

Strange Laws◀◀

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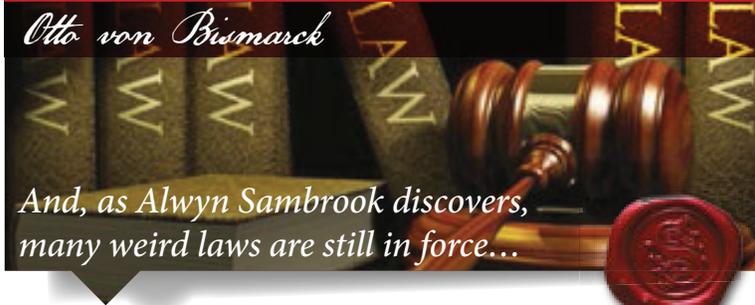
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"Laws are like sausages:

it's best not to see how they're made"

Otto von Bismarck



And, as Alwyn Sambrook discovers, many weird laws are still in force...

Given the ingenuity of legislators, it's no surprise to find laws covering every aspect of our lives.

We generally expect law-makers to be obsessed with consistency – especially on international issues – but this isn't always the case. England's Prohibitions & Injunctions Act 1998 makes it illegal to cause a nuclear explosion – but how does that square with the law in Utah allowing people to own nuclear weapons in the first place? Or with California, where actual detonation incurs a mere \$500 fine (hardly the ultimate deterrent)?

Perhaps priorities vary with national temperament. Health & Safety officials here might swoop on some Yorkshire hill farmer keeping 10 litres of diesel in an isolated barn, but the residents of China's mega-crowded cities can cheerfully store up to a ton of fireworks in their basements – encouraging even the dullest party goes with a bang. This shift in priorities means a confused outcome for wildlife, too. While in parts of the US it's forbidden to catch fish with a machine gun, or lasso, or by giving them alcohol, Guatemala's legislators openly condone fishing with dynamite. In Alaska, although it's legal to hunt bears, it's unlawful to wake them up for a photo. And why bother, in South Africa, to spell out the penalty for 'harassing' great white sharks? Offenders have only themselves to blame...

Certain sectors of society seem likewise to suffer from this imbalanced application. In Hawaii, it's an offence for twins to work for the same company; in Rhode Island to impersonate an auctioneer; in Madrid for thin people to boast about their figures; and whereas most municipal authorities view street musicians favourably, one-armed pianists in Iowa are expected to perform free. Fair?

And where's the legal logic, in Britain, that calls ringing doorbells and running away a crime? Far better to be practical, and just call it Parcellforce...