

The Starmer Project (Britain): 'A small but very useful book'

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Tony Richardson reviews this study of the Starmer leadership.

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THE STARMER PROJECT - A JOURNEY TO THE RIGHT By OLIVER EAGLETON, VERSO BOOKS.

This newly published book is really useful. When studying what happened to Corbyn we need to understand how his replacement came about. A lot of people are looking at Starmer and thinking are they serious about him becoming a PM? However that is not the issue here, it is how we have got to where we are, and this book is really helpful.

First, let us clear some differences I have with the author. Although the book was just before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, I suspect that I would not agree with him on this as he puts forward the idea that Russia is being provoked. Secondly, I am not so sure that I agree with some of the political points he makes, by inferring that Corbyn should have stuck by the acceptance of the Referendum. For me this was one of the most undemocratic decisions in recent British history, considering the closeness of the vote, and the all-out campaign by the media. Have we now accepted this kind of event?

Putting this to one side, he provides a demolition of all the myths.

Starmer as lawyer and DPP

He first deals with Starmer's legal past, as a human rights lawyer. He shows how from the beginning he tried to relate to the state, he was a member of the Haldane Society and tried to get the word Socialism taken out of their mission statement.

So the book deals with cases he was good on but shows how right from the start he was close to the establishment and the police. His work in Ireland, had him joining the Northern Irish Policing Board, supporting police attacks on Republicans defending their neighbourhoods. He received high praise from reactionary Unionist leader, Ian Paisley, who said Starmer gave us the tools to do the job.

When he was appointed the director of public prosecutions (DPP) he put the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) at the disposal of the government's international policies, training other countries in anti-terrorism prosecutions, and receiving huge Tory backing on this.

The CPS also received funding from the American Government and Starmer developed a long-term relationship with Eric Holder, Obama's Attorney General. This included giving tacit support to drone strikes. Starmer went to several countries on behalf of the US. He also helped the Americans with dubious extradition cases.

The list of undemocratic actions is not short. He refused to prosecute MI5 officers involved in interrogation cases, took no action over Tzippi Livni's visit to the UK and there is dubious activity on the Julian Assange case. You need to read the book for more details on this.

In cases in Britain his record is astonishing:

- Jean Charles De Menezes, the Brazilian 'mistaken' for a terrorist and assassinated by police, with no charge
- Ian Tomlinson, the newspaper seller who was caught up in a demonstration, killed by police, no charge until later evidence
- Jimmy Mubenga, suffocated on a deportation flight, no charge.
- Infiltrators in groups, who entered into relationships with women, no charges.
- Review of Blair Peach, the teacher killed by an officer in the Special Patrol Group, no charges.

As far as demonstrators were concerned Starmer was vicious; Alfie Meadows was a student on an anti-fees demo. He was nearly killed by a police officer. The policeman was not prosecuted, but Meadows was brought to trial 3 times before he was finally found not guilty.

Following demonstrations in 2011 over the Mark Duggan killing, he escalated cases to the Crown Courts that could give bigger sentences. Courts acted through the night, and no bail was offered.

These are just a glimpse of what is in the book regarding his legal professional record, it needs to be read.

Politics

There is a section on Starmer's political role. He opposed Corbyn in the original leadership election but said he accepted the result, which meant that he got a shadow cabinet post.

The author presents Starmer's role in the Brexit brief, as one where he continuously agreed to Corbyn's position but ignored that agreement. Much of this is known, but it is useful to have it documented. He presents an account of the Labour Party Conference, as one which Starmer manipulated his position through.

Here I have to differ with the author about the consequences of this. Given the battles for different positions in the shadow cabinet, an election with Brexit at the centre was unwinnable. Eagleton says that Labour had no choice but to accept having an election under those conditions, because other parties accepted it, but Labour could have blocked it and demanded the Brexit vote first.

All the campaigning around a second referendum and the machinations against Corbyn's 'a Labour Brexit deal' (which I disagree with) are dealt with. He covers what he considers Macdonald's letting Corbyn down and Trickett's machinations. Make your own mind up about this it is an important debate.

He deals with Starmer's lying leadership election campaign, the bringing in of Blairite advisers and his dropping of the mildest reformist demands since his election.

Perhaps the overriding feeling one gets about his election was that he had planned it for a while.

I have dealt mostly with his legal career because that is less reported on, but this is just a glimpse of a small but very useful book.

Tony Richardson

P.S.

- Anti*capitalist Resistance. 15 Jun 2022:
<https://anticapitalistresistance.org/a-small-but-very-useful-book/>