

Howard: I will scrap 'twisted' Act that gives rights to criminals

MICHAEL HOWARD will scrap the controversial Human Rights Act if he gains power, The Mail on Sunday can reveal.

The Tory leader has ordered a complete review of the four-year-old Labour legislation which has led to a flood of costly court actions from criminals, asylum seekers and health tourists.

The policy review of the Act, which enshrines the European Convention on Human Rights in British law, is part of the Tory assault on the 'rights culture', which the party claims has led to an 'ethical quagmire'.

The Conservatives are also concerned that the Human Rights Act allows unelected judges to overrule Parliament - forcing British laws to change if courts rule they infringe any rights contained in the Act.

The legislation has led to a cash bonanza for legal firms specialising in human rights such as Matrix Chambers, where the Prime Minis-

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ter's wife, Cherie Blair QC, practises. Last year it made profits of £8.8million - equivalent to £210,000 for each barrister.

A senior Tory told The Mail on Sunday yesterday: 'The Human Rights Act may have sounded like a good idea at the time. Who can possibly be opposed to having a right to privacy or a right to family life?'

'But the courts are interpreting the law in a twisted fashion, giving all sorts of rights to criminals and too few to the victims.'

Cases have included a robber winning £1,000 damages because police breached his right to privacy by filming him to gain evidence and an aggressive beggar getting legal aid to claim her freedom of movement rights were breached when magistrates banned her from a city centre. A paedophile won public funding to sue the Government for making



COMMON SENSE: Michael Howard

prison life too boring and one of Mrs Blair's clients was a schoolboy suing his head teacher after being suspended for allegedly setting the school on fire.

Foreign Aids sufferers have used the Act to make it almost impossible for them to be deported to any country with a worse healthcare system

and a judge ruled suspected terrorists who claimed asylum could not be locked up while the Government decided if they were a real threat.

The Tory review, spearheaded by Shadow Home Secretary David Davis, aims to bring 'common sense' back to the criminal justice system.

It comes after Mr Howard last week signalled a new tough line on law and order, saying he wanted to rid the criminal justice system of 'politically correct nonsense'. He attacked time-wasting red tape and called for a 'zero tolerance' attitude.

Any reform of the human rights legislation would require a major new act of Parliament.

But the Tories may struggle to scrap the Act in its entirety, because it has now become so firmly embedded in the British legal system.

And any move to reverse the legislation could lead to further legal battles - as hostile lawyers will inevitably attempt to take a future Conservative Government to the European Court.