

JUSTICE COMMITTEE

HATE CRIME AND PUBLIC ORDER (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM IAN H FORSYTH

I would like to share with you my views on the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill, particularly on Part 2 of the Bill and the plans to introduce a new offence of stirring up hatred.

There is a danger that individuals could be guilty of stirring up hatred offences unknowingly when simply discussing their deeply held religious beliefs, even in private conversations. Surely a free society should allow this, unlike say, South Korea or other oppressive regimes. There is a world of difference between sharing your views and stirring up hatred.

It is possible that offenses could be construed as caused when the message of Christianity is preached and the requirements of integrity and holiness in behaviour, including sexual purity, is stressed.

Laws are already in place to address threatening or abusive behaviour likely to cause fear or alarm. However, if there was to be new legislation, it should only cover threatening conduct, not "abusive behaviour", as this can be interpreted in many ways.

The free speech clause on religion must be stronger to ensure people should feel free to vigorously challenge religious beliefs and also beliefs about same-sex marriage and transgender issues to allow open debate.

There is a serious danger that politically-motivated complainants will label disagreement as hatred, to try to silence their opponents and thus destroy the liberty of free speech and open debate. The threat of prosecution for stirring up hatred will undoubtedly cause some to keep quiet out of fear. It is important that a clear distinction is made between honest debate and deliberately seeking to stir up trouble.

I write this as a Christian and also a very proud Scot, who loves this land and what it has stood for over many years and I am seriously worried about the impact a very vocal minority can have in stifling those who disagree with them.

Ian H Forsyth
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