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Bradshaw, Tom ORCID: 0000-0003-0780-416X (2014) If David Cameron can risk contempt of court twice, why shouldn't the rest of us? Conversation.

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In England and Wales, contempt of court is a criminal offence, punishable by up to two years behind bars – and yet Cameron has skirted the edge of this criminal behaviour more than once.

In recent months, he has twice been chastised by judges for potentially endangering the smooth functioning of justice. In both instances, he made remarks about individuals involved in live court cases, thereby potentially influencing jurors' attitudes.

Twice burned

general on a contempt issue, only for the trial judge to then suggest that the prime minister's remarks were still close to being in contempt. The executive is thinking one thing, and the judiciary quite another.

Bad advice

The irony is that the attorney general's office launched an initiative in December to educate the public about the dangers of making legally prejudicial statements. Dominic Grieve announced that advisory notes flagging up legal cases which could give rise to prejudicial statements would be published on Twitter, the aim being to reduce the chances that users of social media could commit contempt. Previously, the notices had only been sent to media

outlets.

In another irony, Grieve made that announcement just eight days before Cameron was admonished by the judge in the Nigella Lawson case.

Given that the Attorney General is appointed by the monarch on the prime minister's recommendation, is it ever realistic that a prime minister would have contempt proceedings brought against him, even for a flagrant breach? The prime minister and the attorney general in any given administration are colleagues and invariably allies.

What with both this constitutional arrangement and the events of the past six months, the current prime minister is in serious danger of appearing to put himself above the law.

Educating a smartphone-wielding public on the dangers of a careless tweet is one thing. But it's vitally important that the attorney general and the prime minister make sure that the government's (and specifically the PM's) own remarks on legal proceedings are beyond reproach.

For if the prime minister can make legally questionable remarks and just about get away with it every time, why shouldn't newspaper editors – or indeed you and I – chance our arm?

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