Justice Committee

Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Bill

Written submission from Gordon Jackson

I have many concerns over what I have read so far about this proposed legislation.

Firstly, I do not accept there are as many sectarian issues here in Scotland which warrant this type of "law" and it's "Victorian" style consequences, especially when comparing the "crime" with many others ie. sticks and stones vs actual bodily crime. It's complete nonsense that carrying a knife with intent is considered less harmful than namecalling.

Secondly, when did the Democratic Right to free speech and freedom of choice end.

However, I am a regular internet user and like to keep up to speed with the latest football news, and take part in the banter amongst the different supporters. Last season was particularly bad with vile abuse and threats being more commonplace than ever before. Each website is overseen by at least administrator and all those wish to post messages need to go through them before they are displayed (forgive me if you already know this). Personal details are held of everyone who wishes to make contributions to each site, and therefore such abusive and threatening posts should be able to be traced to its' origin. If someone is considered to have overstepped their right to free speech etc. then surely the authorities are able to act in that kind of situation.

I believe this is where the policing should be concentrated. A straightforward set of rules should be established and site administrators should be licensed before they can sit in any judgement concerning the comments made on their website. Anyone flouting this set of rules should have their license withdrawn and the actual perpetrator of the abuse should be relieved of their ability to post any messages ie. equipment confiscated.

On a related matter, I have reported the website of a supposed journalist to my local MP, Brian Donohoe, and many other leading members of our Parliament. This person regularly produces exaggerated lies regarding "Anti Irish Catholic" hatred in Scotland and I believe this kind of thing incites much of the hatred which has infiltrated many footballing websites. I urge you to look up his site and see for yourself. If you read most of the subjects, ask yourself why this person would do what he does and to what end.

There may well be anti Catholic, anti Irish Catholic, anti Muslim, anti Christian, anti Protestant, anti English, anti Welsh bigotry here on an individual basis, but not on the National scale which has been alluded to by some individuals. Individuals which have some kind of an agenda.
Anyway, I hate the fact that my Country is being portrayed as a "biggotted wee place" by those people, and I think by producing this sectarian legislation is playing into their hands as well as making us a laughing stock around the World.

Please consider tighter legislation within the internet as I think this is at the root of the matter.

Gordon Jackson
20 June 2011