

Blair's legacy is a religious time bomb

PRESS RELEASE

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Tony Blair is leaving behind him a religious legacy that could amount to a time bomb of conflict for the future, says the National Secular Society.

Commenting on the departure of Mr Blair – widely regarded as one of the most religious Prime Ministers since Gladstone – Keith Porteous Wood of the National Secular Society said: “Tony Blair has done more to undermine the secular nature of British society than anyone in recent history. But many people haven't woken up to what will be regarded by coming generations as Tony Blair's worst legacy – encouraging single faith schools. Perhaps people will realise the dangers of this policy for community cohesion when we have hundreds of minority faith schools in inner-city conurbations and the school system becomes in effect apartheid, and with it the progressive fragmentation of the rest of society. It is already starting to happen in northern cities like Blackburn, as this week's Panorama programme illustrated.

“Under Blair the Government has addressed minority communities primarily through their supposed religion. This has had the effect of exacerbating people's differences rather than emphasising our common humanity and building on what we have in common. This policy of Multiculturalism, or really multi-faithism, is belatedly being recognised as a having been counter-productive.

“Multiculturalist policies have also almost de-franchised the many who are not practising a religion - especially those in minority communities and those who feel oppressed by their 'community' religion. Those in minority communities who do not wish to be defined primarily or at all by their religion are voiceless. Consequently, the moderate and the integrationist voices from such communities, especially the Muslim community, are hardly ever heard. They are drowned out by the voices of those – almost always men - who want sharia law and more veiling.”

“And why has Mr Blair done all of this? To appease and bolster religious leaders, at the same time giving sometimes the more extreme an importance quite out of proportion to their real value. By consulting religious leaders about policy-making he has emboldened them. They now regularly use their new-found power to seek to thwart socially progressive legislation and make self-serving demands, including for the suppression of freedom of expression and the restriction of the human rights of others.”

Mr Wood added that “all the statistics show that Britain is probably one of the least religious nations in the world, and yet Mr Blair had placed religion at the top of the national agenda. In doing so, he has set a time bomb of conflict that will explode in future generations.”

Mr Wood did acknowledge that “the Blair administration has overseen a substantial raft of equality legislation, albeit some was required by EU directives. Sadly, too much of this legislation has been compromised by excessive religious exemptions – exemptions granted to those most likely to discriminate.”

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