

John Cooper QC

Over the last decade, I have been representing the Criminal Bar both on the CBA and the Bar Council.

During that time, I have developed a reputation as one who fearlessly and independently stands up for the criminal barrister in whatever forum that becomes available so that our voice is heard. I will continue to do this.

For instance, I demanded that the Bar Council expose the potentially corrupt practice of referral fees and forced it to the top of the agenda in numerous CBA and Bar Council meetings.

In my time working on the CBA Committee, I have seen genuine and committed negotiations undertaken on our side by people of integrity, only to see them undermined by the duplicity of politicians. There is, of course, a place for continued negotiation, there always will be, but there is also a time to admit that Government have taken us for granted and abused our goodwill. That time has come.

I do not hesitate to say now that I am in favour of properly considered, carefully planned, industrial action, whether it be a complete withdrawal of labour or more targeted, subtle, but effective withdrawal of cooperation.

We are at a time in the history of our profession when we cannot afford to be cheated upon again by government.

The next two years or so will be critical for the Criminal Bar. Without any doubt, the Coalition Government will be developing and implementing legislation as their last throw to influence the General Election. We know only too well how the last Government rushed through legislation in the dying days of their power to attack the livelihoods of criminal barristers.

There are major challenges ahead.

We must oppose proposals which could result in 'one stop shops' for solicitors and be vigilant to oppose the implementation of block contracts and unfair price competition which is just around the corner and only last week supported by Ken Clarke.

Preserving the separate and distinct identity of the Criminal Bar will be a major challenge in the next few years and the CBA must encourage new business models and practices which will allow us to compete on an even playing field with solicitors.

Quality Assurance will not go away and we need to make sure that whatever regime may be put in place, it is structured so as to reflect the talents and abilities of the Criminal Bar. Ultimately, if this is not achieved, I would not hesitate to advocate withdrawal from the scheme.

As someone who does a significant proportion of work on Circuit, I will ensure increased and significant engagement between the CBA and the Circuits. There is always a concern that the CBA can become London orientated. Over the last year or so, we have been attempting to correct this and conferences on Circuit have been a great success. As Editor of CBQ for nearly 7 years I have always sought to reflect the Circuit view as well as all in the rank and file of our profession.

But more can be done to involve the Circuits. As SE Circuit Representative on the Bar Council, I am acutely aware of life as a circuiteer and I will encourage the trend of more meetings on Circuit and opportunities for regular Q & A Sessions around the Country to give everyone a real chance of getting involved.

The Criminal Bar is a broad church. As a product of a Comprehensive School I have for many years been a campaigner for social diversity. My work for the Citizenship Foundation in support of State School students taking an interest in the work we do is but one example of the central spine of my belief. Fairness.

I have no aspirations for future preferment, but my aspirations for the Criminal Bar are significant.

In the old days, candidates would be expected to include within their manifesto, their views on detailed policy, I hope that I have done that. But my manifesto in this election is nothing short of a promise to stand up to those who are attacking us....whoever they may be.