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Attorney-General rejects charter of rights for NSW

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THE new Attorney-General, John Hatzistergos, has split with his left-leaning predecessors, Bob Debus and Jeff Shaw, and rejected calls for a NSW charter of rights.

But Mr Hatzistergos, the first attorney-general from Labor's Right faction under the Carr and Iemma governments, yesterday brushed off suggestions he would be less committed to defending the rule of law or the independence of the judiciary.

"I don't accept the argument that somehow I don't understand the principles of liberties," Mr Hatzistergos said.

"I regard the independence of the judiciary as crucial to our economic prosperity and our social stability."

Mr Hatzistergos, who practised as a solicitor with the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions and as a barrister before entering Parliament in 1999, said he believed he brought "a very different perspective" to the role, including a strong belief in the rights of victims.

Earlier this week, Mr Debus, who resigned from Parliament at the election, launched a campaign for a charter of rights in NSW, saying it was important to define "our most basic rights". Several Left MPs were present at the launch.

But Mr Hatzistergos, like Mr Iemma and Mr Carr, who stem from the Right, said he believed a charter was unnecessary and could lead to increased criticism of the judiciary.

Mr Hatzistergos said many judgements are "very dry" and he believed clearer writing would encourage greater public involvement in the justice system.

"I would like to see plain English. I would like to do what I can to encourage it," he said.