

Daniel Hannan MEP v Daily Mirror

Clauses noted: 1

Daniel Hannan MEP complained to the Press Complaints Commission that an article published in the Daily Mirror on 18 September headlined "Tory accused of 'excusing racism' after Barack rant" was inaccurate in breach of Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Editors' Code of Practice.

The complaint was not upheld.

The article reported that Mr Hannan, a Conservative member of the European Parliament, had been 'dragged into the US race row' after saying he 'understood the anti-Barack Obama feelings'. It referred to a blog he had written for the Daily Telegraph website in which he had written: "Barack Obama has an exotic background and it would be odd if some people weren't unsettled by it".

Mr Hannan said the article was a gross distortion of his position. His blog had drawn attention to the fact that some of the *discreditable* attacks on President Obama were based on racism. But it had not sought to justify those attacks. Indeed, the complainant said he did not believe that people should be treated differently because of their ethnicity. He had supported Obama during the US election.

The complainant also said the article misleadingly implied that he supported Enoch Powell's views on immigration. He had named Mr Powell as a political hero but did not share his stance on that subject. This had been made clear to the newspaper before publication.

The newspaper said that, regardless of Mr Hannan's intention, some people (such as a Labour MP quoted in the piece) had taken offence at the choice of words in his blog, and had interpreted parts of it as empathising with those who were uneasy with President Obama's background. The newspaper said it was entitled to comment on the complainant's public pronouncements. It suggested that Mr Hannan submit a letter for publication in which he could clarify his position.

The complainant said he did not believe that people had taken offence at what he had written. He defied anyone to read his blog in full and interpret it as an expression of empathy with the bigots who criticised Obama on racial grounds. He rejected the offer to submit a letter.

Adjudication

Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Code of Practice makes clear that newspapers are entitled to be partisan. Editors may select and present material for publication accordingly.

The Commission first considered the complaint about how Mr Hannan's comments on people's views of President Obama's ethnicity had been reported. Given the delicate subject matter, and the fact that the remarks were open to some interpretation, the Commission was satisfied that the newspaper's reporting in this instance was well within the range of political partisanship permitted by the Code of Practice.

The reference to the complainant's admiration for Enoch Powell was arguably slightly misleading, as the context of his regard for Powell - which was not to do with immigration - was unclear. However, the Commission considered that the proposal to publish a letter from the complainant was a suitable response to this part of the complaint. It would have allowed him to clarify both the nature of his comments about Enoch Powell and his views on those who criticise President Obama.

Adjudication issued 18/12/2009