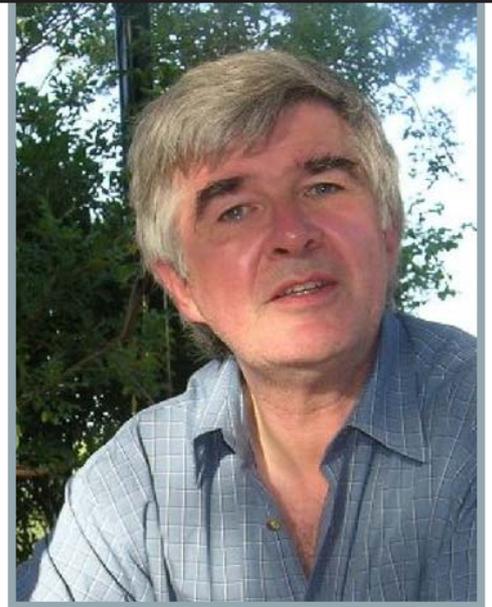


A legal clause for SANTA

Local solicitor and broadcaster on BBC Radio Norfolk, **Richard Barr**, considers what would happen if Father Christmas was forced to go PC.



It was the night before Christmas but Father Christmas was feeling grey and miserable. It was supposed to have been his happiest time of the year, with the delightful task of making, trying out and choosing presents for every child.

Plans had been well advanced. He had practised on Santnav, his new satellite navigation system, which contained the location and dimensions of every known chimney. He had been able to iron out the glitches after inadvertently entering two ocean liners, one power station and a crematorium.

But Father Christmas had been out of sorts ever since he had received a visit from officers from Off-Polly which represents the Government's latest initiative to stamp out political incorrectness once and for all. Off-Polly (with its logo of a parrot with its beak sealed) has been given powers of entry, the right to arm its officers and the power to detain indefinitely without trial anyone who is even suspected of political incorrectness.

On the day of the visit the reindeer were corralled and examined to ensure that the antlers were of regulation size, and that each beast resembled the photograph on its passport. The inspectors lingered over one of the deer. They concluded that its red glowing nose was in breach of the Snout (Construction and Use) Regulations which provide that a red light should show to the rear and not at the front of any sledge-drawing deer. As it was to prove anatomically uncomfortable to move the light from the front to the back of the creature, the inspectors ordered that it would have to travel backwards behind the sledge and carry a suitable warning sign.

Inside Santa's factory, the inspectors first commented on the size of the workers. All appeared to be vertically challenged. Father Christmas was accused of discriminating against large people in breach of The

Factory Workers (Size) (Not Too Big or Small) Regulations. He was instructed immediately to recruit several giants to increase the average height of his employees. Father Christmas protested in vain that this would be impossible due to the height of the ceilings in his factory being less than four feet.

And then they set about the toys. Father Christmas watched indulgently as they squirted each other with spaceman water pistols, raced electric cars round the test track, patted the dolls and played the computer games. But he was wrong if he believed that their play spelled endorsement. Several hours later the inspectors grew bored. The cars were wrecked. The pink rabbit's batteries had run out. Several dolls had lost limbs. The computers were smashed and a water fight between half a dozen inspectors ended with several in tears and one (called Sandy) having to borrow a change of clothes from Father Christmas.

Suddenly the atmosphere changed. The inspectors crowded sullenly into Father Christmas's grotto. They were behaving like children on the afternoon of Christmas Day. Sandy was their spokesman. Solemnly (or as solemnly as he could, bearing in mind that he was now wearing a red and white outfit) he read out to Father Christmas the offences found by his fellow inspectors:

Not one of the toy cars represented a low emission model, thus encouraging profligacy among the children receiving them.

Most of the dolls were of the female gender and would therefore be a bad influence on little boys who wished to play with them.

Several teddy bears appeared to be made of fur, thus giving endorsement to the hunting of helpless grizzly bears and the antics of Sarah Palin.

Concern was also expressed at the carbon footprint created by the reindeer as they sped across the night sky. There was a risk that their consumption of oxygen and attendant

methane emissions would significantly add to global warming. He was therefore required to undertake to plant 100 hectares of new forest to compensate for the ecological damage he would be causing on 24 December.

"And now" continued Sandy, poking his finger at Father Christmas, "we have the little issue of what you look like and what you call yourself. It is our considered view that it is not PC for you to go around calling yourself Father Christmas. We insist that from now onwards you are renamed Parent Winterfest.

"And you look entirely wrong in that garb. The colour is likely to offend those who do not like red. And that beard – we aim to be a clean shaven nation. If you show your beard to the tiny tots they may be encouraged to become hirsute in later life."

Exasperated, Father Christmas (as he still thought of himself), asked what he should wear instead.

"That's easy" replied Sandy. "Don something dull and grey, that blends nicely with the landscape and reflects the mood we require."

"But that will make me look nondescript – just like a solicitor" he protested.

"Precisely" replied Sandy, who had become so fond of his own Santa uniform that he resolved, when he got back to HQ, to recommend that all Off-Polly inspectors should from then onwards wear distinctive red and white uniforms to ensure high public visibility.

And that, boys and girls, is why we now sing of dreaming of a grey Christmas, and why politically correct bureaucrats look so ridiculous 365 days in the year.

Post script: no reindeer were injured or offended in the writing of this article. ■

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