

Response to Government Consultation on proposals for a single Equality Bill for Great Britain

Church Society was formed in 1835 and is one of the oldest Anglican Voluntary Societies. Whilst we recognise that the intent of this legislation may appear laudable it will in fact greatly undermine liberty and the freedom of speech. The concept of rights though superficially attractive panders to human selfishness and undermines the concept of duty which lies at the heart of Christian morality.

Some human rights legislation is merely an attempt at social engineering, to impose by law and force concepts which cannot be won by reason and the use of argument. We consider that the plethora of right legislation which has appeared in recent years betrays a moral vacuum developing at the heart of modern society. This new Bill will not improve matters, it will create conflict and fear, increase costly legal action and undermine freedom.

Part of the reason for this Bill appears to be to try to tidy up some of the previous mess of legislation much of which has been controversial. It would be better to recognise that significant aspects of what has been proposed are fundamentally flawed rather than try to shore up poor legislation with more poor legislation.

The large size of the consultation document and the proposals demonstrate not simple legislation which might help people but complex and ill defined ideas which will serve no-one but lawyers.

Certain aspects, such as the term 'harassment' are once again ill-defined and therefore likely to be misused. We have seen ample evidence that some of the legislation this Bill proposes to replace have likewise led to abuse and ordinary people being harassed in expressing their sincerely held beliefs.

Some specific proposals:

Transsexuals will be able to conceal the fact that they have undergone genital mutilation. This is an absurd piece of legislation. No operation can change their genetic makeup and yet the Bill proposes to allow someone to live a lie, pretending to be what they are not.

At present all religious groups enjoy freedom to proselytize - that is to convince people by argument and reason that their beliefs are cogent and true (rather than by force of law as this Bill attempts to do). Such argument necessarily means arguing that the beliefs of others are wrong. Yet this Bill seems to be aiming to take away this freedom by allowing someone who is offended at being told they are wrong to take legal action.

Legislation has been previously attempted to make it a crime to argue that sexual intercourse properly belongs within a marriage relationship of a man and a woman. This new Bill seems to attempt to do this again. Society is crumbling partly because marriage is being undermined, yet such marriage has been a bedrock of our Society from the beginning and has been honoured and protected. This Bill will apparently make it a crime to argue that actions which undermine this (such as homosexual practice) are wrong if someone finds such a statement offensive.

This is poor legislation, compounding existing controversial legislation. It will be destructive and needs to be greatly simplified if it is to have any value.

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