

**JUSTICE COMMITTEE**

**HATE CRIME AND PUBLIC ORDER (SCOTLAND) BILL**

**SUBMISSION FROM LES REID**

I welcome the removal of the offence of blasphemy from the statute book. There have been no prosecutions under that law for many years, but the mere existence of an offence of blasphemy was an encouragement to those countries which still imprison or execute people found guilty of that obsolete offence.

However, I am concerned that the proposed Bill does not uphold freedom of expression adequately when it comes to criticism and satire of religious beliefs. It would be a most unwelcome retrograde step if this Bill were to criminalise in any way the long-held freedom of expression to criticise or satirise religious beliefs. For that reason I would support the insertion into the Bill of a paragraph which explicitly safeguards the right to criticise or satirise religious beliefs.

The following wording was used in a similar bill in England and Wales and should be adapted to suit this Bill: “Nothing in this [legislation] shall be read or given effect in a way which prohibits or restricts discussion, criticism or expressions of antipathy, dislike, ridicule, insult or abuse of particular religions or the beliefs or practices of their adherents, or of any other belief system or the beliefs or practices of its adherents, or proselytising or urging adherents of a different religion or belief system to cease practising their religion or belief system.”

Les Reid  
09 July 2020