

# Labouring under an illusion: Neoliberalism and Britain's Labour Party

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Region: [Europe](#)

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*Note: This is in the way of a continuation of my last essay [‘In the belly of the beast’](#).*

Nothing could illustrate the paradox better than ‘the party of labour’, financially supported largely by Britain’s biggest trade unions (representing around five million public employees) bankrolling the party which has led the way in attacking what’s left of the gains made since 1945. In a word, a traitorous political party that once again, faces the task of reinventing itself.

For the umpteenth time I’m hearing the same, tired old cliches pouring forth from the annual Labour Party conference, replete with the odd ‘we got it wrong but now we’re going to get it right’. The economy that is.

Allegedly attacking the institutions that the Labour government wholeheartedly embraced—principally the financial sector and their “fast buck” culture—Ed Miliband, leader of the Labour Party, which even more than Thatcher created the conditions for today’s economic meltdown, now expects us to forget thirteen years of neoliberal, imperial rule under the ‘party of labour’ with exhortations by the party faithful to return to ‘our roots’.

I might add that Ed Miliband’s call to tax the bankers and accusing them of being ‘predatory’, the tag ‘Red Ed’ that appeared at last year’s Labour Party conference has resurfaced at this year’s conference, a farce heaped on farce. (see my [‘Not Red Ed’ – reinventing Labour, again and again...’](#))

The BBC was quick to point out the error of ‘Not Red Ed’s’ ways:

“Ed Miliband has denied that his Labour conference speech – in which he attacked “predatory” firms and a “fast-buck” culture – was “anti-business.” — [‘Labour conference: Miliband denies being anti-business’](#), BBC News Website, 28 September 2011.

After a raft of people attacking ‘Red Ed’ for, amongst other things, “kicking business in the teeth” we get *definitely* ‘Not Red Ed’s’ groveling retraction for daring to accuse Big Business of being predatory!

“In a round of interviews on Wednesday morning, Mr Miliband said Labour would not lurch to the left and would be “firmly in the middle ground” – but argued that the middle ground was changing.

“He said it was not a left-wing idea that there should be responsibility at the top of society, and pointed out that he had also pledged to reward good behaviour in the welfare system, by suggesting those who contribute to their communities should get preferential treatment with social housing.

“Speaking to the BBC Mr Miliband said he had been talking about “good business practices” and “bad business practices” in his reference to “predators” interested only in the “fast buck.” — (ibid)

So, if only we'd had 'good business practices' (like laws?) we wouldn't be in deep doo-doo now? Problem sorted, sort of... but it illustrates just how events are determined and controlled by the corporate/state media's stranglehold on what it laughingly calls 'news'. Note too, the derisory reference the BBC dropped in the piece about “not lurching to the left”, a clear warning to 'Not Red Ed' to remember which class put him where he is now. That which the ruling class 'giveth' it can also taketh away as the rest of us are learning to our literal cost.

With a never-ending stream of speakers talking of 'reinstating Labour's values', a call to some kind of return to what? According to 'Not Red Ed':

“Unless we reform our economy, unless we find ways of tackling these issues - and this has been a problem for the Labour Party for decades - unless we get that political economy right, we are not going to get the change we want to see.” — (ibid)

Note that there are no actual plans for 'getting the economy right' merely empty platitudes, not about how Labour would specifically attack the crisis of capital but that it would do 'something', though what is not revealed.

What is clear from the travesty called the Labour Party is that whilst it may be bankrolled by organized labour, it long ago gave up representing them (if it ever *really* did).

Yet sections on the Left seem still to be calling for 'returning the Labour Party to its core values' (whatever they may be). Is such an enterprise possible and if so, what would be the outcome in the current situation?

In an attempt to answer this, it's worthwhile reminding ourselves that virtually since its inception the Labour Party's 'core values' have been Imperialist. Successive Labour governments have wholeheartedly embraced the UK's imperial colonial 'enterprises' overseas whilst it allegedly defended the rights of workers at home, initially using the name of socialism in order to sell itself (a word it finally abandoned when in order to retake power, it dropped any pretence of being a party of socialism, as if it ever was).

In the context of the current situation, the Labour Party, reinvented again, or not, is structurally incapable of returning to anything except its own miserable, traitorous past. It represents no one except itself as an integral part of the political class, united in their defence of Imperialism and their own preservation as part of the UK's political elite.

'Not Red Ed's' speech at the conference is a wonder to behold. It's as if the thirteen years of Labour rule never existed! But the Labour Party's fundamentally reactionary policies are revealed by the following extracts where 'Not Red Ed' applauds Thatcher for unleashing

capital's attack on working people:

"Some of what Margaret Thatcher did – such as council house sales, punitive tax rates and ending the union closed shop and strikes without ballots – had been "right".

"And New Labour also achieved much, he argued, but "we did not do enough to change the values of our economy," said the Labour leader.

"And the result was a society in which vested interests such as the energy companies and banks prospered and the wrong people – such as Royal Bank of Scotland boss Sir Fred Goodwin – got the most rewards, argued Mr Miliband." — '[Labour conference: Miliband vows 'new bargain' for UK](#)', BBC News Website, 28 September 2011

What does he mean when he talks of "changing the values of our economy"? What values is he talking about changing? More to the point, what economy? What does any of it mean? It's empty, meaningless rhetoric that tells us nothing about the nature of the crisis. Instead 'Not Red Ed' blames it on the greed of individuals, thus by implication, it's not the way our economy is (dis)organized but the failings of individuals that are the cause of the crisis.

So, according to university graduate 'Not Red Ed' Miliband (son of well known leftie Ralph Miliband) thinks the "wrong people" benefited from thirteen years of Labour rule. So who are the right people? Surely not us, we who have been stripped not only of our rights under the guise of the 'war on terror' but also had our collective wealth stolen from us by the corporations the political class represents.

So Miliband is saying that some corporations don't have the right values. Okay, what values should they have instead? After all, isn't the objective to get the highest return on investment for the shareholders? That's what makes capitalism tick. But of course corporations are rarely owned by individuals these days. The major investors/shareholders are *other corporations* such as pension funds and banks. So to talk even of one corporation having the 'wrong values' inevitably questions the values (such as they are) of *all* corporations. It's called Capitalism. It purports to run under an operating system called the free market. Investment flows to where there is profit to be had. And note, that corporations, including banks are making huge profits even as the country is meant to be broke. It's lots of small- to medium-sized businesses that are going broke, not the corporations.

So even 'Not Red Ed's' throwaway line opens up a can of worms for capitalists; no wonder the ex-CBI boss Lord Jones said the speech was a "kick in the teeth" for capitalists.

For as long as the 'socialist' Labour Party refuses to acknowledge that the central obstacle to resolving the crisis remains capitalism itself, talking of a change in values of the banks and energy companies is totally pointless. 'Not Red Ed's' rejection of a turn to the left, seals not his fate, but ours. Unless there is a radical rejection of capitalist 'values' I fear we are doomed. And it's not as if we don't have viable, sustainable economic alternatives to capitalism (once we've broken up the big corporations and nationalized the banks, the two main obstacles, plus of course the entrenched political class, probably the UK's most intractable menace).

We have had sixty-six years of tweedle-dee, tweedle-dum politics, masquerading as

democracy. Every five years we kick out one 'party' and replace it (or not) with the other one. Each government either does it its way or, if we exert enough pressure, we can make small changes to the system, that may or may not become permanent features of society, eg the National Health Service. In truth of course it has never really been ours to own and cherish as a valued member of our society (like it is in Cuba for example).

Instead, free healthcare for all has become a political football, to be kicked back and forth between successive governments, depending on which way the wind is blowing. Yes, the Labour government pumped billions of funny money into the NHS, much of it going to corporations and 'consultants', all part of 'Not Red Ed's' "culture of greed". Basically Labour's version of neoliberalism was gangster capitalism abroad and larceny and fraud at home. Life was great, don't think about tomorrow. Don't think about what havoc you are wreaking on our culture and economy. Now here's a fundamental capitalist value: not thinking beyond today. And believe me, this is an intrinsic and inescapable feature of capitalism, borne out most dramatically by the events now playing themselves out. To change it you'll have to get rid of capitalism.

Assuming society survives pretty much intact by the time of the next election, are we as a people to put ourselves through yet another replay of the same? Surely enough is enough of this bullshit of governments paying off banks with our money and resources, when *none of it is necessary*, if we take the brave step of challenging the pirates and demanding, as a people, that we take over the banks. They did it in [Iceland](#) for example. Treat it like the NHS, as a public service, here to supply the necessary wherewithal for development and holidays on the Costa Brava. That's what it's all about. It's not about lining the pockets of a few thousand fat cats and pumping up pension funds. Screw the shareholders, they're not people, they're corporations that screw us every day. We have done it before so we *can* do it again.

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