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

Yes. The Offensive Behaviour bill is ridiculous, it criminalises football fans and creates heightened tensions between fans, opposition and indeed the authorities at matches. Pointing cameras at fans and waiting for them to sing a ‘bad song’ is an absolute joke in the first place, but what is a ‘bad song’. A song that is blatantly sectarian? There is already legislation to take care of that. A song that is political that some people may not like or, perhaps, understand? Sorry but that is part of life, politics is in everything, certain areas of society and indeed certain clubs have strong roots and identity, that will always be celebrated. It’s not the fans problem if there is ‘offence’ caused due to the ignorance of the offendee. If you are to criminalise football fans for political songs, are you going to extend that into wider society? Maybe start criminalising those who support the ‘wrong party’?

2. **Did you support the original legislation?**

I did not support the Offensive Behaviour act.

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?**

Yes. There is increased opportunity with this Act in place, it creates a new unnecessary tension.

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?**

It’s a joke that football fans are targeted, but this is dangerous legislation to attach anywhere.

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?**

Section 6 has hardly been used in the whole period since it was enacted and that police and prosecutors regularly use other legislation eg Communications Act, 2003.

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?

With immediate effect, halt all current cases and wipe past convictions.

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

It has made it worse. The lack of understanding of what sectarianism is and what is or is not a sectarian song leads to a lot of ‘whatabouttery’ and in turn defiance.

Paul Walker
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