

JUSTICE COMMITTEE

HATE CRIME AND PUBLIC ORDER (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM DANIEL JAMES SHARP

Hi there. I want to comment on the Hate Crime Bill. While I welcome the abolition of the blasphemy offence, it's inconsistent to introduce new legislation which could act as a backdoor blasphemy law! The vague wording of 'stirring up hatred' and the inclusion of 'abusive' as well as 'threatening' (compare the English law, which is still imperfect but better than this proposal) leave the door wide open to, well, abuse by people with offended sensibilities twisting words in such a way as to conform to those criteria. And even if someone *is* abusive or spouting hatred, there's a very thick line between that and inciting violence. The free expression protection is also vague and flimsy compared to the English law. Please reconsider this bill or scrap it altogether (while not forgetting to abolish the blasphemy offence too!). My own views are nicely summed up by this article from the National Secular Society, which raises some very important points for any consideration of this bill:

<https://www.secularism.org.uk/opinion/2020/05/scotlands-new-hate-speech-law-will-be-too-censorious>.

Yours sincerely,

Daniel James Sharp.