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Labour's Scottish Secretary, Jim Murphy, risks alienating the Party's core vote if he continues to insist that it embrace a religious agenda, says the National Secular Society.

Reacting to Mr Murphy's speech^[1] in Westminster today to Labour think tank, Progress, Terry Sanderson, president of the National Secular Society, said:

"Jim Murphy is taking the Labour Party into dangerous territory when he calls on it to make a special play for the religious vote. His personal religious enthusiasm may be blinding him to the facts. It is no longer the case that clerics can dictate the way their congregations vote. People are too independent-minded now to be herded into the voting booth by religious considerations alone.

"The society that we live in today is very different to the one that existed fifty years ago, and we want our politicians to reflect that change. Even in the last twenty years Scottish mass attendance has almost halved. The Labour Party should rein in Mr Murphy before he does it permanent damage."

"A poll by ComRes published last week^[2] showed that half of those who define themselves as Christian say that religion is of "little importance" to them. If the Labour Party starts favouring religious voters by promising socially regressive legislation, dictated by out-of-touch and dogmatic religious leaders, it risks alienating huge numbers of people.

"Other polls have shown that ordinary Catholics are completely out of sympathy with the teachings of the Catholic Church on issues such as contraception, euthanasia, homosexuality and abortion. A 2007 YouGov poll^[3] showed that only a quarter of Catholics (and only a seventh of the population) agreed with Catholic dogma on abortion. This suggests allying a political party to religion is electorally very dangerous. This is why the electoral results of the Christian Party are pitiful.

"The British Social Attitudes Survey, published last month about religious leaders trying to influence how people vote in an election, showed that 75% of respondents thought that they shouldn't, while 67% think religious leaders should stay out of Government decision-making. When asked: "If many of our elected officials were deeply religious, do you think that the laws and policy decisions they make would probably be better or probably be worse?" Nearly half of respondents thought they would be worse, whereas only 26% thought they would be better."

^[1] <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/8529789.stm>

^[2] <http://campaigndirector.moodia.com/Client/Theos/Files/TheosPoliticalPollFinalFeb10.pdf>

^[3] http://www.catholicsforchoice.org/news/pr/2007/documents/YouGovPoll_16-Nov-2007.pdf