

JUSTICE COMMITTEE

HATE CRIME AND PUBLIC ORDER (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM PHILIP PICKETT

To whom it may concern,

I would like to give my view on the hate crime and public order bill.

My key disagreement is with question 6. "Do you have views on the merits of Part 2 of the Bill and the plans to introduce a new offence of stirring up of hatred?"

There are four points of objection I have to this bill:

First, I believe that religious beliefs and opinions on morality are things that people can and should have lively debate on and freedom to change their minds. We must allow that if we are to be called a free society.

Secondly, existing criminal law already covers threatening and abusive behaviour so I believe no new law is needed. I feel that criminal offences should only cover deliberately threatening conduct. Otherwise abusive behaviour becomes something that is purely subjective. It is very serious to accuse someone of stirring up hatred, so it must be clear they were doing so deliberately.

Thirdly, this bill doesn't exclude homes or places of worship. It is unreasonable, and controlling, and frankly 'big brother' like for the government to censor and have the power to prosecute what is said in the privacy of one's home. Likewise if a church was to preach that Jesus is the only way to God, and all other religions are false, or where certain behaviour is sinful, this bill could see them prosecuted for stirring up hatred.

This leads to fourthly then the fact that this bill undermines freedom of religion and belief. It may stop people giving an account for what they believe. This is true for religious people, and atheists, because any defence of what they believe could be subjectively deemed as offensive behaviour.

The bill needs amendments that protect freedom of speech on religion, both in the private and public sphere. There should be freedom for example to say what the bible teaches on human sexuality, in a non-threatening manner, in the home, the church or the park bench, without fear of prosecution.

I trust you will take these points into careful consideration and make the appropriate amendments.

Sincerely,

Philip Pickett

22 July 2020