

# Ruth Dyson speech given to Deaf Society of Canterbury AGM on 02<sup>nd</sup> May 2010

(Dyson) Hello. Thank you for asking me to be your patron. I am happy to stay on in this role. Although I don't feel like I did much in the last year as Labour is the opposition to the current government.

And thank you for the invitation to the annual general meeting. I acknowledge your office holders: Greg Pateman (President) and Josje Lelijveld for stepping up into a leadership position. Just a quick question for Greg and Josje: why has the AGM finished so early? I have never known it to finish by lunch, this is extraordinary! So many times I visit here and you're all mid-meeting!

Your office holders have developed plans for the club, which is a huge asset for the Deaf community. I will help out all I can to help make your plans a reality, but I need ideas from you on how I can get involved and help.

I would like to review our discussion from last year and the issues I have followed up on: hearing aid subsidies, Vodafone/Telecom text only packages (excluding calls), captions (subtitles) for urgent messages on community TV, Deaf people in rest homes needing access to Freeview.

Ministerial Department - Our wish for NZSL course based at CPIT as well in Auckland. What's happening now? Not a lot in portfolio. Since National is in government I have less power to influence these decisions. National party MP Paula Bennett, who was posted to Minister for Disability Issues, gave up portfolio and handed the job to Maori Party MP Tariana Turia. This role is now considered "outside cabinet". I have not had a chance to remind colleagues about the Deaf or disability since the government has changed hands. As a minister, Tariana Turia will find it hard to influence Parliament when not involved in the decision making. There are barriers and I have been disappointed in portfolio performance this year, but we have to muddle through for the moment.

Historically, we have known what happens across the board in all portfolios. Now this is not happening. The ministerial committee meet but there is no disabled representation, no advisors, and no specialised committee. The government is not releasing minutes of these meetings.

(Question from audience): Why are these not being released?

(Dyson) I don't know. We pay our taxes and I believe they should be open.

Review of Special Education – I am worried about this because I don't see what the mission (goal) of this review is or what problems they are trying to fix. The options seem to be all fully inclusive. This means **no** special schools or **more** special schools, and nothing in between. It sounds as though they don't know which direction to go in. This review has no vision and therefore people get concerned and rumours start. The government is currently all over the place.

Another issue access to hearing aids. A new way of processing application for hearing aids and appliances has been implemented. The new hearing aid process is

included in a recent announcement from Ministry of Health. This new process is quicker and will save money for the government. However there is a possibility that there will be less money going into hearing aids and appliances. The criteria for getting hearing aids and appliances are already a high threshold and often new people miss out. This could get even tougher.

There is no other progress regarding other issues.

This week, NZSL Week, we celebrate New Zealand's 3<sup>rd</sup> official language announce review of NZSL and the Implementation Act. We need to stand up and say with a strong voice, that we want and need more interpreters trained. We are still in the first stage of this. Now you will notice that we have better access to internet and video conferencing with interpreters by remote. But as I'm sure you know there are still holes in the system.

I have not yet had a chance to look into the review. Would you, the Deaf community, like it if I visited on a Friday night to show you all the issues in the review or prefer if I emailed it around?

(Audience) Audience is enthusiastic about Ruth coming on a Friday social night to talk to us. Also, is it possible to invite the minister (Dyson) to do a tour of New Zealand visit Deaf societies and ask what works well, what doesn't?

(Dyson) I can't do all at the same time. The Deaf need to drive process and create opportunities.

(Noeline Still) All Deaf groups need to be included. DSC or DANZ could host the events. The Deaf in Canterbury need to be involved.

(Dyson) The local body elections are in October. The most important thing we can do right now is vote for major City Council, community board, District Health Board. Last year we voted in our regional council, this year National has sacked them all and appointed their own representatives. Therefore they've taken away our democracy without consultation. If the government can sack our elected officials without consultation how is that different from the military dictatorship in Fiji?

(Audience) How is this legal?

(Dyson) Government changed the law and therefore it is not illegal. The Labour and Green Party both did voted **against** this, but it was not enough to stop it from happening. It is important we all get involved in local body elections. A show of hands, how many of you voted in last local body election?

(Audience) About 50%

(Dyson) You should decide to runs the city. Have you considered having a political forum here? And inviting local government representatives? This type of meeting can be get unruly and you'll need a good chairperson. One last thing, I am disappointed about negative attitude in government BUT there are only 1 ½ years until the next election.

Ruth now tries and holds you accountable. Government can bully and steam-roller things through. Remember the woman that criticized the government? Government retaliated by publishing all her personal information. If you have any issues visit your MP or me first. I will take your cause on-board. So, Shall I visit in 2 to 3 weeks? Is Friday night good? Yes?

(Audience) Yes! Maybe one month from now?

(Noeline Still) There were lots of protesting people before, now nothing.

(Amy Hewgill) It is best to put your opinions in writing. Otherwise the government won't record your opinions and do nothing about it OR they think you accept their decision happily.

(Ruth) I was involved in ECAN protest on Friday. Nick Smith was giving a speech fundraising for the National Party at the Copthorne Hotel and gloating about the ECAN decision.

(Paula Haworth asks question regarding Review of Special Education)

(Dyson) I will send more information on the education review if you like; just give me your e-mail addresses.

(Paula Haworth) How can we support Maori Tariana Turia? (Review of NZSL Implementation Act)

(Dyson) Good question. NZSL Act your act. When it is reviewed it is critical the Deaf community is at forefront of the review. Have you considered inviting Tariana Turia here? You can ask how we support her. How can we get her into cabinet? I don't want more National in the cabinet.

(Roy Williams) We have minister of this, minister of that, that where of minister of Deaf? Why is there not a Deaf issues portfolio?

(Dyson) When the government set up disability issues in 1990s the Deaf were always included in that issue. I feel Deaf need to be in the big part of the portfolio. We have more power as a larger "disability" group and as an individual Deaf community. When I visit blind groups they often say to me that I am favouring the Deaf. Ultimately all of these issues are human rights issues. What's our Deaf Agenda?

(Kevin Stokes) Why not heard from the office of disability issues themselves?

(Dyson) The government has abolished the committee which included disabled advisors (experts) and now there is no continuity. I would be happy to help to extend invitations for a local body election meeting. Thank you all so much.

Meeting ends 1.40pm