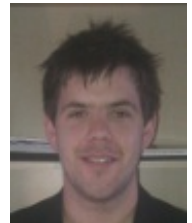


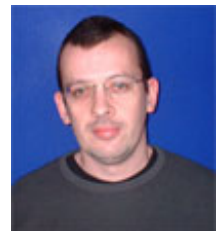
Traditional values, not New Labour policy, will win Labour the next election. It's time to go back to our social democratic principles.

Feb 7 2012

Labour must ditch the belief that abandoning principles is necessary to win political power. [Pete Redford](#) and [Kevin Hickson](#) argue that the party must have confidence in its founding values, not in an attempt to reassure the disillusioned but simply because they are both right and popular with the electorate.



To begin, we would like to thank [David Miliband](#) for taking the time to provide a serious response to Roy Hattersley and Kevin's original article, '[In Praise of Social Democracy](#)', published in *The Political Quarterly*. Obviously we disagree with David's assertions but welcome the serious debate it provides and that has been sorely needed in the Party. Here we would like to respond to David's critiques of the article and defend its advocacy of social democracy as the firm ideological grounding for the future of the Labour Party.



David has branded our 'seductive' case for social democracy as 'Reassurance Labour'. We have taken this to imply that we have somehow provided an argument that is intellectually lazy, wishing to retreat to a safe zone and resting on our laurels, while failing to acknowledge the uphill task that awaits us at the next election. If our fault is reassuring those disillusioned by New Labour and providing an alternative to the Blairites who wish to repackage New Labour, then we cannot apologise for this. We firmly believe that the complacency comes, not from us, but from David and other Blairites in the Labour Party who cling firmly to the 'unfinished' Blairite agenda of pre-2007 and the three consecutive election victories we enjoyed.

However, as David acknowledges, Britain and the World have changed since 2007. It is the Blairite agenda that has become out-dated, post-recession Britain is a country where traditional social democratic values are more relevant than Blairism. The deep effects of the financial crisis in our society were the result of inadequate regulation, on the part of New Labour. Greedy bankers made personal gains whilst the poorest suffered through widening inequality, causing social unrest and demonstrations seen in the August riots and the 'occupy' protests. Inadequate regulation favoured the rich and not the common good. Labour did great things in power (the Minimum Wage, Future Jobs Fund, and badly needed investment in public services to name but a few) but we can't help but think that caution for the sake of popular opinion squandered great opportunity to do so much more.

David argues that "the choice of principle and power is logically as well as politically disastrous". We argue that principles do not have to be compromised for power. Faced by the current economic realities the electorate demand strong and coherent leadership, Labour can provide this based on its traditional values. The laissez faire approach to the market has brought Neoliberalism to its knees and policy based on traditional social democratic principles should be our response to regain power. Not a rebranding of New Labour and the pandering to the electorate provided by David and the authors of the [The Purple Book and Blue Labour](#).

Moreover, we believe that Labour should defend the central state. We do not argue that it can do everything, nor is it perfect. There is still a need for constitutional reform, more effective relations with

local government and for greater international cooperation between nation-states in the era of globalisation. But we have to recognise that it is only the central state that will provide more effective regulation of the markets and repair the damage done by the financial sector on our economy. New Labour left us too dependent on financial services, lacking effective regulation and an active industrial policy. This was our greatest failure, domestically, in power and we must take responsibility for our actions.

David, in his advocacy of finding alternatives to the central state, misses a crucial point. It is the market – not the state – that should be the primary focus of criticism and reforms. Roy Hattersley pointed out in his [response](#) to David:

“Who now believes that “light regulation” will encourage banks to contribute to the general good, or that the profit motive – as illustrated by the collapse of Southern Cross – is the best stimulus to high-quality domiciliary care?”

The central state is not perfect but it can provide safeguards to a laissez-faire approach to the market which have proved to be disastrous for society and citizens.

The contributors to *The Purple Book* and those associated with Blue Labour share a commitment to extreme localism. David accuses us of wanting to diminish the role of local government. However, we are struck by how pointless his commitment to local government is as a response to the major issues of the day. Few, if any, banks are based locally – perhaps they should be but they are not. David, through his advocacy of “double devolution”, wants to decentralise public services but at the same time fails to explain how this can be achieved or do anything other than make the postcode lottery in welfare and public services that Labour has historically sought to diminish even worse. City academies prove our point, in that they are a perfect example of how the interests of the articulate, self-confident and determined minority are promoted at the expense of the community as a whole. We do not wish to diminish the role of local government but we believe the central state is more often than not the best way of providing essential social services.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that divisions in the party are no longer between ‘left’ and ‘right’ but ‘statists’ and ‘localists’. We maintain our 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. But we believe re-election will elude us until we establish a distinctive radical reputation based on social democratic principles. That requires a leader who has the courage and character to acknowledge the fundamental flaws in New Labour thinking. Our membership cards state that the “Labour party is a democratic socialist party”. We should no longer be ashamed to shout out the name above the shop. The lack of belief in our traditional values has held back Labour for too long.

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 promised us this when he ran for Labour leader and this is why we supported him then and continue to support him now. He has effectively tapped into the sense of unfairness felt, legitimately, by the British people against bankers’ bonuses, tax evasion and unfairness in society. We have confidence in our traditional values, not because we wish to reassure the disillusioned but because they are both right and popular with the electorate.

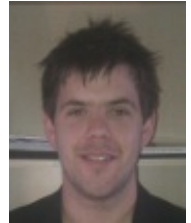
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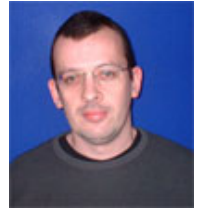
Pete Redford is a former Parliamentary researcher and a freelance article and speech writer currently undertaking his PhD in Politics and Social Policy at the University of Birmingham. He holds a BA (Hons) British Politics and Legislative Studies and MA Global Political Economy from the University of Hull. His research interests include British ‘aspirational’ politics, social mobility, the ‘underclass’ and traditional Labour Party thought. He tweets @PeteRedford

[Read articles by Pete Redford.](#)



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Dr Kevin Hickson is Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of Liverpool. His research focuses on British politics, especially British political ideology and political economy. He is a prominent contributor to recent debates over the ideological identity of New Labour and of the Conservatives under David Cameron and has published highly regarded works on the political thought of all three major political parties in the UK. He is currently undertaking research in the political ideology of the Coalition Government, concentrating on the meaning of the ‘Big Society’. He co-authored of “In Praise of Social Democracy” with Roy Hattersley.



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