



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

An attack upon our civil and religious liberties

By Rev. Brian McClung, Minister of Newtownabbey Free Presbyterian Church

The [consultation document](#) which forms part of the review of parading published by the OFMdFM contains a direct attack upon our civil and religious liberties.

The working group set up by Sinn Fein and the DUP have moved beyond reviewing legislation on parades & related protests and are now seeking to place restrictions on all public assemblies or protests. Freedom of peaceful assembly, which our forefathers fought and died for, instead of being a fundamental right will now become a privilege that has to be applied for and by inference can and will be restricted or denied in certain circumstances.

1. Permission will have to be obtained from a new government quango to hold an open-air gospel meeting, where more than 50 people will be present. Notice will have to be given 37 days in advance and this new body will decide whether it is lawful to go ahead with the open-air meeting. Those opposed to the open-air meeting taking place will be able to register their objections with the purpose of having the meeting ruled unlawful or having it restricted.

Objectors will have up to 7 days prior to the open air meeting taking place to register their objections.

If this proposed legislation becomes law the fundamental civil and religious right of free assembly has been taken away. Our freedom to worship in the open air will be subject to the say so of a government quango. You can be sure that any sympathy towards the Gospel will be lacking in this new body.

2. Permission will have to be sought from this quango to hold a protest where more than 50 people will be present. This time 22 days notice will have to be given and this new body will decide whether the protest can go ahead or what restrictions will be placed upon it.

3. This quango will be charged with facilitating mediation between 'the organiser' and 'the protestor'. They: *'may take into account a person's participation or non-participation in any meeting convened under this section'* when deciding on the lawfulness of any meeting or protest. When preaching the gospel or protesting against sin we can have no dialogue with those we oppose about what is acceptable. The Word of God is our rule. Are they going to tell us that we cannot use certain words or phrases as part of the assembly or protest? This we cannot accept.

The Free Presbyterian Church holds many open-air services as part of its witness. In Newtownabbey we hold open-air services every Lord's Day after the evening service, June - August, weather permitting. If these proposals become law then we are going to be told when, where and whether we can have these open-air services. This is totally unacceptable and a



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denial of religious liberty.

The Free Presbyterian Church holds many protests as part of its witness. We protest against ecumenical gatherings. We protest against immoral gatherings whether at theatres or other places. Again these are going to be subject to the whim of this quango. Can you see them giving us permission to protest again sodomy and other vile sins that are displayed in public? I think not!

Not only are these proposals impractical but they smack of an overbearing, authoritarian, anti-Christian, police state. Many, if not most, public assemblies and protests are organised at short notice. What about protests which may be organised in just a few days or even hours? This means that if we do not submit a request on time no public meeting or protest could take place. This is a blatant attempt to erode religious freedom and liberty and shame upon any who have any part in bringing it into existence.

Curtailling the right to worship and peaceful protest should be a matter of grave concern to every believer. We should not treat this matter lightly. Dark days are coming for the gospel witness in this province. The old battles which our forefathers fought are going to have to be fought again.

April 22nd, 2010.

Update

It would further seem that convicted terrorists will be able to sit in judgment on these issues. It is only convictions subsequent to appointment to this body that will necessitate resignation. There is the possibility that those who have engaged in murder and mayhem will now be able to decide whether we can preach the gospel or protest against sin. How true it is: *when the wicked beareth rule the people mourn, Prov 29:2.*