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THE AUSTRALIAN

Edition 1 - All-round Country **THU 07 FEB 2008, Page 039**
 Extreme political views from distant past

The Australian Press Council
 Adjudication No1380

THE Press Council has upheld a complaint that The Australian unfairly associated author and webmaster Scott Balson with organisations known to espouse racist, conspiracy and extreme right-wing views.

The report, on October 5, 2007, alleged that right-wing extremists were behind a move to damage the then Opposition leader Kevin Rudd by reviving the Heiner affair, a 1990 Queensland controversy arising from the alleged government shredding of documents relating to a judicial inquiry. At that time Mr Rudd was a senior (Queensland) government officer. Mr Balson maintains a website devoted to keeping the Heiner affair in the public arena.

In a backgrounding of MrBalson, The Australian listed a number of extremist groups whose controversial views have been published on his websites.

Mr Balson said that the views in question were printed on an open forum on a news website that has been inactive for more than seven years and were clearly referenced then as not his personal views.

He argued that equally extreme views were commonly aired on websites run by media organisations.

The report quoted a spokesman for the Council of Australian Jewry as saying that Mr Balson had long been associated with extremist right-wing views and conspiracy theories, without indicating whether this was a recent comment.

Mr Balson complained that the report lacked balance in that during a brief interview via email with The Australian he was not made aware of the full nature of the article nor given the opportunity to rebut such criticism.

The newspaper did not specifically accuse the complainant of being either anti-Semitic or racist, but Mr Balson said that linking organisations with known anti-Semitic views from his long-closed website, together with comments by the Australian Jewry spokesman, would lead readers to infer that he was anti-Semitic, a charge he has vehemently denied for nearly a decade.

In upholding the complaint, the council notes that people active in the political arena can be burdened with past associations long after such connections may have ceased to have any relevance.



While the report refers to MrBalson as a former One Nation webmaster, and he does not deny that one of his website forums once carried extremist material, it is important that newspapers identify when these associations occurred or demonstrate to readers that such associations are held contemporaneously.

Column: Media

Section: FEATURES

Type: Correction

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