

JUSTICE COMMITTEE

HATE CRIME AND PUBLIC ORDER (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM PAUL ATKIN

I would like to give my views on this Bill

In principle, I do not believe the idea of 'hate crime' is useful. In practice, it has become 'thought crime' and is used for political ends rather than to further the cause of justice. Laws existed before hate crime legislation was invented and these were adequate to protect against harassment, threatening behaviour or incitement.

I am particularly concerned about the new offence of stirring up hatred. The threshold seems very low and the maximum punishment too high. We must be free to express our views, whatever they are. If people say things that are unpleasant that is bad manners but this must not become a criminal offence. We must be free to propose ideas that are controversial or just have minority support. And others must be free to answer them as they see fit. How else would the Scottish Enlightenment have fared without these freedoms?

I do not think the offence of blasphemy should be abolished. Steps should, instead, be taken to strengthen protection for religious views and practice. Religion is beneficial to society and practiced by very many, often in times of great need. It should have a special place in society and law.

I hope this is helpful

Paul Atkin
20 July 2020