

Britain: New? 'old'-new? Labour. the Election of Ed Miliband and the Left

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One step forward and two steps back

I have to share this with you:

Following the election of Ed Miliband to lead the 'new' 'old' Labour Party it seems nothing has been learned from the lessons of the past thirteen years (let alone the previous forty):

"Mr Miliband sought to brush off the "red Ed" tag, insisting that he did not plan "to drag Labour to the left." — '[Labour turns to Miliband](#)' By Adrian Roberts, The Morning Star, 26 September, 2010

"Ed Miliband ran as the change candidate for Labour leadership and that was unquestionably the right stance." — '[What Ed Miliband means for Labour](#)', By Michael Meacher, The Morning Star, 26 September, 2010

"The Labour leadership election result represents a defeat for the arch-new Labourites. Whether Ed Miliband's victory is a split in the new Labour camp or the beginning of a break from new Labour remains to be determined."

Strangely, or perhaps not? Ed Miliband is the son of a well-known Communist Party member of yore, [Ralph Miliband](#). So what's going on here? The Morning Star, under the ironically titled (if you know your history) of '[One step forward](#)', a feature article by Robert Griffiths tells us:

"In each case, Miliband should be helped by socialists and the trade unions to take the second option – and put Labour on the road to social democracy."

What's that?! "On the road to social democracy"? Been there, done that. The article should have been titled 'One step forward and two steps back' for all the good it does.

And continuing in the same vein, the Star's editorial is titled 'An important step towards social justice' and sums up Miliband's victory as follows, (after a summary of Miliband's economic programme):

"Does this constitute a socialist programme or a detailed and coherent body of policies to transfer wealth and power from rich to poor such as exists in the People's Charter and is supported by the Morning Star?"

“Of course not, but it would indicate an important step away from new Labour neoliberal orthodoxy towards the possibility of embracing the outlook for greater social justice.”

They just don't get it do they? There is no going back to what the Star calls social democracy, firstly because the global elite would never allow it and secondly, because, when you think about it, the real heart of the post-WWII 'social contract' was finished by 1980 already. It lasted thirty-five years and ever since then we have been on the defensive, trying to stem the rolling tide of corporatism as it inexorably ate away at the gains that had been made since 1945. The final nail in the social coffin came in 1991 with ending of state socialism in the USSR.

But if nothing else, the election of Ed was carried out by the combined weight of individual trade union members, a revealing and important fact that when mobilized, working people can and do, act.

Obviously, it's important to defend our social rights, but just as importantly, it's time for the left to stop time-warping into the past. Are they seriously suggesting that working people are in any kind of position to strike a deal with capital such as the one the Labour government did (on our behalf) in 1945? It's ludicrous to even suggest the idea. Now, nothing's impossible of course, but without real leadership from the trade unions and the concerted action of civic and political associations, we remain sitting ducks.

If there ever was a time for principle to speak out and for once, dump the political expediency, this is it. But even here, the Star's approach is lame and apologetic (for claiming to be socialist):

“The Tories and right-wing media are already playing Ed Miliband up as Red Ed, which, as he himself recognises, is rubbish.

“The aims of this spurious campaign are twofold - to persuade the electorate that Labour has lurched to the left and to frighten Miliband into denouncing his supporters in the unions and backing a bankers' agenda rather than looking to win back Labour's five million lost working-class voters.” — [‘An important step towards social justice’](#), Morning Star editorial, 26 September, 2010

Excuse me for being a Red! “Lurch to the left” indeed. The point is, trade unions are here to defend the interests of their members, that's their purpose. Sometimes, those interests overlap with overtly political and social concerns, for example, the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement, but with some exceptions their interests are sectional. One exception is now.

The great majority of those five million votes are government employees, the ones who will feel the first effect of the axe and in turn of course, the 'ripple' effect will be a tsunami of more lost jobs and more dead communities. We already lived through all this in the 1970s and 80s! Been there, done that!

We need only look at the US situation to see where we are headed if we let the government dismantle our social wealth and in the process completely transform the workforce into majority low paid and part-time, with a much smaller 'middle class' keeping the wheels of consumption turning. The die has been cast.

It's not just about defending our existing gains but of going beyond even what's left of our social democracy. Even 'our' democracy doesn't work, it is after all a giant Victorian mythology made real, even down to a fake Gothic Houses of Parliament. No wonder we think the damn thing (democracy) has been here forever and not constructed in the 1800s, with little changed ever since!

And let's face it, we have over four years before the next election and unless the Lib-Dems do an about-turn and vote against their 'partners' (unlikely, since when can liberals of any stripe be trusted?), our only recourse to action has to be extra-parliamentary, or as the media pundits call it, 'social unrest'.

Note

"With real wages stagnant or falling after 1980, the deficit in effective demand was largely bridged by resort to the credit system. In the United States in particular, household debt tripled from 1980 to 2005 and much of that debt was accumulated around the housing market, particularly from 2001 onwards. All sorts of innovations in finance along with state policies that often had the effect of subsidizing or even paying people and corporations to go into debt, kept the compounding rate of growth going. This was the fictional bubble that eventually burst in 2008. But, again, notice the sequence. Wage repression produces a deficit of effective demand that is covered by increasing indebtedness that ultimately leads into a financial crisis which is resolved by state interventions which translates into a fiscal crisis of the state that can best be resolved, according to conventional economic wisdom, by further reductions in the social wage."

Read the rest here: [***The Enigma of Capital and the Crisis This Time***](#) by David Harvey

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