

Labour's best chance for re-election lies in expressing support for an active state with social democratic values and avoiding the ideological vacuum of the Blue Labour movement and the Purple Book

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Ed Miliband's election as leader of the Labour party could be seen as a break from the technocratic New Labour project which disillusioned much of the party's traditional support and took it away from its traditional values. In the first instalment of a three part series from across the political spectrum, [Pete Redford](#) argues that the party must embrace its social democratic roots and resist populist 'Blue Labour' ideology which threatens to roll back the state when it is needed most.



Ed Miliband promised us a new approach based on social democratic values, a stance which won him the leadership, and provided a rise in Labour Party membership. I would like put forward the case for a revival of social democratic values and why Roy Hattersley and Kevin Hickson's ['In Praise of Social Democracy'](#) can provide us disillusioned members with optimism.

We expected a debate on these principles but have instead been met with silence rather than serious debate around policy or principles. This silence has only been broken by [Blue Labour](#) and the [Purple Book](#) which only seek to pander to the electorate rather than inspire them with new ideology. We do need to convince the electorate but instead of believing that voters are of fixed minds it is more democratic to offer leadership, argument and an alternative to the status quo based on recognisable social democratic values. Blue Labour and The Purple Book are 'anti-democratic' in that they don't provide leadership.

The idea of going back to a platform that lost Labour four successive general elections may seem a step backwards from the electoral success of New Labour. However, times change, and now is time for a revival of Labour's Social Democratic values. Labour lost the 2010 election but Cameron's Conservatives failed to secure the argument. In essence, the Tories failed to put forward a convincing argument to the British people.

The case for reaffirming our social democratic values is stronger than ever. The effects of the financial crisis were the result of inadequate regulation, admittedly on the part of New Labour, but it also shows the neoliberalism has failed. Greedy bankers made personal gains whilst the poorest suffered through widening inequality, causing social unrest and demonstrations as seen in the [riots](#) and [St Paul's protests](#). Spending cuts must be made but these cuts are ideological vandalism. Neoliberalism favours the rich and not the common good. Amazingly, Tories still maintain an unshakeable belief in this "outdated and failed philosophy" and it is to our detriment that we've failed to provide a strong response to it. Neoliberalism is on its knees and Social Democracy should be our response, not the [Social Democratic Party-esque](#) pandering to the electorate provided by the Purple Book and Blue Labour.

The common lack of belief in the party has held back Labour for too long. We should no longer compromise principles for power. What other organisation would be ashamed to shout out the name above the shop? New Labour provided us with years of policy rather than ideology; for us to be successful again the party needs faith in its ideology and to break free from the New Labour belief that abandoning principles is necessary for power. Ed Miliband's belief that Labour is not intellectually confident is an unfortunate truth. Not since [Hugh Gaitskell](#) and [Anthony Crosland](#) has the party had a clear ideological view and it now falls upon us to give an ideology back to the party.

It is clear that the divisions in the party are no longer



between 'left' and 'right' but 'statists' and 'localists'. There is strong advocacy of localism in both Blue Labour and the Purple Book. There is a compelling case for the need of a strong state that will both defeat the empty concept of the ['Big Society'](#) and provide the framework for much needed social democratic values to be implemented while accepting an important role for local government.

The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats believe the encroachment of state under New Labour threatens civil society and, in order to revive it, they must restrict the state. Cameron's frequent use of the ['big society'](#) to explain his ideological position is reliant on the need for non-state actors to step-in and provide services. This view has been met with derision by many and the electorate simply have no idea what it means. Blue Labour provided a misguided and flawed response to this. The emphasis on localism has led to their acceptance that the state became too big under New Labour. Putting them in the anti-statist camp with the coalition, the merits of the state have, as a consequence, been ignored.

The concept of autonomous communities is "in some senses desirable" but only the central state can conduct essential tasks and that it is the state who can perform other tasks fairly. The state can provide interventions to correct forms of local injustice that may occur, such as discrimination towards certain groups. The economic crisis we face can only be resolved through strong action from the state. It is impossible for local communities to act in such a manner. How can the Women's Institute regulate the banks?

Only the state acts fairly towards citizens. Devolution to local communities will only provide great inequality and a postcode lottery in the services provided. Crosland observed that public expenditure is misdirected towards the middle-classes as they have the loudest voice. If significant devolution to local communities was allowed the voice of the poorest will be drowned out, and only the state can provide a national minimum welfare standard. The sycophantic belief in localism that plagues recent Labour thought only serves to put in jeopardy the well-being of those who need the protection provided by the state and will inevitably lead to the bankruptcy of local authorities.

The economic crisis shows that the state does not intervene too much. They agree that the market is essential to providing a free and prosperous society but that it should not always be the solution. The internal market in the NHS didn't improve standards, nor has privatisation of the railways or the energy sector. Social democrats support the market but not where it is to the detriment of society and the economy. There has been a missed opportunity to voice the social democratic view of a 'mixed economy' put forward by Crosland that allows for a strong public sector to sit alongside the market and allow significant investment in the boom years.

Neoliberalism has failed the British people and growing support for traditional social democratic values is evident. The party must also resist ideologically vacuous publications such as Blue Labour and the Purple book which provide little in the way of the thought we need in order to imitate the electoral success of New Labour. The case for the active state is stronger than ever. We recognise the important role of local government but the localism advocated in these works are dangerous. Cameron offers no coherent political thought. It is this active state combined with social democratic values that will provide an adequate response to the Coalition's ideological cuts and empty concepts such as the 'big society'.

Pete Redford tweets [@PeteRedford](#)

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