns about accuracy.

It isn't what you might think: ?Do you think you could clean up my quotes?? asked the councillor following a particularly late-running Council meeting. ?I sounded like an idiot last week.?

Oh so many replies raced through the reporter's mind but, conscious of job security, all of these were left on the lobe.

The reporter simply smiled and said, ?I'll see what I can do.?

But, there were oh-so-many things to say in reply to this politician. First of all, if what you say is not as coherent as it sounded in your head upon playback, perhaps more thought should be given to the words before they are launched forth.

Second of all, accuracy is always the best we can aspire to.

Third, and most importantly of all, it is not a reporter's job to rework your quotes into something that would be the envy of silver-tongued politicians like Barack Obama.

This was just over six years ago in my early days at the paper and although the politician in question was, of course joking about this ? or, at least half-joking. I think. ?I've been thinking back to that moment as the U.S. Presidential Election descends even further into the muck.

Look no further than the Republican nominee as the root cause of these flashbacks.

Since the very beginning of his unlikely campaign, he has continually cited media ?elites? and power brokers being the cause of all the controversy he has caused in his wake.

?Clear bias,? he and his surrogates cry when referring to the so-called ?mainstream? media, despite the fact nobody has played the media game better than him over the course of the bulk of my natural life. He has been a power player and he knows the ropes.

Yet, he has found a core base of voters who see him as an outsider, someone who is fighting an uphill battle, someone who can be a change-maker, and it is fascinating to watch unfold. His core uncritically latches onto buzzwords without exercising the critical thinking powers available to us all to see they are just words, completely devoid of meaning and, let's face it, when it comes to monikers, completely lacking in the catchiness and panache offered by politicians from elections of yore.

It is, in the case of this man, easier to find a constituency eager to take just about everything spoon-fed to them as long as it fits into their already-set worldview at face value without giving it a moment's consideration.

It's a perfect storm of ignorance and misplaced anger within this group that has propelled him forward, but there is an equally strong constituency who are not lapping it up.

Why?

Well, the easiest answer for this group to digest is, ?Well, the media is biased and the election is rigged. Obviously.?

Obviously not, but it is an excuse that takes minimal grey cells to process.

The first problem with his argument is his evidence: his own words, which the media has the gall to listen to, replay in the full flower of eloquence, and unpack as to its potential impacts to the American voting public (and the curious international bystanders) looking on with increasing horror.

The second problem with his argument is logic. As several pundits ? including those making a living on satirizing such people ? have said since the nominee started to trot out these arguments when it appeared the tides were turning, it is counterintuitive to think that the Democratic nominee is the preferred media choice for the top job.

For better or worse, we live in a 24 hour news cycle. Today's consumer of TV news need to be re-engaged at regular intervals with fresh commentary, analysis and up-to-the-minute video and sound bites in order to keep their interest, and there is no better person to help in that than the Republican candidate.

Compared to previous elections, this one is very much being tried in the court of social media where clickbait is the name of the game. With quote-a-minute candidates like the Republican, there is no better person to keep such outlet in clover for the better part of four or five years.

In all seriousness, however, what this all boils down to is scapegoating and having incredibly thin skin and that, in any hands, can be a potent and dangerous combination.

If replaying, reporting or otherwise regurgitating a quote from a politician accurately and without the benefit of a good spit and polish constitutes bias against someone in the eyes of many, we're on a dangerous road.

At the moment, there are reports coming out of South Asia that Thailand, in the wake of their revered King's recent death this month are calling on Google to remove all content seen as insulting to the late monarch and on foreign governments to extradite online commentators to face prosecution in Bangkok for this particular crime.

Is the Republican's latest siren call over social media to have the powers-that-be cancel the venerable Saturday Night Live due to Alec Baldwin's brilliant send-up all that different?

Or is using the candidate's own words ? in 140 characters or less ? another example of bias.

We'll find out in a couple of weeks.