

Green Party calls for lawyer MPs who break rule of law to be suspended from professional bodies



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The Green Party has called for legally trained politicians who vote for legislation which disregards the rule of law to be suspended from the Law Society and the Bar Council.

Co-leaders Carla Denyer and Adrian Ramsay have written to the two legal professional bodies asking them to consider whether voting for legislation that breaks international treaties would constitute serious professional misconduct and could therefore lead to being suspended [1].

The letter comes as in the wake of the EU launching legal action against the UK to stop Boris Johnson from unilaterally rewriting the post-Brexit arrangements for Northern Ireland [2], and Government plans to override the power of Europe's human rights court and abolish the Human Rights Act – moves described by Stephanie Boyce, the president of the Law Society, as “deepening the government's disregard for the checks and balances that underpin the rule of law” [3].

Carla Denyer said:

“We have learned from history that the slippery slope towards despotism begins with small steps and that institutions outside the political realm can save the rule of law when they step up to defend them.

“This government clearly already shares features of authoritarian regimes in that it believes it can act with impunity and is above the law. From partying in lockdown to trying to rip up international treaties it has itself signed, this government does not feel constrained by the rule of law.

“As so many MPs are qualified barristers and solicitors, we believe the Law Society and the Bar Council both have a particular duty to set out clearly what professional standards are expected of these politicians and to consider suspending any that vote for legislation which breaks international treaties.

“Legally qualified politicians can not be allowed to use their status as a veneer of respectability to their political machinations while at the same time so willingly undermining the rule of law.”

In the letter, the co-leaders point to a series of actions by the government which have undermined the rule of law including:

- The politicisation of the role of Attorney General, who has repeatedly

expressed political support masquerading as legal advice

- The significant diminution of the role of Lord Chancellor, and a failure of successive office holders to stand up for the independence of the judiciary and to defend the judiciary against political attack from government ministers
- Overseeing a raft of constitutionally dubious legislation, including the so-called “Bill of Rights”, the Internal Markets Bill, and the proposed legislation designed to violate the Northern Ireland Protocol.

Adrian Ramsay said:

“We know that non-political institutions can play a key role when democratic values come under threat.

“We welcome the way that the Archbishop of Canterbury has criticised the Rwanda policy and the action by the legal bodies to defend their members against government attacks [3].

“We are now asking them to go a step further and challenge legislators who are undermining the rule of law while themselves members of the legal profession.”

Notes

1. See the [full version of the letter to the Bar Council](#). Letter to the Law Society is identical.
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jun/15/brexit-eu-plans-carrot-and-stick-approach-to-uk-northern-ireland-move>
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2022/jun/21/uks-new-bill-of-rights-will-curtail-power-of-european-human-rights-court>
4. <https://twitter.com/thelawsociety/status/1536739630623641600?s=21&t=iJx49j2ydR7Gcc-4xNpfsQ>

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