

## A JOURNEY TO OBLIVION.

Reviewing a new book often means getting hold of a copy as early as you can and publishing while potential readers might be wondering about buying and reading a copy. **Oliver Eagleton's The Starmer Project, A Journey to the Right (2022)** appeared just as the Tory Leadership Merry Go Round speeded up. Not only was that distracting but it added to a need to imagine Starmer as a potential prime minister. What follows is more of a response than a review.

My baseline for a Labour PM is Attlee. I see him as a relatively conservative politician who brought about a level and intensity of social change that today would be regarded as revolutionary. Not only post-Thatcher Tories but also post-Blair Labour Party members would be horrified at the thought of such policies being introduced in today's context. In 1945 Corbyn would have been regarded as a centrist. Today's New Management Labour paints him as Robespierre.

Eagleton makes clear that Starmer is inconsistent. The policies that he 'sells' can change quite dramatically. Corbyn is understandably criticised for a failure to be clear on Brexit. While working under Corbyn Starmer, however, posed as a very clear Remainer. Eagleton suggests that this was not helpful to his leader at the time. Today we know that Starmer has disposed of his former firm policy as belonging to yesterday. His inconsistency comes within a bigger consistent framework that was devoted only to his personal ambition.

Human rights feature prominently in the curriculum vitae that Starmer wants everyone to see. What he does not reveal, but Eagleton does, is the extent to which the rights of humans are severely diminished when Starmer wishes to stay in the good books of the US Establishment. The mistreatment of Julian Assange is a prominent example of this and Sir Keir's responsibility for what amounts to torture ought to be clear to all.

Torture? When Nadia Whittome opposed the intention of the Tory government to effectively de-criminalise torture Starmer sacked her as a parliamentary private secretary. She was not the only one to suffer from his displeasure. He is very keen on the word 'management'. It seems to mean getting rid of anyone who disagrees with him. And that brings me to the misuse of the word Semitic. I wish Eagleton had pointed out how nonsensical it is to use that word racially. Racist Germans such as Wilhelm Marr in the nineteenth century chose to use a word denoting a family of languages as an indicator of race. Virtually the only time that European Jews of that time used a smattering of Semitic Ancient Hebrew was in the synagogue. To conclude that this defined them as a race is as sensible as asserting that users of Latin in a Catholic church must be Romans. As the Diaspora Museum in Tel Aviv made clear when I was last there, to be a Jew is to be a follower of a religion, not a member of a race. Just think of Ethiopian Jews as one example of people who do not fit that simple-minded stereotype. Nevertheless, they have been singled out for racist treatment in Israel, not Jews of the right colour.

The continuing attack upon Corbyn concerning antisemitism is utterly unjustified and visits racism upon followers of a religion. Corbyn, however, is not one to punch a bully.

The book concludes by stimulating thoughts on the viability of our party system. A Labour leader shuffling more and more to the right and highly unlikely to challenge the Establishment does not offer an alternative. He offers the same but, he claims, more efficiently. Unlike Boris he has a comb.

The post Corbyn years have seen not only a Labour shift to the right but also a shrinking of the Party to a point at which it is more easily managed. Labour so often used the phrase 'Broad Church' to describe itself. Like all such Churches the maintenance of a coherent set of values could be difficult and, very often, destructive. Today Starmer reminds me of Calvin bringing about the burning of Servetus and his books because he was, 'The Wrong Kind Of Protestant.' We are looking at a 'Narrow Church'.

So what can and must we do? Form another Party? Organise chats between lots of groups striving in different ways and different contexts to give life to the slogan, For The Many Not The Few? Perhaps I should re-read To the Finland Station by Edmund Wilson (1940 and 1972). I see it as a socialist car chase. Whatever we do I believe that the tyres of today's Labour Party are flat and Starmer does not have a pump.

One negative about the written English style of Eagleton. Why, every time he types the words 'met' or 'meet' does he have to follow them with the word 'with'?

Yes, a very good and exceedingly worthwhile book. Though I doubt that Sir Keith would think so.

**Cliff Jones, 13th. July 2020**

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