

The rhetorical shift in Labour ideology could denote a return of socialist values to British politics

Andrew Crines *argues the recent shadow cabinet reshuffle and the shift in Labour rhetoric towards a new 'radicalism' may demonstrate the party is ready to join the new mainstream of European social democracy.*



Ed Miliband's recent cabinet reshuffle provides an opportunity to affirm to the electorate exactly what kind of government he intends to lead. This is vital towards advancing modern Labour rhetoric and provides an understanding of how Labour's ideological journey of travel frames its policy agenda.

The decision to bring in Jon Cruddas implies a more classical form of Labour rhetoric, rooted in selected Third Way values but tied to stronger critique of those considered to be excessively wealthy. Although Cruddas backed David in the 2010 leadership election, the younger brother legitimises this move saying, "Cruddas is known as one of the most radical and deepest thinkers in the party. I am delighted he will be working with Angela Eagle in her proposed role as Chair of the National Policy Forum combined with Shadow Leader of the House." This confirms an emerging necessity in Labour rhetoric to emphasise a new radicalism whilst drawing in talents from across the ideological divide. Although on the surface this may appear to be "the reshuffle-that-barely-was" it may also come to be seen as the point where Labour's rhetoric re-found something of its credibility.

In terms of elite rhetoric and ideology, the New Generation of Miliband's activists have had a very strange emergence from the ashes of New Labour. Labels like Next Labour, Blue Labour and Renaissance Labour all contributed rhetorically to an ideological confusion which reduced Labour's electoral message. It is this confusion which needs to be addressed in order for a clear message to begin to resonate with the electorate should they wish to position themselves convincingly for the next election.

Labour's ideological rhetoric has recently come under useful scrutiny by figures such as Kevin Hickson and Roy Hattersley. However, the elite rhetoric remains vague on how the New Generation will advance. Both Hickson and Hattersley rightly make the case that "[the arguments in favour of social democracy have never been more compelling](#)", yet their deployed rhetoric continues to emphasise the importance of reducing austerity rather than highlighting social democratic investment.

The rhetoric of modernisation is an ever evolving concept and can be seen in this recent reshuffle. It can often mean renouncing one particular interpretation of Labour ideology whilst favouring another.

Centrally, the rhetoric of continued modernisation remains a vital means of demonstrating a certain 'newness' to the electorate; to show they are no longer old, but are in fact, new.

Also, a more apparent left-leaning shift in Labour rhetoric may also demonstrate they have finally have put the 1983-1992 electoral defeats behind them. Modernisations have taken over the party machine since 1983, with a ceaseless fear of a repeat haunting the leadership since. However, the conditions facing Labour in 1983 were of such uniqueness that fearing a repeat was always highly unlikely. More broadly, the electorate across Europe are becoming increasingly disillusioned with free market economics.

With austerity increasingly seen by leaders such as Obama and Hollande as part of the problem, the Labour Party now may finally be able to play the socialist card without fear. Indeed, one cannot participate in an investment-led global economy if the domestic economy is being strangled by free market theory. The only concern here would be if the Labour Party have modernised to the extent to which they are incapable of remembering key strategies such as nationalisation of industry and macro-economic investment strategies. To remind them, Cruddas will need to emphasise how the state can be

an effective player in fostering economic prosperity.

In order to reap rewards in the future, one must invest in the present. It is increasingly evident that the Conservative/Orange Book strategy of putting nothing into the economy will produce nothing at the end. Labour rhetoric can therefore feel more confident in acknowledging its socialist instinct to invest in order to grow. This rhetorical strategy would have proven riskier in 1997, 2001, 2005, and 2010 – however we no longer live in that world. That was the world of deregulation, easy credit, and a stronger private sector. The world of today needs a strong state-led investment strategy, paid for by corporation and [transaction taxes](#). The rhetoric of ideological modernisation can therefore demonstrate that the Labour Party is ready to join the new mainstream of European social democracy – however it remains to be seen whether it ever be proud of its traditional socialist values.

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About the author

Andrew Crines is a lecturer and researcher at the University of Huddersfield, specialising in oratorical and rhetorical analysis across British Politics. Dr Crines has written a monograph entitled 'Michael Foot and the Labour Leadership', and is currently editing a volume with Dr Richard Hayton (Huddersfield) on Oratory in the Labour Party.

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