

SIR ALAN MOSES SPEAKS AT McNAE'S 23rd EDITION BOOK LAUNCH

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Thank you for asking me to welcome, indeed to sound the trumpet, for the birth of a brave and bonny new child...the new edition of McNae. Generally, I have to confess, congratulations for a new-born child after the production of 22 previous offspring might be met with a groan rather than a paean of praise...the authors, Mark Hanna (3 editions under his belt) and Mike Dodd (2 editions) have been at it again. But no, this is not a cause for gloom at such fecundity...far from it - it is a cause for praise and admiration...cheers for the 23rd, and its 22 ancestors, each one more essential than the last, back to the first edition by Leonard McNae in 1954, 62 years of learning and authority, and only 20 years ago he died, at 90.

Let me, if any explanation is needed, explain why. I accept that in this brave new world of regulated journalism...(forgive me, the heart does rather sink at that almost oxymoronic description of so vital a part of our life) occasionally, just occasionally one or two of your fellows may be a little guilty of exaggeration or hyperbole, the unique revelation which is not quite so unique and does not reveal quite so much...the exclusive that turns out to be ever so slightly worn out by previous repetition...and amongst the vocabulary of overblown epithet I suppose one ought to count the word 'essential'. But I tell you, never was that word more apt than in this 23rd edition. Essential Law for Journalists...and the reality, the truth, is that what the authors, with their midwife - the National Council for the Training of Journalists - and the OUP have achieved, is indeed essential. It is not possible to conceive of anyone who wants to be taken seriously as a journalist or as an editor, without McNae's 23rd edition well-thumbed and inwardly digested in his or her knapsack. If you leave it behind, if you ignore it, you do so not only at your own peril but at the peril of all those who fight for and believe in an untamed unruly and a free press.

You will, I hope, understand why I am so keen and confident that you will not march along, stamp about or even tiptoe delicately along a path hedged with legal restriction and regulation without carrying McNae with you. It is no burden at all, light in weight but so heavy in content.

And that, for the lawyer that once I was, is truly remarkable. You will understand, I hope, that now that I have been with IPSO for two years, a little nostalgia...when I think of legal textbooks, of chest-crushing tomes, I don't think of anything as slim and as navigable as this McNae...3,084 pages of Blackstone's Criminal Law, over 800 pages in the new Tughendat Law of Privacy...that's what you might call a book of law....not so, what rubbish...the marvel of this book is that it has what you need, in chapters and sections that are clear and to the point...and short.

I cannot over-emphasise the importance and the difficulty of producing so much essential information within so brief a compass. Brevity is the hallmark of the distinction of this book. Do I need authority for so obvious a proposition? Probably not. But I have it...Hanna and Dodd must have had Hemingway very much in mind....as Stig Abell will remind you, Hemingway was pretty hot on brevity in his interview with the Paris Review of Books:

I always try to write on the principle of the iceberg. There is seven-eighths of it underwater for every part that shows. Anything that you know you can eliminate and it only strengthens your iceberg. It is the part that doesn't show. If a writer omits something because he does NOT know then there is a hole in the story.

I defy anyone to find any holes in this essential guide. These impressive cartographers, your authors we celebrate today, unlike so many judicial authorities whose signposts point in opposite directions, leave no holes...they do what the best pundits used to do when scaling the Himalayas...they show you the way...each topic with pithy case summaries, or short but wise analysis, reminders and recaps, each complex issue with a vital pointer to further reading in McNaes.com. Who wrote:

Remember the most common cause of libel actions against media organisations is a journalist's failure to apply professional standards of accuracy and fairness. The best protection against becoming involved in an expensive action is to make every effort to get the story right...?

...not some unbending regulator, not some acrid judge, no, the authors of MacNae at p.263.

There is, I must admit, further support for the right to describe this guide as essential. You, Mark Hanna, are chairman of the National Council for the Training of Journalists Media Law Examinations Board and your fellow author Mike Dodd a member of the Board....it is surely

elementary that if as a student journalist you want to pass courses accredited by the NCTJ you will need to read and study what the examiners themselves have written...but the need to read this for everyone who aspires to be or who is a journalist or who, like the rest of us, regulator or not, cares about journalism, is not confined to the wish to pass exams. For we at IPSO must congratulate you on managing to succeed in dispelling ignorance and misinformation in a field so ripe with such vices. You at least understand and explain what regulation is about... Chapter 2 gives a clear and correct summary of how regulation works through IPSO and clarifies what has become, all too unnecessarily, opaque and complex; you are one of the few who have understood and because you understand can explain the dreary mechanisms of the Charter and recognition...you even permit yourself to observe that the beloved Press Recognition Panel has been "twiddling its thumbs"...You describe how IPSO seeks to achieve every day to protect the public from the abuse of inaccuracy and misrepresentation, from intrusion and harassment, and how such practical everyday regulation will equally protect the authority and importance of the journalist whose rights, as you so trenchantly and rightly describe, are themselves threatened and imperilled... read the late news you so importantly summarise, and this in chapter 1 p.4:

It is the journalist's job to help safeguard freedom of expression and free media, by reporting accurately and ensuring people are properly informed about what is being done in their name by those who claim to govern them...

To do...this, journalists must know the law: where it comes from, what it says and what it allows them to do - or stops them doing.

...

Journalists' ethics are under increasing scrutiny. The observance of ethical codes should be an integral part of how journalists operate, to help produce respected fair journalism and preserve freedoms. Failure to respect these codes risks the creation of new and punitive laws aimed at curbing malpractices and limiting everyone's freedoms.

So we must raise a glass, so generously provided by News UK in their normally disappointingly dry office, to congratulate the authors of this so very essential guide.