

Torts

Cases and Commentary

by

HAROLD LUNTZ

BA, LLB (WITWATERSRAND), BCL (OXON)

George Paton Professor of Law, University of Melbourne

Barrister and Solicitor of the Supreme Court of Victoria

DAVID HAMBLY

LLB (MELB), LLM (HARVARD)

Professor of Law, Australian National University

Barrister and Solicitor of the Supreme Courts of Victoria and ACT

ROBERT HAYES

LLB (MELB), PhD (MONASH)

Associate Professor of Law, University of New South Wales

Barrister of the Supreme Court of New South Wales

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TORTS
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Preface

The theme of this book should be apparent from its first sentence. First, it is essentially an Australian book. Although we deplore chauvinism and nationalism as much as anyone, we recognize the increasing tendency of the High Court of Australia to review afresh the common law as it has developed in this country. Since we have written the book primarily for use by Australian students, we have preferred, so far as possible, Australian authorities. Its distinctive Australian flavour may also make it of greater value to overseas readers, who are probably more interested in the different development of the common law in different jurisdictions than in further examples of a known pattern. Secondly, the book is contemporary. We are concerned with the law as it is in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Thus, on the whole, modern authorities have been chosen rather than ancient ones. Thirdly, the book attempts to see the law in its social setting. Our major interest is the actual operation of the law in the society in which we live. None of us is trained in the social sciences, but we have done what we can to introduce statistics and empirical data where known to us and apparently relevant.

In years of teaching the law of torts we have all found much cause for dissatisfaction. Severe criticism of the present state of the law is explicit or implicit throughout our commentary. Whether, in consequence, we have been unduly polemical is for others to judge. We should like our criticism to be thought of as constructive, even though it may also serve to destroy delusions as to the certainty and fairness of the law. We believe that the critical edge to our commentary will not hamper our readers in discerning the state of the law on any topic we have included. Frequent reference is made in our text and notes to the periodical literature in order to encourage further reading and a broadening of the perspective.

The inspiration for the book came from a paper, "The Teaching of Tort Law", presented by Professor Patrick Atiyah at the annual conference of the Australasian Universities Law Schools Association held in Adelaide in 1971. Although we have not, as there advocated, taken the bold step of banishing many of the traditional topics of the law of torts to other subjects, we have made the focus of the book the problems of accident compensation.

Professor Atiyah's own book, *Accidents, Compensation and the Law* (2nd ed, 1975), has provided us with a shining beacon towards which we should bend our steps, even if it is a goal that is unattainable in the context of a casebook. In so far as we have had a model on which to base our work it has been Bob Hepple's and Martin Matthews' *Tort: Cases and Materials* (1974). At the time of its publication, we were approached by Butterworths with a view to producing an Australian counterpart. It was the time of the National Inquiry into Compensation and Rehabilitation in Australia and, until the fate of the *Woodhouse Report* that emanated from that Inquiry was known, there was little point in writing a torts casebook that concentrated on accident compensation. When it became clear in 1976 that radical changes were not imminent, we agreed to collaborate on the present work. Other commitments prevented us from proceeding as quickly as we would have liked, but the publishers have done everything possible to bring out the book in time for use in the 1980 academic year.

Collectively we are indebted to too many of our colleagues for us to acknowledge their individual assistance. From one great writer on the Australian law of torts we have all learned: we gladly acknowledge our debt to Professor John Fleming. We have been

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assisted by able secretarial staff, including Miss Len Warne, Mrs Sue Horsman, Mrs Carol Ryan and Mrs Marjorie Saul. We also thank our families for their patience and encouragement.

November 1979

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DH
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