

*Red Flag:  
The Uneasy Advance Of Sir Keir Starmer*

Michael Ashcroft

London: Biteback Publishing, 2025, p/b, £16.99

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Originally published as *Red Knight* in 2021, this version of Ashcroft's biography of Starmer was meant to provide fresh insights into the character and career of our Prime Minister. Generally speaking, I find it fails on both counts. Indeed, given the lack of anything which we didn't already know, wading through its 450-odd pages I felt a certain drowsiness developing. I could imagine AI writing this book, pasting its sources together in chronological order. But at least with, say, Microsoft's 'Co-pilot', you do get to see its references. There's not a single footnote or reference in this tome. Perhaps the overall impression it leaves takes its inspiration from its subject. It sucks the air out of its existence.

Since 2005, Lord Ashcroft appears to have written one book a year. I assume that with his millions he can afford to employ a decent team of researchers. Hence my hopes for some decent revelations. The most that can be said is that it provides its author with some grounds for scepticism about Starmer's honesty. There's no surprise there then. He spends a few pages explaining why it's hard to take at face value Starmer's statement that the 'case never crossed his desk' when he was Director of Public Prosecutions and the Jimmy Savile affair was in full swing. Other high-profile cases also never seemed to have disturbed Starmer's gaze. Sadly, Ashcroft doesn't examine *at all* Starmer's behaviour in the treatment of Julian Assange. This seems a strange omission, as there appears to be plenty of evidence showing Starmer's active role in prolonging Assange's detention and possible collusion with U.S. authorities. Ashcroft acknowledges that Starmer is by definition an establishment man, but doesn't delve into what exactly that means.

Perhaps Starmer really is 'what you see is what you get' and there is no mystery. He perhaps attended a meeting of the Trilateral Commission, or

perhaps didn't. Ashcroft doesn't know.<sup>1</sup> That's about as close as we get to learning about his engagement with the deeper echelons of the establishment. However, there is one long quote in the book, from an unnamed barrister who had worked with Starmer since the 1990s, which is worth repeating at length,:

The best evidence of Keir's weak personality is the way he would argue cases to court. He'd make concessions that would undermine the main issue and they'd be binding on everybody. If you make a concession in an Appeal Court case and that gets recorded in the judgment, that's the law. He made concessions that were completely wrong just because he thought that was the way the court was thinking and he was trying to play to their existing way of thinking. That's the man through and through. He's the same as an MP as he was a lawyer. I've always thought the thing he's most scared of is being found out for being a mediocre individual. (p. 456)

Sour grapes? Perhaps. But there's a ring of truth to the above, which surely makes him useful to somebody.

*Colin Challen was Member of Parliament for Morley and Rothwell from 2001 until 2010. He blogs at <<http://www.colinchallen.org/blog>>.*

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<sup>1</sup> He is listed as former member of the Commission at <<https://shorturl.at/41tsu>> or <<https://www.trilateral.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/TC-MEMBERSHIP-LIST-June-2022-1.pdf>>.