

# Posts for deAlign 2011

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## Labour Party Lost

With Ed Milliband distancing himself from the trade unions, who does the Labour Party represent?



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# Underprepared and Unsupported

Ed Miliband is losing grasp on his party as the opportunity to defeat Cameron gets slimmer

by Lucy Sweetman (05 July 2011)



**Ed Miliband just cannot get it right. Ten days ago he looked purposeful, announcing his proposed changes to shadow cabinet elections and giving a strong performance at Prime Minister's Questions.**

But in the last week the Leader of the Opposition has looked unsure, failing to reflect the feeling in his base that a Labour leader should be supporting public sector workers.

Last Thursday, in what was promised to be the first strike of many, public sector workers from the civil service and teaching unions took to the streets to protest changes to their pensions.

Miliband chose to come out against the strikes, arguing that the unions should persist with the ongoing negotiations, step back from “the rhetoric” and avoid creating disruption to “hard-working taxpayers”.

During Questions the day before the strikes, having taken a position against them, Miliband concentrated on NHS reforms. In doing so he gave David Cameron a golden opportunity to attack on the industrial action and avoid detailed interrogation of his health proposals.

If Ed Miliband is to secure his position as leader with strong backing from his party and make an impression on the electorate, he cannot go on like this.

It is said that during the Labour leadership election, David Miliband was so sure that he would secure the leadership, he and his team had already mapped out his first hundred days in charge, including a calendar of policy messages.

By contrast Ed Miliband was not prepared. His plan was not clear and, as a consequence, he has struggled throughout the last nine months to establish his leadership, personality and vision.

As if to cement the view that the younger Miliband was not prepared for office, he immediately announced a full policy review and repeated publicly that the party should not expect to have a clear set of policies after such a serious defeat in the general election.

This led the public to think that he didn't have any policies. Even now, members of his own party can't be sure what he stands for. It hasn't helped that having won the leadership with the support of the trade union vote, Miliband has been desperate not to be seen as the unions' man and this has been his problem in the last ten days.

Once the teaching and civil service unions voted to strike at the end of June, Miliband was immediately under pressure to take a position. Given his trenchant criticism of the government's cuts and restructuring of public services, he was expected to support the action. Instead, Miliband triangulated horribly - criticising the government but at the same time pleading with public sector workers not to inconvenience 'the public' by striking.

This uncomfortable position was only magnified at the end of last week as footage from an interview was uploaded to YouTube. In the exchanges, a journalist asks a series of questions about the strikes but Miliband answers each one with the same response. The phrasing is almost identical and makes Miliband seem unwilling to have his position challenged and only comfortable parroting an agreed line.

Ed Miliband is in danger. He is publicly looking like a man without a plan and he has failed to win the confidence of the parliamentary party. Despite outward voices of support, the front and back benches are rumbling; they will want to see a strong show during the party conference speech.

Meanwhile the public seems bemused by Miliband, they don't who know he is and they are certainly not clear what he stands for. And surely the most worrying part of all of is the lack of damage Miliband has done to the Conservative party. Despite a government approval rating in the minus twenties, the party poll ratings have held quite steady and it is the Liberal Democrats who are suffering most.

Miliband needs to find his voice and his backbone if he is to take on the government and win over his party and the public.

# Our Public Services, a Private Sector Profit

Should David Cameron be opposed in his plan to allow the public sector to provide public services?

by Lucy Sweetman (19 July 2011)



**The phone hacking palaver just keeps on giving and it has occupied the press and politicians for the last two weeks.**

It's water torture for David Cameron and his government, the resignations and revelations burst like pin-sharp droplets into the press, preventing him from grabbing hold of the story - any story.

And so it was a week ago Monday when the Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt had to answer an urgent question on phone hacking in the House of Commons because the Prime Minister was at Canary Wharf, to launch his long-delayed and much-trumpeted white paper on public services.

David Cameron has had a lot to say on the role of the state since he came into office. The launch of the white paper, *Open Public Services*, was designed to be the final coming together of all the Prime Minister's big ideas: scaling back the size of the state, the little platoons of volunteers willing to run their own post offices, the localism agenda, parents running schools and the desire to end the "state monopoly" on public services.

It was meant to be the moment when we all listened to him and realised that he had been right all along and we simply did not understand his splendid joined up thinking. The crowning glory of all of this would be to announce the detail of his plans to open the delivery of public services to “any willing provider”, basically an invitation to the private sector to bid for public service contracts without hindrance and in direct competition with the state.

Unfortunately for Cameron, all his sound and fury was drowned out by the mêlée surrounding the phone hacking affair and his own grubby relationship to it. After giving his carefully crafted speech, the questions rained down but none sought to shed light on his big idea.

However, he did achieve some coverage, not least since on the morning of his announcement, the private sector elderly care provider Southern Cross announced its descent into administration. Quite a juxtaposition and one which the media put to good use.

Labour took a different angle, shrugging their shoulders and arguing that there was nothing new in the white paper and in fact, that it looked significantly watered down. The party let it be known that government had clearly been worried about being too radical, lest they found themselves with another NHS issue and a convoluted rearguard.

But in the midst of all the hoo-hah and however much the Opposition snipes about this being an emasculated set of proposals, one sticks out.

The government is absolutely committed to the private sector’s entrance into all public service delivery. The big providers are already there, companies like Serco and G4S. They provide some of the basic services your council would normally run. In recent months they have been awarded enormous tax-payer funded contracts to deliver the new Work Programme. The Prime Minister wants you to believe that his plan is all about choice and competition which will drive up quality of service and put the “consumer” of public services in charge. He thinks he will create a variety of choice through a range of providers. But the list of prime contractors is always very small and the same names pop up again and again.

Meanwhile, small sub-contracted companies and voluntary organisations rely on the largesse of the prime contractors to support their direct delivery of our public services in a way that is sustainable.

Add to that the complications of private finance so perfectly illustrated by the awful mess Southern Cross found itself in and we have a very new, very radical change on our hands: our public services, paid for by us, delivered at a profit by the private sector but accountable to no one but the “customer”.

Whatever your views on how we support ourselves as a society, this is a fundamental change to the fabric of our political and democratic structures. Perhaps last week we needed Cameron to be heard because surely, this must be opposed?

# The Balance of Power

How has phone hacking changed the relationship between politics and the press?

by Lucy Sweetman (12 July 2011)



**The phone-hacking scandal has brought into sharp relief the strange and often incestuous relationship between our politics and press.**

It has been an odd sensation this week to hear politicians of every stripe, scramble to the front of the queue to criticise News International and lambast the News of the World for the horrors of their practice, after years of fawning to the founder and his lieutenants.

One can't help but think the political class is pleased that, for once, it is not on the receiving end of public ire and can be seen to stride towards the moral high ground. But, before they do, we should reflect that it's a little more complicated than that.

This is a symbiotic relationship. Politicians need the press to communicate their messages, press barons own newspapers in order to exert influence on law-makers to further their business interests. Journalists become politicians, politicians become journalists. Editors, newspaper executives and senior politicians move in the same circles, they are friends and neighbours in private. Many of them were educated in the same institutions.

For years it has been assumed that without the support of Murdoch and his high-circulation papers, winning a general election in the United Kingdom is impossible. This is why politicians from all parties have appeared at News International parties, taken phone calls about policy from Murdoch himself and dined with his editors and executives. As a result, Rupert Murdoch - an American citizen of Australian birth, a man who pays little tax in this country - has enjoyed extraordinary influence on British government policy and politics for four decades.

Now that the phone-hacking scandal has moved beyond the celebrities the public both mocks and adores, to groups of people viewed as untouchable and unimpeachable, News International looks more vulnerable and Murdoch ever so slightly less powerful.

Finally those who have worried about Murdoch's influence over our politics but have been too scared to challenge it, are coming out of the woodwork emboldened by a public mood which considers the News of the World to have crossed the line.

But it is here that we should all take stock and bear some responsibility for the state of our press. While the Murdoch papers have dished out the endless diet of scandal, gossip, celebrity and reactionary politics, we the public have consumed it.

Not only has this culture absorbed the popular press, it is found in our television programming and even in our serious newspapers. Gossip, celebrity and tittle-tattle, even delivered with irony or a knowing wink, are now a popular source of entertainment in our most upmarket broadsheets.

The public mood is slightly queasy, we liked the gossip and celebrity-bashing and we weren't really that bothered about Hugh Grant having his phone hacked. But these darker revelations have made us uncomfortable. Now we see the deeds done to sate our interest in a good story, we cannot help but recognise our complicity.

This whole episode has allowed the unspoken to be spoken, the willingness to criticise Murdoch and his empire will have felt liberating to those at the forefront. But it has also shone a light on a number of unhappy truths about the quality of our press, its influence over policy and the calibre of political debate in the public realm.

It is not only Murdoch and News International that should view this episode with shame. We must bear some responsibility. Politicians of every party refused to challenge Murdoch's power and influence and, by supporting Murdoch's papers, the public gave him the power to reduce our political debate and influence our politics.

Hopefully now, as yet more revelations are unveiled and the responsible individuals uncovered, we can have a more elevated debate about what we need from our press to secure a civil and engaged society.

# The Silly Season?

With huge amounts of information available, why do we filter our news into a diet of drivel and inconsequence?

by Lucy Sweetman (26 July 2011)



**Normally at this time of year, we enter what broadcasters and journalists like to call the news 'silly season'. I have always disliked this phrase, implying as it does, that there is no news to be had unless the Mother of All Parliaments is sitting.**

But these last few weeks have felt far from silly. Although the News of the World scandal dominated headlines, the much smaller type contained stories of famine in East Africa, the underhand privatisation of the NHS and other public services, a notable Eurozone crisis and the debt ceiling stand-off in the United States.

Then, over the weekend, we were overwhelmed by the abhorrent slaughter of a group of politically engaged young people on the island of Utøya.

Not silly at all.

But with all this news to choose from and particularly with one story going right to the heart of press freedom and the diversity of viewpoints on offer from the media, surely now is the time to ask ourselves, do we get the news we want or the news we're given? Or, are we so used to what we get that we don't know what we want? Or, is it just easier not to hear about the hard, intractable, distressing, inhuman things that happen to other people thousands of miles away?

You might imagine, and it has been argued, that the rise of the internet has made us more informed about the world than ever before, that the internet has democratised news and made us more powerful citizens as a result. Instead, an algorithm determines the content of your Google search, based on your location, what Google already knows about your preferred sites and other information it may have gathered about you from other sources. Facebook only shows you output from the friends you talk to most, sending you spiraling into a reinforced cycle of social interaction with your most active friends.

If you get your news from Twitter, you have already determined your sources through the people you follow. Most of us follow other like-minded people, those that share our views, values and interests. Is your twitterfeed a hotbed of diverse opinion or does it simply reflect back your own world view?

Of course this is completely understandable. We've been doing it with newspapers for years. Few of us would choose to read a newspaper replete with views in total opposition to our own or buy several newspapers each day for a range of views. Perhaps here the internet wins an element of the debate, many of us now scan multiple newspaper websites for sources of news.

There are other consequences to the competition to traditional news sources that the internet provides, two of which are a particular concern. [Jon Slattery of MediaBriefing.com](#) has written an excellent piece on the decline of news agencies and reduction in professional journalists over the last ten years. For decades, much news gathering has been delivered by news agencies - large international agencies like Associated Press and regional and local agencies in Britain. These agencies provided the legwork and investigation that were the source for breaking stories and their work would appear in the national newspapers. Since the internet has become a source of news itself and news bloggers have become more active, news agency work looks expensive to the national newspapers and the agencies are starting to close down as the papers drop the rates they are prepared to pay for stories.

The result is a smaller supply of independent, professionally produced news and instead a recycling of stories from newspapers to the internet and vice versa, often without crediting the original source. Plagiarism is on the rise.

The second critical change has been the reduction in overseas news bureaux run by the biggest broadcasters and newspapers. Thirty years ago, correspondents were bringing us news from all parts of the world, writing incredible stories, with a deep, local perspective, that helped us understand the political and human struggles and successes of our fellow men and women. These days there are far fewer international correspondents and we are the poorer for it.

Imagine a world which will never have another Alistair Cooke. There was a man who each week delivered a scalpel-sharp assessment of American politics, written from a trans-Atlantic perspective but with a great sense of his British audience. That precision, that local knowledge and deep appreciation is gone and our capacity to truly understand and empathise with our international neighbours is gone with it.

The gap in international news is filled far more cheaply by celebrity and gossip. We have always had scandal-magazines and gossip disguised as news. The News of the World was famous for it long before Murdoch turned up with his chequebook. What's changed is that the most frivolous aspects of the lives of the famous and infamous, our musicians, sports stars, politicians and other public figures, are now the overwhelming subject matter of so many of our newspapers and news sources.

Even our most revered broadsheets and still-pioneering investigative journals are not immune from the trickle of news-gossip the population has come to love.

Amy Winehouse died the day after sixty-nine young people were murdered, the day thousands more children in the Horn of Africa were subjected to famine conditions. Even in those news conditions, the tragic death of a single, talented woman, created more print acreage than looked appropriate. In fact, it looked unapologetically over the top.

So if technology is reducing rather than widening our sources and business models are dictating the breadth of our world view, is it any wonder that we only pay attention to what we are offered? Perhaps these days we don't even consciously have to hide from the unbearable suffering of others because no one is really trying to tell us about it. And if they do, it's a reporter flown into a trouble-spot with a flak jacket and an escort, rather than a correspondent who knows the town or the country and its people personally.

The world feels like an increasingly scary and difficult place to many of us, maybe we feel that way because we don't use our resources to understand it as we used to. Instead we are content to be the recipients of a diet of drivel and inconsequence while our faith in others, ourselves, in politics and public life fades away.

We will be in dangerous, dangerous territory if that is the path we take.

# More Than Money

The economic depression is affecting more than just our finances...

by Lucy Sweetman (23 August 2011)



**The unemployment figures for the quarter to June made grim reading last week, 38,000 more people unemployed (21,000 of whom were women) and an unemployment rate amongst 16-24 year olds of 20.2%.**

As the figures were released, markets were shuddering all over the world with anxieties over the eurozone and the USA's loss of its 'triple A' finance rating.

Towards the end of the week, the markets continued to look rocky and the UK reflected on the causes and ramifications of the recent riots. On Friday, the Prime Minister decided to spend the afternoon at the test match, arguing that he needed to take a break to avoid a 'fried brain'.

For the first time in decades, the state of our country and the world's finances seem to be having a direct and tangible impact, for most of us, on our daily lives. Since the Coalition came to power in May 2010, the focus of our politics and national debate has been the deficit, the cuts and the still-stumbling global economy. A fortnight ago, we added the riots to that agenda. Last week we added rising unemployment.

Usually in an economic downturn, a significant proportion of the population is insulated from any serious personal harm, they ride it out. This time though, only the very wealthy are immune, the rest of us are finding it hard.

The numbers many of us were once able to ignore - redundancies and job losses, rising VAT, commodities prices on the stock exchange, inflation and the projections for economic growth - we now know are critical to our own, very personal economic wellbeing.

And wellbeing is the critical issue here. It's no coincidence that we talk about economic 'depression' when growth stalls and the risk of a double-dip recession feels ever-present. Even at the height of early 1980s nuclear panic, I have never known our nation to be so gripped by anxiety and worry, so bleak in outlook.

It doesn't take long in any family or network of friends, to find someone who has lost their job in the last twelve months or even someone who is still unemployed after six. Early retirement, forced redundancies, companies going into administration, government funding cuts to public services and charities - all of these things have economic and emotional consequences for individuals and their families. Those consequences when multiplied are even more devastating.

When the cuts began and concerns grew that the economy would stall, many made predictions of riots, higher rates of crime and increased domestic violence as families came under economic pressure. Well we've had the riots and we've not seen the crime statistics but I can tell you that, driving through Dorset last week, I saw the following headline on a local paper: "Domestic Violence Shelters Overflowing".

We cannot avoid the emotional and social consequences of our economic torpor which raises an interesting question for David Cameron. Last year he announced his determination to address the quality of our national "wellbeing" as a measure of progress and success, in addition to the usual economic indicators. He argued that we were too focused on economic outputs, ignoring the value of more human states of being. Much of this was derided in the press as a "happiness" agenda but he had a serious and valid point. However, the Prime Minister and a large number of his policy advisors think that "happiness" and "wellbeing" are states of mind over which we have complete personal control, regardless of our economic circumstances. He concludes that with a bit of will-power, anyone can break free from the chains that shackle them and succeed. It's a classic neo-liberal, personal responsibility, "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" argument.

The problem for Mr Cameron is that on current evidence, the very opposite is true.

# Unpleasant Truths

The failure to convict Dominique Strauss-Kahn highlights major problems in Western culture

by Lucy Sweetman (30 August 2011)



**Dominique Strauss-Kahn, former head of the International Monetary Fund, last week had all charges of sexual assault brought against him by the New York District Attorney, dropped.**

His was a high-profile scalp and initially the New York Police Department enjoyed the reporting of Strauss-Kahn's dramatic apprehension. After the Frenchman was bailed to a luxury Manhattan townhouse however, the New York District Attorney cooled on the case. A few weeks later, the New York Times reported that the case was likely to be dropped because the sole witness, the alleged victim, was found to be "unreliable".

Nafissatou Diallo, a chambermaid at the Sofitel New York Hotel, alleged that Strauss-Kahn sexually assaulted her when she entered his room to clean it. The former head of the IMF argued that he was not guilty of assault because the sexual encounter between them was consensual. This on the face of it looked like a classic problem of a sexual assault allegation. Two people in the room, one makes an accusation, the other argues consensuality and the truth of the matter is never established.

But what happened to Diallo went further than that, or rather it did not because she never had the opportunity to make her claim in front of a jury of her peers. Instead, she was subjected to a very public trial of her veracity, her character, her personal history. Like so many women before her who have made accusations of rape and sexual assault, it was she who was subjected to an interrogation while the man she said violated her, sat back in his Manhattan townhouse.

After establishing that Diallo had lied about a gang rape in her country of origin, Guinea, while making her asylum claim and that her account of the events with Strauss-Kahn had changed during the investigation (was any leeway given for translation issues?), Diallo's allegation was dismissed because it was felt that a jury would find it hard to believe her.

This case tells us rather a lot of unpleasant truths about our Western culture:

Firstly, that the only rape and sexual assault victims likely to find themselves in front of a jury to make their case, never mind see the conviction of their attacker, must be pristine and faultless themselves. They must have led lives that none of us can honestly say we have lived, without blame or duplicity of one kind or another. They must be impossibly wholesome so that we should have no reason to doubt their claim.

Secondly, that the old culture of 'droit de seigneur' apparently lives on in France, a culture that finds no fault in a man's imposition of himself over a woman against her will, especially when she is not his equal in class or power and perhaps, where this allegation is concerned, when she is not white like him.

Thirdly that we will never overcome our pitiful conviction rates for rape and sexual assault unless we start to believe women before we judge them. Our record in the United Kingdom is appalling and it is worsening. It is harder and harder to convict. In part this is because we have a culture that looks to the accuser to prove that she is flawless before it looks to the evidence. Equally, it is because of this very distrust that so few women go through with court cases for fear of being accused themselves.

What a world we have created for ourselves! Fifty years of feminism and yet we seem to be travelling back in time. We can only hope that Diallo's miserable experience at the hands of the American justice system can teach us all some urgent lessons.

# A Political Preview

There's been no 'silly season' this year, and politics is set to get even busier in the coming months...

by Lucy Sweetman (06 September 2011)



**It's the end of the summer, children are going back to school, sixteen year olds are joining the dole queues because their Education Maintenance Allowance has been cut, some of them are starting apprenticeships. Well, you get the picture. It's the end of summer and the 'back to school' cliché is applied liberally to headlines not just for the young but for the Mother of all Parliaments too.**

For years eyebrows were raised as Members of Parliament rose at the end of July and did not reappear on the benches until October, after the party conferences. It looked like shirking while the rest of us were working. Now, we have a short interlude before the parties' annual gatherings in which the Houses of Parliament become active.

Having had the busiest news summer in recent memory and a total lack of 'silly season', those tired under-vacationed journalists and the senior politicians called back endlessly from their own holidays, are forced to gather once more for the long political term to Christmas. It will of course include the Queen's Speech but before that, there is some unfinished and potentially turbulent politics to be done.

This week the Culture, Media and Sports select committee is holding more hearings into the News of the World phone hacking scandal and the Home Affairs select committee will be asking questions about the August riots. Expect some headlines about lack of police resources and questions as to whether James Murdoch should reappear before the CMS committee to clarify his previous evidence in the light of some contradictory statements from the paper's legal team.

Meanwhile, rumblings are already audible about the continuing passage of the Health and Social Care Bill as it returns to the Commons this week for its reporting stage and third reading. In the last few days, Nadine Dorries MP and Frank Field MP have taken some of the headlines, proposing an amendment to change the terms under which a woman accesses counseling, prior to choosing to terminate a pregnancy. Number Ten initially announced it would support the amendment but has now flipped its position. The British Pregnancy Advisory Service has been busily disputing Nadine Dorries' accusations about their service and all sides have been huffing and puffing from their established positions.

This has caused enough of a sideshow to distract from the heart of the Health and Social Care Bill. This piece of legislation should have arrived onto the statute books weeks ago. Instead it was subjected to a 'pause' earlier this year after disquiet on the Liberal Democrat benches about increased private sector involvement and a watering down of the Secretary of State's duty to provide a national health service, overflowed into vocal antipathy.

Dame Shirley Williams has been rattling her sabre on the bill's return, making clear that she is still not satisfied with the changes made during the hiatus. Even the time left to scrutinise the bill has been criticised with accusations that the Prime Minister is desperate to railroad the legislation through Parliament without further delay.

The next few weeks will be a test of the will of Andrew Lansley to see his flagship piece of legislation through to completion and a stronger test of the ability of the Coalition to withstand yet another internal rumble.

Meanwhile the Education Secretary's bill will continue its journey in the Lords, but Michael Gove is keen that everyone's focus is kept on his Free Schools. Expect to be kept very well informed about their progress.

Finally, what should we expect from the party conferences?

Labour's Ed Miliband had a busy summer, doing well in his response to the hacking scandal and the August riots. However, the pressure is still on him to impress at the party conference. He has plans for changes to the party's constitution, opening up leadership voting to registered supporters as well as members. This has gone down very badly with Labour's affiliated unions and this spat could well make it to the conference floor.

Nick Clegg will spend his conference trying to bounce back from a very poor early part of the year. He will want to showcase his and his party's influence in government. He might not have it all his way, however. He may well need to rebuff allegations of terminal acquiescence to his senior partner, especially where cuts and the health bill are concerned.

The Prime Minister will no doubt echo his recent theme of 'broken Britain' and enjoy support from party stalwarts as he praises the long sentences handed down to the 'criminal elements' he blames for the riots. But he and his Chancellor have some hard questions to answer about the state of the economy: stalled growth, rising unemployment, even the service sector is tanking. But will it be his own party members who ask the difficult questions?

That should keep us busy until the Queen's Speech, when the Coalition needs to show that it still has plenty of impetus to take the country into the next year. As economic worries and growing anxieties in a post-riot England take hold, they will need some good ideas.

# Shaping the Future

With a decade gone since 9/11, what do the next 10 years hold for the USA?

by Lucy Sweetman (13 September 2011)



**When US President Dwight Eisenhower gave his final television address in 1961 he sounded a warning that has echoed ever since. In those final, prescient paragraphs, he underlined and worried for the continuing and unbreakable bond between economy and the making of war. He called it the Military-Industrial Complex. On the tenth anniversary of the attacks on New York City and Washington D.C., his words seem as relevant now as they did half a century ago.**

Alongside remembrance, this week many voices have raised asking questions about our world since that September day: what we learned, how the attacks shaped our politics and cultural discourse for a decade, and where the next 10 years will take us.

It is only human that we seek to understand both the act itself and its impact, to place it somehow within a context, even to revise our view of it over and over, as time passes. So it is inevitable that on the tenth anniversary, we are so overwhelmed by these questions.

When Eisenhower spoke about the Military-Industrial Complex, he was talking about the moral and political risks the US was taking in building its military might. Faced with the threat of the opposing ideology of Communism, he argued that the US must arm itself to such a degree that no enemy would "risk its own destruction", but he also warned that a military of such power, determined constantly to improve its reach and capacity, could overwhelm American values of democracy and citizenry in its wake.

"In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.

We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defence with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together."

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, President George W Bush announced the commencement of a 'War on Terror' and he enlisted a willing helper in the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair. Between them they established a new doctrine of Western power. Blair had already marked himself out as an interventionist in Kosovo, so perhaps it was unsurprising that he immediately, as we have learned, offered the US all the political and military support it required to prosecute its decade-defining conflicts.

It has been Tony Blair who, once again, has been re-explaining and defending his decision making in the months and years after the attacks. What is particularly striking is the language he uses to describe what he sees as the continuing threat. Speaking on the Today programme last week, he asserted that an ideological and dangerous 'Islamist' force still sits in opposition to 'Western values' and that radical Islamists are seeking the opportunity to attack at any point. He was insistent that Iran was the fulcrum of this movement, that further attacks were inevitable and that the threat of terror persists and must be dealt with. He also resisted any suggestion that the rise of Islamic fundamentalism was in any way related to the response to 9/11 visited upon Iraq and Afghanistan by the US and Great Britain.

Eisenhower, even though he was deeply concerned about the ideological and military threat of Communism, made the point that the strength of that threat should not lead to the abandonment of the very values America sought to uphold. Given that many in the West have considerable anxieties about the weakening of civil liberties and habeas corpus since 9/11 for citizens and enemies alike, it would be interesting to know where Eisenhower would position himself now. Perhaps he would have something to say to Blair and Bush?

By contrast, President Obama, despite reiterating the terrorist threat to the United States, speaks with a very different tone to Mr Blair. In fact, his message to the American people stated exactly Bin Laden's objective over the last two decades, not the theatrical and devastating mass murder of 9/11, but long-term economic destruction. In his weekly address on Friday he said, "They want to draw us into endless wars, sapping our strength and confidence as a nation. But even as we put relentless pressure on al-Qaida we are ending the war in Iraq and beginning to bring our troops home from Afghanistan. After a hard decade of war it is time for nation building here at home". Here is an American President, after the first attack on the US mainland since the War of Independence and 10 years of crippling foreign wars, striking an isolationist pose. Can the President finally

resist those military-industrial powers?

Consider the damage that 9/11 wrought on America's economic prospects over the last 10 years. As the country fought wars on two fronts as well as its internal threats, China and India continued their extraordinary economic ascension, unchecked. The United States is a wounded animal, the enormity of its military spending since September 2001 has made its recovery from the economic disaster of the global banking crisis, long and slow.

When Obama came to office, the American people were desperate to step back from war and anxious about their own record on civil liberties, so he promised an exit from Iraq and Afghanistan and the closure of Guantánamo Bay. Now, American anxiety is focused on a loss of economic power. In the absence of any serious homeland attack for 10 years and with a deficit so enormous it is basically incomprehensible, perhaps it feels safer to pull down the nation's shutters?

Let's not forget, America as the world's policeman was a twentieth century invention. The Founding Fathers were isolationists and anti-imperialists, having resisted the forces of those lovers of empire, the British. They were concerned with individual liberty and the pursuit of happiness, perhaps it is that which America craves now.

So here we have two positions, Tony Blair, the European envoy to the Middle East warning of a terrible and persistent threat to "our values and our way of life" and our need to address it militarily, and President Obama, seeking to return to the home fires, work on his job plan and rebuild his country (if, of course, the American people will take him back in 2012).

It is the battle between these two positions that will define the next 10 years of American and European foreign policy. But, as China and India continue to build their economic power, it is their geo-political allegiances that will shape the wider world.

# Labour Party Lost

With Ed Miliband distancing himself from the trade unions, who does the Labour Party represent?

by Lucy Sweetman (20 September 2011)



**A year ago, a man perceived to be in the shadow of his brother stepped out of the darkness to take his crown. Ed Miliband, wonkish but competent, found himself on the stage at the 2010 Labour conference, lifted there by Labour's union-affiliated members.**

The previous 10 minutes had been full of tension as each round of voting was revealed and another candidate eliminated. There were audible gasps in the conference hall as the older Miliband, whom everyone expected to win, was beaten at the final hurdle and turned to his brother to offer a familial hug.

It was widely agreed that the union vote won Ed the leadership, specifically the GMB, Unison and Unite, who cast thousands of votes for the younger brother. They were criticised latterly for sending voting papers to members that indicated the leaderships' choice of Ed for leader.

So having been anointed as the unions' man in the big chair, Ed Miliband immediately set about resisting the label and distancing himself from the unions' leadership. The hot issues for the major unions have been cuts to public spending and services, and public sector pensions. Miliband has repeatedly and publicly told them to negotiate on pensions and not to strike while negotiations are ongoing.

Last week at the TUC conference, Miliband made the same appeal, saying it was wrong to strike over pensions and more important to negotiate, despite union leaders' protests that negotiations were dead in the water.

This positioning is important to Miliband as leader of the Labour party. Even with the Murdoch empire in turmoil, the perception is that any Labour leader must keep the unions at arm's length, even when it was they who placed him there.

It was no surprise then that the TUC reception for Ed was frosty at best. He was heckled and given only polite applause during his big finish. But he will have left a happy man, satisfied that he will not be seen as anyone's lackey.

This position, that the party of labour must disavow its working and organised brothers and sisters in order to be elected, was wrought in the Eighties by Thatcher and enacted by each Labour leader since Neil Kinnock berated Militant at the 1985 Labour conference.

Thatcher's achievements in taking on the unions were many. Her trade union reforms made it harder for organised labour to strike but it was her rhetoric which did the most damage. Her use of the phrase "the enemy within" struck a chord with a public that remembered the winter of discontent. Imagery of that period in the late seventies when local services were disrupted was used liberally in the mid-Eighties to reinforce the point. By 1984, the main objective of Thatcher's year-long confrontation with the National Union of Mineworkers was not to reform the coal industry but to break union power completely.

The result has been seen over the last two decades. Whereas millions were once union members, now only thousands are. Where once the unions were the bedrock of working people's lives, providing support during hard times as well as campaigning for better pay and conditions, now their leaders are perceived as political dinosaurs, barracking from the sidelines.

But, the unions do still represent thousands of working people. They often represent the working poor, people who do the lowest paid jobs that many of us would never consider even in the darkest of times. And in our modern world, the workers they represent are often low-paid women in part-time jobs, who work nightshifts in factories or cleaning offices. These workers without their unions would be voiceless, powerless.

So isn't it perverse that the leader of the Labour Party, which was founded on the backs of organised people to protect their rights and freedoms in work, feels the need to reject the organisations that seek to represent those people now?

Ed Miliband's election last year brought huge optimism in the trade union movement which felt, finally, it had grabbed the heart of its party back after years of New Labour triangulation and rejection.

But they have only been disappointed, watching yet another Labour leader distance themselves for fear of upsetting 'the public'. And this is the heart of the matter: just as popular rhetoric in the press describes public sector workers as though they are not also citizens, voters and taxpayers, union members seem also not to be part of that benighted group, 'the public'.

So if Labour isn't talking to low-paid union-represented workers and it's not talking to public sector staff - from police officers to job centre workers and nurses - then who is it that the party seeks to represent?