

# Why the Mail was Not right to attack Ralph Miliband (Guest blog)

 [blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2013/10/01/why-the-mail-was-not-right-to-attack-ralph-miliband-guest-blog/](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2013/10/01/why-the-mail-was-not-right-to-attack-ralph-miliband-guest-blog/)

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I [wrote earlier](#) - with a somewhat tongue in cheek headline – that the Mail was ‘right to attack Ralph Miliband’. My colleague [Dr Bart Cammerts](#) disagrees. He makes a very strong ideological case and includes some interesting insights from Miliband Snr on the UK news media. Read on!

Politics has always been and will always be a dirty game. A statement like this is – as a Dutch saying goes – like kicking in a wide open door. However, the rightwing printing press in this country takes negative political campaigning, blatant racism and bias to quite extraordinary levels compared to other mature democracies. My main question here is whether this is a good thing for democracy in this country and my answer is unequivocally no. Newspapers like the Daily Mail and what they represent are a festering cancer within British democracy, which is in a pretty dire state already<sup>[1]</sup>.

In this country, under the veil of freedom of speech and liberal values a white-oriented, misogynist and vicious kind of press is operating that veers frightfully close to fascist propaganda, and the Daily Mail is the torch-bearer par excellence of that kind of vile press. It continues to amaze me how it frames the world we live in. While the world out there ain't a pretty sight (never has been), the way the Daily Mail represents it is shocking on a daily basis. This manifests itself first and foremost in terms how the Daily Mail writes about the weak and vulnerable in society, about women, about ethnic and religious minorities, on subcultures and how it castigates negative moral judgments on everything and everyone – in fact, in this regard it is frighteningly egalitarian; politicians, celebs, ordinary citizens, everybody is fair game. Except the animals, because the Daily Mail loves its animal stories.



## Unapologetically Ideological

The Daily Mail is less egalitarian, however, when it comes to its unapologetic ideological stance, which in a propagandistic way celebrates a morally righteous neo-liberal and above all market-driven society and ridicules all discourses that diverge from this. Anything that smells of socialism, it argues, will lead us straight to a dark Stalinist and left-wing fascist past. In fact intrinsically part of such castigating discourses is a classic tactic of demonization, namely implying that the communist ‘experiments’ in Russia, Eastern Europe, Asia and Caribbean were/are actually at the very least as ‘evil’ and dangerous as the fascist ‘experiments’ in Germany and Southern Europe during the second world war and needs to be condemned in equal measures.

As a long-time anti-fascist activist(\*), this link has always made me very agitated. Despite the fact that equating communism with fascism is intellectually unfair, it is also not entirely surprising. Hitler's discourse was after all referring to national ‘socialism’ and under fascism collectivist solutions for some problems in society were also sought and at times enforced. There were unfortunately also disturbing convergences in terms of the brutal ways in which both ideologies were imposed on society and also in the atrocious way they both dealt with those who held opposing views.

## Higher Ideology

I would like to contend, however, that the main difference and the reason why both ideologies cannot be put on par just like that is that their basic core aims and what they propagate are in my personal view of an entirely different moral category. Intrinsicly at the level of ideations communism is about redistribution of resources and control, striving towards a much higher degree of equality in society, transforming private property into collective goods and internationalism.

Fascism, on the other hand, was/is about increasing tensions between different ethnicities, privileging one group – the pure in society over and above all others – the impure, exterminating or at the very least removing these others, protecting and preserving the interests of the owning classes, rejecting equality, normalizing inequality, and an extreme exclusionary nationalism. Any sane and civilized person has to admit that these are quite different kinds of ideas and value systems which

just cannot be considered as similar at a moral or an ethical level.

### Read His Works

As such, I also believe that much of what Miliband Sr. is being accused of – e.g his critiques of the British imperial zeal, its island mentality and his lamenting of the deeply entrenched UK class system – are perfectly valid and highly relevant critiques, certainly today. In fact, I happened to be reading some of his work on the tube lately and it struck me how very accurate many of his observations are even today, 45 years on.

Funnily enough, I don't think Ralph Miliband himself would have been surprised at the attacks on his son through him. Tellingly, referring to dissenting ideas and the media, Miliband Sr. argued that for ideological indoctrination to be successful, a monopoly on the channels of expression by minority power is by no means necessary in capitalist societies, on the contrary, the expression and existence of dissent is essential for the maintenance of minority power, but he also wrote that:

*"[freedom of expression] has to be set in the real economic and political context of [capitalist] societies; and in that context the free expression of ideas and opinions mainly means the free expression of ideas and opinions which are helpful to the prevailing system of power and privilege."*<sup>[2]</sup>

Or arguing that mere pluralism does not lead to diversity:

*"Newspapers everywhere vary enormously in quality, content and tendency. [...] But whatever their endless differences of every kind, most newspapers in the capitalist world have one crucial characteristic in common, namely their strong, often their passionate hostility to anything further to the left than the milder forms of social-democracy and quite commonly to these milder forms as well"*<sup>[3]</sup>

And to end, an insight appropriate in terms of the attack on him in the Daily Mail:

*"the press may well claim to be 'independent' and to fulfill an important watchdog function. What the claim overlooks, however, is the very large fact that it is the Left at which the watchdogs generally bark with most ferocity, and what they are above all protecting is the status quo."* <sup>[4]</sup>

Actually, more people should go and read the work of Ralph Miliband and acquaint themselves with his views. Now would that not be an amazingly good outcome of this media controversy and very nasty attempt at smearing an ideological enemy?

[UPDATE: this is precisely what has happened - [sales of Miliband Snr's books have soared](#) - so the Mail has ended up boosting the profile of Marxism]

[This post by [Dr Bart Cammaerts, LSE](#)]

### (\*) Disclosure:

In Antwerp, where I am originally from, a neo-Fascist party had at some point 33% of the popular vote and I together with many others played my role in the active resistance against this.

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[1] Stoker, Gerry (2012) *British Democracy in Crisis*, London: British Academy.  
<http://www.britac.ac.uk/news/news.cfm/newsid/662>

Wilks-Heeks, Stuart, Blick, Andrew and Crone, Stephen (2012) 'How Democratic is the UK? The 2012 Audit'. London:

Democratic Audit.: <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/jul/06/british-democracy-decline-report?newsfeed=true>

[2] Miliband, R. (1969) *The State in Capitalist Society: The Analysis of the Western System of Power*. London: Quartet Books Ltd., p. 197

[3] *ibid*, 198

[4] *ibid*, 199