

COPY

25, Middleton Close,
Fareham,
Hants. PO14 1QN
19th November, 2001

(sent to 8 humanist and/or free speech organisations)

Dear Fellow-Campaigners,

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'.

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 will not try to use it to silence their own dissidents or ex-members.

The Campaign will be making representations to Parliament during the passage of the Bill. Please let me know if:

1. You would like copies of our document,
2. You would be interested in meeting our representatives,

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3. You would be interested in discussing tactics and/or co-ordinating our efforts for maximum effect.

You can reach the Campaign at my address and phone number (at foot of first page) or by e-mail on kmmhayward@britishlibrary.net.

Yours,

(Hon. Secretary, CAC)