Ed: The Milibands and the making of a Labour Leader

A transparent attempt to rebrand Labour

Part two

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This is the conclusion of a two-part book review. Part one was posted September 10.

Once he left university, Ed Miliband had a period working for Channel Four before moving seamlessly into government as a special advisor to the Treasury. He was a supporter of Gordon Brown, while David, who had also been a special advisor but was now a Labour MP, was a supporter of Tony Blair. This was the first time the brothers had ever been in opposition.

Apparently, in his never-ending battle with Blair, Brown, as chancellor of the exchequer, was always on the lookout for those he could appoint as special advisers. Of course, Blair had to have his own, as did other ministers.

By the time Blair was forced to resign as prime minister in 2007, a whole industry of "special advisors" had grown up within the corridors of power. Their job is to supply the plans and the useful and slanted statistics that would keep the government in office.

We are told by Hasan and Macintyre that Ed Miliband has visited Harvard University twice. The first time, with the encouragement of Gordon Brown, was in the autumn of 2002, when he became a visiting scholar at Harvard's Center of European Studies (CES).

"Every year Harvard admits about thirty scholars from around Europe and the USA. He was personally invited by the then-director of the CES, Peter Hall … the scholarly Hall was familiar to Ed; two years earlier, in 2001 he had co-authored a book called *Varieties of Capitalism* with the economist David Soskice—father of Ed's ex-girlfriend, Juliet."

Later the authors write: "Ed had the opportunity to make contact with some of the West's most progressive thinkers, including the Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam, famous for his work on social capital, and the Harvard political philosopher Michael Sandal, who taught the celebrated 'Justice' course at the university for the last two decades."

In 2003, Miliband decided to extend his stay by a term in order to teach for the first time in his life. "Ed returned to Harvard in the autumn of 2003, but this time to the university's government department rather than the CES. His background as an advisor to Gordon Brown helped him obtain such a prestigious post."

The course he taught was entitled, "What's Left? The Politics of Social Justice."

According to Harvard, its theme was to compare the recent experience of "left-of-center governments in different European nations and the US" in order to examine "policy dilemmas confronting politicians seeking social justice amidst trends like globalization, economic insecurity and multiculturalism. And it explores innovative, feasible ideas in welfare, economy and society which can define a future for progressive politics."

Miliband's target audience consisted of future Democratic Party functionaries, with the aim of providing a left veneer for the pro-business agenda now being implemented by the Barack Obama administration.

Hasan and Macintyre insist, "Ed's story cannot be fully understood outside the context of his struggle to emerge from the shadow of his elder brother, David."

They provide no evidence for this. Rather than there being a "big struggle" to emerge from David's shadow, there was a deep brotherly love between them. Even when Ed joined Brown's economic team at the Treasury, the two brothers were close.

The election of Ed Miliband as leader of the Labour Party at this particular moment in time *can only be understood* within the context of the developments in the crisis of the world capitalism system and the continuing decline of British imperialism.

At the last minute, and after a campaign in which five candidates had participated, the Labour bureaucracy decided hesitantly and by a narrow margin of 1.2 percent that Ed Miliband should be leader and not the strong favourite, David.

This was particularly due to the vote of the trade union bureaucracy, which decided that the Labour Party had to look as if it was making a new start. On the hustings, the Iraq war was still the biggest issue. While David is still closely associated with that war, having stood by the decision to invade and refused to apologise, Ed had been in the US at the time of the parliamentary vote to support war and said that if he'd been able to vote, he would probably have voted against.

Ed Miliband also boasted of the "proudest personal moment in my career"—his "securing extra funding for the [National Health Service] out of general taxation, and instituting a tax credits regime that put more money in the pockets of the poorest workers while encouraging those on benefits to get jobs."

Not for the first time Hasan and Macintyre act as apologists for Ed Miliband and Labour, for this was the time when the NHS was

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being handed over to the private sector. Working tax credits are a form of means tested benefits. Although rolled out in 1999 with great fanfare, amidst the claim that they would reduce child poverty while making work pay, the actual result was that employers got a gratis top-up on the low wages they pay, thereby helping them maintain low wages. Although some claimants received up to £50 a week more, many others landed in a bureaucratic nightmare and thousands of pounds in debt.

The official announcement of Ed Miliband's leadership victory in September 2010 was an incredibly tense affair. A yell let out from the audience, which wasn't so much celebration as relief because at times the contest had been very ugly. The authors give a description of how the rival supporters of each brother "squared up to one another" at the July 13 reception organized by the Trades Union Congress at Summer House, in Westminster. By the announcement it was clear there was a split right down the middle of the bureaucracy.

One of the more amusing passages in the book reads: "After the announcement, Ed was to be taken triumphantly backstage. The plan was he would be greeted by a party official and escorted off to a holding room to gather his thoughts and then do a round of press interviews. Like all the other candidates, he and his team practiced the choreography… Now, though, something was horribly wrong. The party's personnel had disappeared; they had voted with their feet. Many had headed to bars to drown their sorrows. One senior party official admits today that 'at least 80 percent of the party backed David.' Some Labour press officers were spotted sobbing outside by members of the Ed campaign."

He was portrayed by the trade unions as "consensual" and "communal," but what they wanted was a visible distancing operation that in fact leaves Labour's rightward course unchanged in most respects, while shifting it even further to the right in others.

It is certainly likely that the union bureaucracy felt his collaborative approach more useful to them, in line with their own practice of breaking up strikes by restricting them to local campaigns based on nationalist perspectives. Miliband himself went to the length of organizing a photo-call visit to Billingsgate Market to defend market porters' feudal rights.

Hasan and Macintyre are forced to state: "Some in the party worry about the nostalgia and social conservatism inherent in the so-called 'Blue Labour' communitarian project pushed by, among others, Jon Cruddas and Maurice Glasman—who, less than a year after meeting Ed, had become an influential member of the leader's inner circle (and was rewarded by the new leader with a peerage)."

But this does not address the real significance of Miliband's attraction to these figures. Cruddas and Glasman's "Blue Labour" agenda is based upon asserting nationalism as the basis for access to welfare state allowance together with an anti-immigration agenda.

Since his election, Ed Miliband has been working night and day to heal the rift in the party, knowing you can't lead any party with only 20 percent support.

Miliband has had an almost impeccable training in bourgeois politics and the Labour bureaucratic machine, having joined the party at 16. It is also clear that "government by coalition" is his preferred method of governing. He already intervened to save Tory Prime Minister David Cameron from facing calls to resign over the Murdoch phone-hacking crisis when he called a meeting between the leaders of the three main parties and reached a common agreement on the matter.

Under him, the Labour Party is holding various meetings with the Liberal Democrats and preparing to push bourgeois politics in Britain ever further to the right.

British society is rotting away as the elite layer gorge on money stolen from the working class through illegal bank operations and privatisation of the utilities and public services. The economic/social gap between rich and poor widens daily, reinforcing class antagonisms. Some form of "government of national unity" cannot be ruled out.

By any social indicator, the British bourgeoisie has lost any moral right it may have thought it had to rule. The country is moving into a pre-revolutionary situation. In electing the younger Miliband, a small majority of the Labour bureaucracy, particularly the trade union bosses, decided he offers them at this point the best political cover for the stormy period lying immediately ahead.

The Tory-led Cameron government is using those caught up in the recent rioting to see if it can get away with making even greater attacks on democratic rights, drive through more cuts in health and education, and force the working class into more humiliating poverty.

Hasan and Macintyre portray Ed Miliband as some kind of leftish democrat who can save capitalism, not unlike his hero Bobby Kennedy. But this is absurd. The world capitalist crisis has moved on half a century since then and deepened, driven forwards by the advances in technology and science it cannot utilize for the betterment of all, but only to enrich the few. It is not a flourishing but a degenerating bourgeois democracy that exists today, and it is the proletarian world socialist revolution that is on the agenda.

Concluded

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