Preface and acknowledgements

This book is an attempt to examine the roots and context of the British criminal justice system and challenge basic assumptions about the roles of institutions and participants within it. In our discussion, a critical, at times acerbic edge is evident. This simply reflects what we see as a fundamental shift that has taken place in criminal justice, not only through the sentencing bandwagon with its official inducements to plead guilty, but more especially in the language of the law, the antipathy towards individuals (suspects and defendants) caught up in the system increasingly being matched by an open disrespect for criminal defence lawyers and contempt for the conventional understanding that the actions of State officials (including judges) should be justified. It is one aim of the book to puncture the dogmatic and high-handed (often, unintelligible and unintelligent) manner in which this ‘sea-change’ is being brought about. If it succeeds at all in this regard, then our task has been greatly facilitated by many individuals who generously helped to make the publication of this book possible.

We have been supported throughout by all of our colleagues at the Centre for Rights and Justice at The Chinese University of Hong Kong as well as by our other colleagues at the Faculty of Law. Professor Eva Pils was especially supportive with her early guidance and belief in the project. The University Law Librarian, John Bahrij and his assistant Lily Ko excelled in chasing down arcane and obscure references for us and both were always ready to give advice and assistance. Similarly, Sarah Wheeler of the library at Lincoln’s Inn and James Woolf and Emma Pateman at the Bar Council provided help in digging up various works almost forgotten.

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More generally, we owe an enormous debt to those scholars who have written about plea bargaining over the last fifty or more years. As always, we have drawn wisdom and insights from their endeavours and hope that, as a result, we have added to the already great stock of knowledge about the practices of State officials in criminal justice.

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