

Justice Committee

Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Bill

Written submission from Celtic Supporters Association

Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Bill

While any action to curb offensive behaviour at football in Scotland should be applauded; I believe that the proposed Bill is far too open to interpretation; and may be impossible to implement by the Police and the Courts.

I don't believe that football supporters in Scotland are much different to football supporters throughout Europe; generally speaking there is a healthy rivalry; particularly when it comes to local derby matches.

This initiative began after the so-called "Shame Game" at Celtic Park; it was instigated by the Police and then the Scottish Government got involved. At this particular match there were two red cards during the match; and one after the match had concluded; all three from the same team; there were also a couple of skirmishes between two of the coaches; one from each team.

I have been following Celtic Football Club since the middle fifties; and in that time have seen many similar clashes; but it has never resulted in the media frenzy that followed this match; or indeed with Government intervention.

I don't believe that the Celtic supporters behave in an offensive manner; and while I would acknowledge that the younger element can be a bit boisterous from time to time; I believe that should be tackled by education; not criminalisation.

I would not profess to being an expert on criminal law; but I would certainly suggest that offensive behaviour at football matches could; and should be handled under the present law; for instance "Breach of the Peace" I don't think there is any great need to implement another law.

We are in serious danger of creating a generation of criminals; their only crime would be supporting a football team; surely the limited resources available should be utilised to improve Scottish Football.

I don't want to be cynical; but if I was; I would think this new strategy is designed by the Police and the Government to alleviate the pressure on the Police to make cuts in their budget.

Scottish Football is in a critical; if not terminal state; it needs investment and encouragement; there are many problems that need to be addressed; everyone who has an input should be consulted.

Scottish Football has evolved like any other industry; the days of terraces full of flat capped labourers has gone; we now have a generation of intelligent supporters; people who own and run their own companies; should we not be utilising them?

I believe the Government need to look at the big picture; football is a massive industry in Scotland; we need to encourage the next generation to go to football; not threaten them with imprisonment for supporting their team.

I personally have followed Celtic Football Club for over fifty years; I would appreciate being treated with some respect at times; I am sick of being criminalised in cities throughout Scotland because I wear a green and white scarf.

In my humble opinion; the Government needs to get all factions within Scottish Football together; they need to listen to the real supporters; people who go to football every week; ordinary football supporters; get their opinions and act on them.

In conclusion; I sincerely believe that First Minister Alex Salmond's actions are for the right reasons; I believe he wants to make Scotland a better place to live in; but you don't achieve that by criminalising the ordinary everyday people who attend football; there are far greater crimes than singing at football matches.

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25 August 2011