

A New Blasphemy Law

The British Home Secretary David Blunkett says that he plans to **repeal** the blasphemy law. Most people don't know that there is a blasphemy law on the books in Britain. Nor is there any reason why they should, as it is almost never enforced. We nevertheless welcome its repeal. But there is a catch: Blunkett also plans to enact a law banning incitement to religious hatred.

We don't support religious hatred, but such a law would be a bad one. For one thing, incitement to hatred is different from the already-illegal incitement to violence. It is wrong to argue that all people with particular beliefs or skin colour or whatever ought to be killed or hurt and it should be illegal. However, there is nothing necessarily wrong with hating people who advocate tyranny, or despising those who apologise for it, provided that one does not also advocate their murder. It is also legitimate to say that particular ideas are evil – in other words to incite hatred against those ideas – again, so long as this does not amount to inciting violence against their holders.

And in all these case, it should make no difference either way if the hated people or ideas are religious. Why does the proposed law specify incitement to *religious* hatred? The US Constitution separates the Church and the state for good reason, they go together very badly. People seldom do evil so gladly as when they delude themselves that they are doing it for God. What is this law but a modern blasphemy law? Not blasphemy against God but blasphemy against the pseudoreligion of political correctness. A religion that puts the politeness of an argument above its truth. Freedom of speech means being allowed to say unpleasant things about religious beliefs moderated by personal judgement rather than fear of violent retribution, legal or otherwise. Like so many of Blunkett's ideas, this law would be a step backward from a free society and the proper respect for personal responsibility. We oppose it.

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That law

That law would never fly in the United States. It would be ruled unconstitutional the first time it was used. Over here, you actually can incite people to violence all you want, as long as you aren't

standing in front of an armed mob. That is the standard of case law.

I have often wondered, in Britain, is there any way for the courts to strike down acts of parliament? Before the Constitution and the Bill of Rights in America, Hamilton was a lawyer. One of his legal principles was that the English common law could trump state legislation. Is it that way in Britain?

Nick
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I don't know, it sounds like

I don't know, it sounds like a pretty good God damn law to me.

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Unintended consequences?

With such a law, a lot of religious leaders should be worried. No more preaching that it's required to kill Jews and enslave Christians.

John Anderson teqjack@wowmail.com

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Re: Unintended consequences?

Yes, and therefore one of the down-sides would be that the public would be systematically misled about how widespread murderous opinions are among the leaders of certain religions.

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