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Bernard Levin The Times
1, Pennington Street
LONDON SE 1 9XN

Dear Mr. Levin,

First, I write as a regular and (nearly always) admiring reader of your columns, which I appreciate for their wisdom, succinct humour, your encyclopaedic knowledge, your sharp attacks on pomposity, crookedness and sheer wickedness : because of the unusual combination of good writing and good morals, I often cut out your columns to send to friends overseas.

Having paid my homage, let me cautiously venture into a trickier area. Yesterday (August 15) your column mentioned "frogs, krauts, wops" and other pejorative epithets for foreigners. A few months ago, when you were writing about the fishing wars, I was distressed by your gleeful and frequent use of "dagos" to describe the Spaniards.

I am puzzled as to why you use such expressions. I am sure that you, as a Jewish man, have winced at hearing the crude anti-semitic terms that one does hear - just as I, a gay man, have been hurt by the similarly crude terms that are used against us. Also, as a Prisoner of War in Italy and Germany for three years, in WWII, I have had to make conscious efforts not to slip into using a word like "kraut", and I have been tempted.

I am puzzled because your columns generally represent some of the best values in our culture, and these gutter terms are so out of place.

Perhaps you are being ironic, or jokey, and I have missed the point? I should explain that I was born in, and grew up in South Africa, and when I first came to England, as an undergraduate, an English friend claimed that I had " a too literal colonial mind". Maybe. But I am sure others will have found that these words jarred, on them. Also, I am sure that you do realise that many of us look to you to provide an example, and that your words often bring out the best in us. Why , then, descend into using such harmful words?

I hope that you do not find this letter presumptuous, but it is an honest question that I ask : Why?

Yours sincerely,