



Australian Press Council

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Adjudication No. 88 (November 1980) [1980] APC 14

ADJUDICATION No 88 (November 1980)

Justice Elizabeth Evatt has complained to the Australian Press Council about an article published in The Australian newspaper of 26 June 1980, after the murder of Mr Justice Opas of the Family Court of Australia in Sydney. The article reported a claim by a Mr Gaunt of an organisation calling itself the Lone Fathers Association that a clan of desperate lone parents who, he alleged, had been harshly treated by the Family Court had developed, and that it would strike next in Melbourne. The article quoted Mr Gaunt as saying specifically that a Judge would be killed in Melbourne and identified him by quoting an alleged statement by a Judge.

Justice Evatt contends that the article was irresponsible partly because it gave credibility to the use of violence as a means of solving personal crises and that it served no public purpose.

With all respect to the learned Judge, the Press Council is unable to see that the article gave any encouragement for the use of violence. Its tendency undoubtedly was to excite alarm in the minds of members of the Court and public, but it served the public purpose of alerting the authorities and the public to the need for precautions against the alleged danger.

In the opinion of the council the paper was entitled to publish the article and to this extent the complaint is dismissed; nevertheless the council points out that before publishing such an alarmist report a newspaper would be well advised to investigate very carefully the source of the information quoted and so far as it can satisfy itself that the allegations are well based.