

JUSTICE COMMITTEE

HATE CRIME AND PUBLIC ORDER (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM DR A K SOMMERVILLE and R. CLARK

Dear Sir/Madam

My wife and I would like to submit the attached view on the proposed Hate Crime and Public Order [Scotland] Bill.

Hate Crime and Public Order [Scotland] Bill - Call for Views

Submission by Dr A K Sommerville and R. Clark

Introduction

A quiet revolution has been taking place over the past ten years involving a small army of faceless, self styled 'social justice warriors'. Their aim, as far as it is possible to determine, is a fairer more inclusive society, purged of prejudice, where particular 'identity groups' defined as 'oppressed' are liberated and finally able to take their place at the top table. These 'warriors' make no apologies for their refusal to engage in honest and open debate, or make any attempt to persuade doubters to their point of view. Instead, the tradition of change through consent, a cornerstone of modern democracies, has been cast aside for an array of insidious tactics designed to silence dissenters: 'no-platforming' and 'cancelling' are now commonplace, with violent protests and criminal damage recently added to their armoury. For a group ostensibly committed to achieving a fairer society, the vigour with which these 'warriors' pursue individuals who question their views and seek to destroy their reputations and careers, is indeed a sinister development in contemporary society.

Background

The power and influence these 'warriors' have accumulated in recent years has not happened in a vacuum. Politicians generally seem to have adopted the persona of the Roman god Janus, but on steroids, not knowing quite which way to turn for fear of being singled out by the social justice warriors. Moreover, significant elements of the corporate world, along with big tech and mainstream media appear to be more than happy to accommodate this new demographic. Universities, once places of learning, are fast becoming places of yearning for protection against views perceived as threatening or unpalatable. 'Trigger warnings', 'safe spaces', and 'microaggressions' are now de rigueur in many establishments. The 'warriors' appear to be relentless in their desire to dramatically lower the threshold of freedom of speech to a level they deem acceptable. The minutiae of written and spoken language is scrutinised, alongside its source and context, looking for anything qualifying as disagreement or offence. The inevitable reaction is a dramatic rise in self-censorship, with an increasing number of people believing silence is the best way to keep the wolf from the door.

Hate Crime and Public Order [Scotland] Bill

The quotation attributed to Churchill, albeit slightly overused, is nonetheless appropriate in the current climate: "He who feeds the alligator does so in the hope the beast will get to him last." When trying to fathom the rationale for the Hate Crime and Public Order [Scotland] Bill the single most important feeling we shared was despair. Despair at politicians who lack any vision for a post pandemic Scotland when jobs, income and paying the bills will be at the forefront of most people's mind; despair at those who close their eyes to the basic decency and compassion of their fellow citizens, opting instead for totally cynical view that sees hatred and the potential for disruption everywhere; despair at those who want to 'feed the beast' knowing full well the consequences will be to consolidate and strengthen the 'warriors' of this new authoritarian orthodoxy. We are sure that the so called 'social justice warriors' will gain some silent pleasure at the idea of a police raid on an individual who has offered a view on, say, the biological difference between men and women, but for the Scottish Parliament to validate and encourage this would be nothing less than igniting a long fuse to disaster.

Conclusion

Freedom of speech is worth defending. We are offended by a new vocabulary we perceive as potentially racist. Terms such as 'white supremacy', 'white privilege', combined with a range of negative views connected with whiteness, are fast become a routine feature of the lexicon. We are happy, however, to defend their right to use this language, not in order to curry favour with this new sect, but in recognition of the fact that sections of the BAME community are desperately trying to reorientate themselves following the traumatic events in Minneapolis. The use of 'offensive' language today could act as a catalyst for positive change and beneficial outcomes for all of civil society in the near or distant future. We are also pensioners and note that the Hate Crime and Public Order [Scotland] Bill is suggesting that age be included as a category. We are elderly people and if the thinking behind this new category is that we need some type of protection, let us just state for the record, we do not!. We are not victims, we are not oppressed, we trust and respect our fellow citizens and through our long lives have found that if you 'do unto others' etc., this will be appreciated and reciprocated. We are looking for leadership from our politicians not obsequiousness. Covid-19 has thrown up all types of challenges so moving forward will require optimism not 'hate', hope not 'public order'. If the politicians need inspiration, they should look to those selfless individuals in the NHS and social care sectors who continue to place themselves in harm's way to help others. Doing the decent thing is a reward in itself.

Dr A K Sommerville and R. Clark
16 July 2020