

The Great Tossport Trial ends in farce



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Yesterday, Brighton solicitor Martin Cray won his libel action against former client Anthony Hancock. Cray was awarded a staggering nine thousand pounds for two defamatory publications: a fax and a letter, that had been read only by members of his staff.

He was awarded a further ten thousand pounds for the harassment he had supposedly suffered as the result of an alleged campaign mainly by E-mail and newsgroup postings, in particular in the Brighton Argus readers' forum.

Full details of the case and judgment will be given in due course, but the most disturbing aspect of the case is that the judge found Hancock had harassed Cray by commissioning a satirical cartoon from the well known illustrator Robert Edwards.

Although Edwards did not appear at the trial he had made it clear that the cartoon was not commissioned by Hancock or by anyone but had been published off his own bat. Whatever one thinks of Robert Edwards or his politics he has a well deserved reputation as a brilliant satirist, and his targets have on occasion included people on the far right as well as the usual politically correct lamebrains.

Edwards published the cartoon on his own website, and unsurprisingly it has been floating around cyber-space for months. Wisely, Cray decided not to include Edwards in his libel action but this part of the judgment is as disturbing as some of the ridiculous findings of fact made by Judge Privete.

Does this mean that Tony Blair or any other much satirised politician can now have dissenting editors and cartoonists arrested for harassment?

In addition to 19,000 pound damages, Hancock, who acted in person, faces a bill of over sixty thousand in costs. He is currently preparing an appeal.

Donations can be made by Paypal to londini...@ntlworld.com.

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