

Prisoner of narrative, not the unions

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Which Ed?

Perhaps Ed Miliband's real problem is the danger of becoming a prisoner of narrative, not the unions.

The (mainly right-wing) British newspapers have already decided, without much concrete evidence, that he is a return to a pre-Blairite Left.

Blairites think he is the Brown Continuation Army, based perhaps on on rather more evidence from his tenure as Gordon's ambassador to the court of Tony.

The soft Left certainly think he is their man, although the minority of 'real' socialists left in the Labour Party already despise him, in contrast to his father who was a 'proper' (and therefore marginalised) Marxist.

Even the Trades Unions do not strike me as particularly sure that Ed is 'their man' but they are content that everyone thinks that they have influence again.

Ed Miliband is [restricted in how he can shape this narrative](#). If he tacks to the right with some anti-union gestures it may well be seen as predictable posturing. If he stresses the Fight Against The Cuts then he risks confirming Labour's status as the opposition, not an alternative Government.

But he should remember that predecessors such as Thatcher, Major and Blair all began with narratives imposed (or assumed) at the inception of their leaderships that were rapidly and significantly transformed within a year or two of the realities of power.*

Ed is young and clever enough to be able to adapt. This is about more than spin, of course, because how he constructs a narrative will ultimately depend on policy and politics.

And if anyone thinks that he really is trapped already, then I would suggest you go back to the early days of Gordon Brown's leadership. Admittedly, very different circumstances. But boy, did the Conventional Wisdom change rapidly as the Great Leader turned into the Great Vacillator. Then from the Man Who Saved The World, to the Man Who Broke Britain.

I look forward to seeing which Ed will emerge from all this.

* Without going into screeds of historical analysis, it seems to me that all three did shift the narrative around them – for good or ill. Mrs Thatcher was originally depicted as a housewife pragmatist who became seen as a right wing economic and geo-political ideologue. Tony Blair was at first talked about as a socialist wolf in centrist clothing who was full of spin and nothing much else. He ended up cast as a right-wing radical with an overblown moral sense. John Major veered from being Son Of Thatcher into a europhile, liberal centrist.

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