
CAMPAIGN

CENSORSHIP

AGAINST

PLEASE REPLY TO:-

PRESS STATEMENT

For Immediate Release

ANTI-TERRORISM BILL: CAC opposes 'religious hatred' clauses

The Campaign Against Censorship is very strongly opposed to the provisions on 'incitement to religious hatred' in part 5 of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill.

Expressing an opinion, no matter how obnoxious, should not be a criminal offence. The proper and effective way to counter 'hate speech' is with information, education, argument and debate, not censorship. Banning an opinion gives it the glamour of the forbidden.

There is a wide gap between the verbal expression of bigotry and its expression in acts of violence. There are already plenty of laws available to deal with violent disorder, arson and assault, regardless of motive. People who are prevented from expressing themselves verbally are more likely to resort to violence, not less.

The existing law on incitement to racial hatred has rarely been used, not least because it is unlikely to result in convictions. The proposed extension to cover religious groups is even more unworkable.

Like nearly all censorship legislation, the proposals have been hastily and badly drafted. They do not even define 'religious belief'. They do not define 'hatred'. In spite of David Blunkett's attempt to reassure Rowan Atkinson, we cannot be sure that ridicule and satire would not be prosecuted. They refer only to 'a group' and so do not proscribe attacks on individuals. (They would not prohibit Salman Rushdie being attacked for his lack of belief in the Koran.)

It is extremely unlikely that the proposed law would be used to prosecute members of mainstream Christian churches. It is much more likely that those charged under it would be of other sects and other faiths. (In the case of Islam, that may even be the intention.) We cannot be sure that groups of believers would not try to use it to silence their own dissidents or ex-members.

The amendment tabled by Lord Dixon-Smith and others (amendment no.100) provides for a 'public good defence'. It would go some way to address the Campaign's concerns, but we would much rather see part 5 removed entirely from the Bill.

CAC supports complete repeal of the law of blasphemy.

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ENDS