

UK Labour Party hires Obama adviser David Axelrod

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There is great excitement in the editorial offices of the *Guardian* at news that David Axelrod has been hired to help Labour leader Ed Miliband win the 2015 general election.

Axelrod, described by the *Guardian* as President Barack Obama's "most influential adviser during two presidential victories," is seen as "crucial in helping [the Democratic] party through [a] tough battle," it wrote.

Political editor Patrick Wintour explained that Axelrod "was integral not just to Obama's two presidential victories in 2008 and 2012, but also to Obama's election as a senator in 2004. He has been described as a lobe of the Obama brain."

His appointment would "sharpen Labour party focus on inequality".

Axelrod told the *Guardian*, "We can't just have prosperity hoarded by a few where people at the top are getting wealthier and wealthier but people in the middle are getting squeezed. This is a problem not just for Britain but everywhere in advanced economies, including here in the US.

"That is how we won in the US. Barack Obama articulated a vision which had, at its core, the experience of everyday people. And everyday people responded, they organised and they overcame the odds. I see the same thing happening in Britain."

Obama may speak about inequality. At the start of this year he was even invoking Lyndon Johnson's call in 1964 for the eradication of poverty and joblessness, stating, "It is now fifty years since President Johnson proclaimed an unconditional war on poverty in America."

But the only war Obama is waging in the US is a class war against working people.

The *Guardian's* gushing pronouncements on Axelrod came as the US national network of food banks reported that one in five US children do not have enough to eat. *Feeding America* reported that the numbers of people

suffering "food insecurity" had risen by 11.1 percent since 2007 to 49 million people, or 16 percent of the population. The situation is worse for children, with 16 million affected, or 21.6 percent.

This appalling situation has arisen not by accident or chance. It is the outcome of the policies pursued first under the Bush administration, and then Obama in which Wall Street has been handed trillions of dollars in bailouts, while social programmes and wages are gutted.

Earlier this year, for example, Obama signed off on \$8.7 billion worth of cuts in food stamp benefits over ten years—the second consecutive cut to the benefit in just six months.

The cuts in food stamps are part of a broader attack on social programmes, which include reductions in unemployment benefits, pensions and the dismantling of employer-sponsored health care. Wages in the manufacturing sector have fallen 2.4 percent since 2009, and by an average of 10 percent in the auto sector.

Meanwhile, the 100 top-earning CEOs in the US have seen their median yearly pay increase by 9 percent in 2013, to \$13.9 million each. Overall, billionaires in the US have seen their wealth double since 2009.

This is the reality behind the current efforts of Obama and the Democrats to posture as opponents of social inequality in the run-up to this year's mid-term elections.

Just as obscene is the fact that Axelrod's advice on how to tackle inequality comes with a reported six-figure price tag to retain his services and those of his media firm AKPD.

Writing on the Obama campaign, the *World Socialist Web Site* explained, "The declared focus on social inequality is a marketing strategy aimed at rehabilitating the image of the Obama administration amid growing popular anger over its right-wing social policies, its illegal domestic spying programs, and its foreign policy of militarism and war. The phony campaign is being

coordinated with the trade unions, in conjunction with their fast food protests and lobbying for a rise in the minimum wage, backed by the allies of the union bureaucracy in liberal and pseudo-left circles.”

This cynical ploy is now to be utilised in Britain on Labour’s behalf.

Despite the Conservative-led coalition presiding over the largest cuts in public spending since the 1930s, opinion polls give Labour just a one percent lead.

Millions revile Labour as a party of war, whose “light-touch” regulation of the City of London facilitated the 2008 financial crisis. That it then bailed out the banks with billions in public funds, and initiated the austerity measures now taken up by the Tories to pay for this, adds insult to injury.

Desperate measures are underway to airbrush these facts from history. *Guardian* columnist Zoe Williams recently demanded the “left” should “Stop calling Tony Blair a war criminal” and celebrate instead the “positive” achievements of his government.

In a letter to the *Guardian*, 19 representatives from various pro-Labour groups and think tanks such as the Fabian Society and Compass urged Miliband to set out a “bold” vision for government.

Clearly anxious that the 2015 general election is Labour’s to lose, the letter warned that the party “must take into the election a vision of a much more equal and sustainable society and the support of a wider movement” to meet the challenges ahead.

The difficulty of Labour garnering wider support is not only its record in office, but the fact that the policies it has outlined are in no way different to the Tories. In fact, while Labour has hired Axelrod, the Conservative Party has retained former Obama campaign manager, Jim Messina, to act as its strategy adviser.

News of Axelrod’s appointment came as the Trussell Trust, the largest operator of food banks in the UK, said the number of people seeking food assistance rose 163 percent last year—mainly as a result of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition’s assault on welfare benefits.

But Miliband is pledged to continue the austerity measures of the coalition and has said Labour will enforce “tough” fiscal rules if it wins the next election. This will effectively mean that cuts in the public sector and social programmes will be made legally binding.

Making clear whose support it is that Labour really needs, Miliband recently chose Rupert Murdoch’s the *Sun on Sunday* to stress that “tough choices” were

needed “to cut the costs of failure in the system.”

Labour is committed to implementing what it has described as “tough love” on welfare, including strengthening benefit sanctions and introducing a form of workfare for the young unemployed.

Axelrod has been introduced in order to disguise this right-wing fare with some sound bites on inequality that can be used by the trade union bureaucracy and pro-Labour journalists such as Owen Jones to try and drum up backing for Miliband.

He has stated that public scepticism in “politics” is a major problem, while insisting “not every solution is a government solution. There are ways to stimulate private investment, or stimulate links between universities and business. But if you ask people, should governments make smart investments in education and training to lift incomes, people overwhelmingly support that.”

Douglas Alexander, Labour’s chief campaign coordinator, said that the party had to balance being “radical” with being “credible ... what we recognise is that people will simply dismiss you if you’re offering more of the same, but equally if they don’t trust you with the public finances then they’re not going to vote for you.”

Within days of Axelrod’s appointment, Marcus Roberts, deputy general secretary of the Fabian Society, was excitedly describing him in the *New Statesman* as the man who “understands the importance of raising turnout amongst blue collar voters to ensure success in key battlegrounds.”

“David Axelrod embodies strategic brilliance and daring, radical politics,” he wrote.



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