

UK Labour seeks to outdo Conservatives with right-wing policies

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Labour is intensifying its rightward shift and is seeking to outdo the Conservative-Liberal coalition on every area of government policy.

After a reorganisation of Labour's shadow cabinet, which included new appointments to the positions of shadow education minister and shadow minister for work and pensions, party leaders publicly endorsed virulently right-wing politics. These positions were given by party leader Ed Miliband to Tristram Hunt and Rachel Reeves.

In his first interview as Labour's education spokesman, Hunt declared that the party would embrace the so-called "free schools" introduced by the coalition and that a Labour government would not force existing schools to close down or prevent the opening of new ones.

In a BBC interview, Hunt stated that his party backed "enterprise and innovation" when it came to education, adding that a Labour government would increase the number of "parent-led academies" in areas where there was educational need.

The establishment of free schools has been a component of the government's sustained drive to privatise the education system. They are operated by companies or parents' organisations and have full independence from Local Authority control to set their own curriculum and appoint staff. The reforms have also included the creation of over 3,000 academy schools, run by private firms. The model for academies was initiated by the previous Labour government.

The privatisation of education has been accompanied by a massive assault on teachers, through the introduction of performance-related pay and attacks on pension rights. On the BBC's "Question Time", Hunt expressed his full support for performance-related pay for teachers.

Reeves, formerly of the Bank of England, told the *Observer* that a Labour government would clamp down on welfare spending and would be tougher than the Conservatives in cutting the benefits budget.

"Nobody should be under any illusions that they are going to be able to live a life on benefits under a Labour government. If you can work you should be working, and under our compulsory jobs guarantee if you refuse that job you forgo your benefits, and that is really important," she said.

The compulsory guarantee was previously unveiled by Miliband, and would mean that those who are out of work would be offered a job after no more than two years of unemployment. If they refused this job, their benefits would be removed. For people under 25, the period will be one year.

Such proposals are aimed at creating a pool of cheap labour for big business. The "jobs" referred to would be heavily subsidised by the government to encourage companies to employ workers who would be paid well below the minimum wage. The consequences of this policy can already be seen with existing work placements paying as little as £2.65 an hour and stories of unemployed workers being compelled to work for free. Labour's intention is to make such conditions the norm.

In the same week that Reeves revealed her intention to cut welfare, a report from the Fabian Society claimed that a Labour government could slash the welfare bill by a further £5 billion on top of what the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats have already proposed for 2015-16. This could be done by clamping down on jobless benefits, removing entitlements to disabled allowances, removing the winter fuel payment from broader layers of pensioners than was proposed at present and freezing the state pension.

The conditions for this assault on working people are being established by a vicious right-wing media campaign denouncing unemployed workers as lazy and a drain on society and seeking to whip up anti-immigrant sentiment.

According to this line, Britain is not massively indebted due to the multi-billion bailout of the criminals in the financial elite, but due to work-shy benefit claimants and because it is being swamped by a tide of immigrants who are claiming social welfare and using public services.

Labour has fully embraced this reactionary offensive. Last week, Miliband penned a piece for the right-wing *Daily Express*, which spewed forth chauvinist and anti-immigrant sentiments.

Addressing the concerns of *Express* “readers”, Miliband wrote, “The next Labour government will get the deficit down and will not borrow more in 2015/16 for day-to-day spending.”

Asserting that immigration had gone too far under the previous Labour government, Miliband vowed to take “tougher measures” to “stop low skilled migration under cutting the wages of workers already here.”

The Labour leader has been promoting such right-wing demagoguery for some time, especially following his speech to the party’s 2012 conference in which he portrayed himself as the heir of “One Nation” Conservatism.

In his *Express* article, Miliband invoked this mantra once again, writing that Labour’s aim was “rebuilding Britain together as one nation in which everybody plays their part.”

This message has broad support within Labour. The Blue Labour project, initiated by the academic Maurice Glasman and supported by leading officials within the party like John Crudas MP, promoted the slogan “Flag, faith and family” to sum up its right-wing, nationalist programme.



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