Ed Miliband’s problem with the Sun (and the working classes in general)

Remember Brave Ed standing up to Rupert Murdoch after the phone-hacking scandal burst into the open? He quite rightly earned credit back in 2011 for cutting the cord that had previously bound UK politicians, including Labour leaders (like his own former bosses Tony Blair and Gordon Brown) to Britain’s most politically-interfering proprietor.

Surely, the shadow cast by Sun must be shortening? Its sales are falling and its power to punish opponents must have been diminished by the more cautious post-Leveson climate?

Yet more recently, the polls have tightened and the Sun’s key role in the public discourse of those vital voters in the C2 bracket has given it even more electoral significance. Team Miliband had to swallow hard and get a bit closer to the UK’s most influential red-top.
Back in June we saw how Ed got himself in a muddle with the Hillsborough campaigners over a photo of him promoting a special World Cup edition of the paper. He was pictured grinning with a copy of the paper but then had to apologise.

In September he was attacked by the Sun for not posing for its promotion of the military charity Hope For Heroes. Now the Sun has lead the charge on the Thornberry Rochester tweet debacle, even sending a white van to her home bedecked with its logo.

So has Ed allowed himself to be backed into a corner where the paper most popular with Britain’s working classes is so keen to give him a kicking? Will he find himself on the front page, a la Kinnock, superimposed upon a lightbulb?

I think most people will sympathise with his courage in standing up to ‘press bullies’. But the trouble is that it’s
more confused than that. Miliband has also cosied up to them by making strange and unconvincing attempts to talk tabloid in terms of opportunistic policy-making (eg more immigration officers) and clunky rhetoric (I feel 'respect' for the St George's flag).

And it's not just the lads from News UK's lovely new London Bridge offices who are putting pressure on Miliband. Remember it was the left-wing Statesman that had the cruelest, most extensive and detailed critique of Ed's character and chances, just a couple of weeks ago.

The fact is that Labour has a real problem with securing popular support, even from their traditional base. As Hazel Blears has pointed out, they have too many wonks as MPs instead of people with a real-life background. But beyond that they have failed to articulate a set of policies that convinces people they have an agenda for the nation as a whole. Their problem is not Ukip or the Sun, it is their own limited horizons.