

JUSTICE COMMITTEE

HATE CRIME AND PUBLIC ORDER (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM ZAK BARLOW

I'm writing to you as a concerned citizen about the proposed Hate Crime and Public Order Bill. I have enclosed a link to it here:

<https://beta.parliament.scot/-/media/files/legislation/bills/current-bills/hate-crime-and-public-order-scotland-bill/introduced/bill-as-introduced-hate-crime-and-public-order-bill.pdf>

Reading this bill, and its broad, non-specific language - I am finding myself extremely alarmed at the expansion of the state into the realms of citizens' speech, expressions and thoughts. Many of the sections relating to offence or potentially insulting language/memes/material/communications are written based upon the subjective feelings of the supposed or perceived "victim", thereby starting from a position of assumed guilt and handing all legal power to the whims of potentially politically motivated judges and actors (I.e those with the most to gain, and those motivated by the fact that they didn't like the material in the first place). In fact, the language therein is so broad stroke that under this law, the writers of this bill would be guilty of the offences listed purely because I perceive them as an insulting affront to my free speech and individual liberty, and thereby find this bill to be grossly offensive.

1984 wasn't an instruction manual, it was meant to be a warning.

I implore you, re-read the language of this bill and try and imagine what would happen if the people you least wanted to have such absolute power over speech and expression were to have it. Imagine what a totalitarian police state could do with such powers, the USSR, Communist China, Nazi Germany, Khmer Rouge - what do you imagine would happen then?

"Hurry words" should never be the business of the state. It's a terrifying step towards authoritarian rule. Free speech is paramount, even if that means some people are going to say things you don't like - you shouldn't be able to go crying to the state to lock someone up for 7 years for offending you.

How many views do you hold? Do you think you could have a conversation with someone and never, ever offend them? On religion, politics, ideology? What about in a room with 100 people? Or 5 million.

There is no way to say anything of value, to discuss any ideas without risking offending someone. But sharing edgy memes to your mates should not land you in court because some pearl-clutcher got upset about what language or tone you used.

Please, whoever reads this,

Do not pass this law, reject it - this cannot be allowed to stand.

Yours sincerely,

Zak Barlow
21 July 2020