Justice Committee

Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Repeal) (Scotland) Bill

Written submission from Susan Forrest

1. Do you agree with the proposal in the Bill to repeal the 2012 Act? What are your reasons for coming to this view?

No, I do not agree with the proposal to repeal the Act. The Act is there to stop the singing and use of sectarian language at football matches. By repealing the Act, one would be saying, yes, go ahead with singing sectarian songs all you like, threaten people with sectarian language at and around football games. Is this the Scotland we want? I certainly don’t. I support the 2012 legislation, I do NOT support your proposal to repeal it, no-one I know does. No-one I know wants to support sectarianism in football, nor promote it.

2. Did you support the original legislation?

Yes

3. Do you consider that other existing provisions of criminal law are sufficient to prosecute offensive behaviour related to football which leads to public disorder? If so, could you specify the criminal law provisions? Or does repeal of section 1 risk creating a gap in the criminal law?

This is a specific problem which I think requires specific legislation. To my knowledge the majority of people in Scotland who have a view support this specific piece of legislation

4. Do you have a view on the focus of section 1 of the 2012 Act, which criminalises behaviour surrounding watching, attending or travelling to or from football matches, which may not be criminalised in other settings?

Football has a specific problem with offensive and threatening behaviour, particularly based around racism and sectarianism which I have not experienced in any other sporting event. I attend boxing, gymnastics, rugby, cycling and many other sporting occasions and have never heard sectarian singing and chanting, nor have I felt threatened the same way I have at football matches

5. Do you consider that other existing provisions of criminal law are sufficient to prosecute threats made with the intent of causing a person or persons fear or alarm or inciting religious hatred? If so, could you specify the criminal law provisions? Or does repeal of section 6 risk creating a gap in the criminal law?

Religious hatred is a specific problem in Scottish football, more so with Rangers and Celtic, but at other games too. It is disgusting, and this Act should be used with all its force to stop it. This is the 21st Century and Scotland should have this under control, which this Act is helping to do. I’m not sure how repealing the Act will help.
6. Do you have a view on the proposed transitional arrangements in the Bill: that there should be no further convictions for section 1 and 6 offences from the date on which the repeal of those offences takes effect; and that the police will cease issuing fixed penalty notices at least from the point at which the Bill is passed?

The Act should not be repealed so I have no view

7. To what extent do you consider that the 2012 Act has assisted in tackling sectarianism?

The Act has had an impact, and will continue to have an impact if not repealed but there are other things which need to happen to tackle sectarianism, such as support from all sides of the political spectrum, from the SFA, particularly from Rangers and Celtic, from the Orange Order – using the excuse of “Culture” is not good enough. The Police need support with this, not politicians trying to score points. This is a popular act and no-one seems to want to repeal it apart from politicians with an axe to grind and football fans who want to sing sectarian songs and threaten people who may or not be of a different persuasion to them.

Do not repeal this Act, support it.

Susan Forrest
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