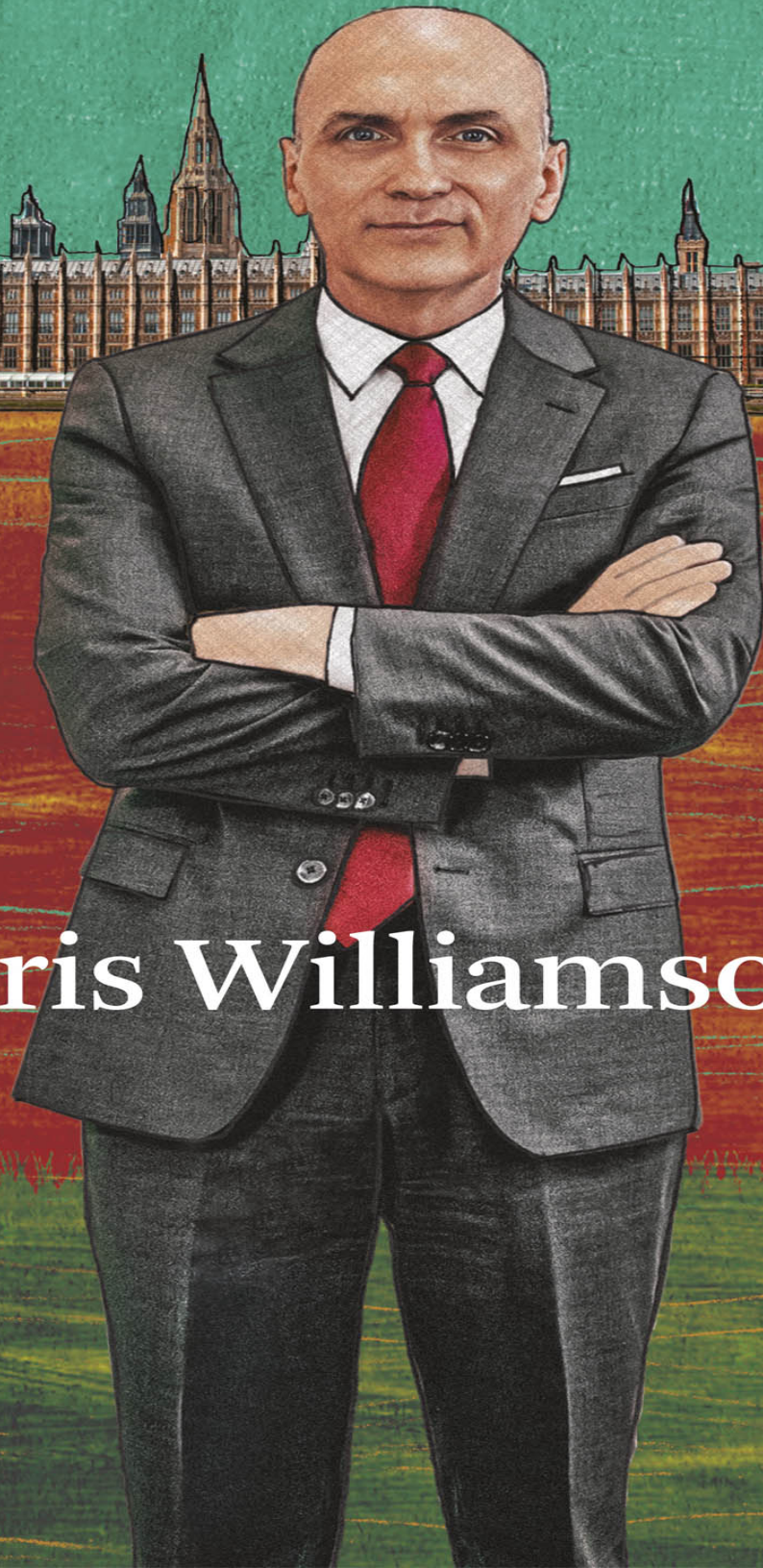


# TEN YEARS HARD LABOUR



Chris Williamson

lk



Chris Williamson describes the political assassination of Jeremy Corbyn and some of his supporters, including Williamson himself. He reveals the ruthless manipulation of the party machine by Labour's right, not new but seen here at its most unprincipled. Williamson's analysis will be contentious and his trenchant views make uncomfortable reading. But for those who want to see a socialist future, or anyone who has ever voted Labour and wants to see it do better, this is essential reading.

**Ken Loach, Filmmaker**

Chris Williamson is a compelling and committed socialist and was Jeremy Corbyn's most loyal supporter in Parliament: that is why he had to be sabotaged at all costs. The left-wing came so close to Parliamentary victory under Corbyn but ultimately failed: Williamson gives an insiders' informed analysis of why this happened and what needs to happen if the Left are ever to gain ascendancy. This book is a fascinating account of his struggle and the way forward.

**Alexei Sayle, actor, author, stand-up comedian**

A monumental injustice was done to Chris Williamson and so many others during the period of hope and pain discussed in this book. Now, hear Chris Williamson speak, his is a story of brushing up against the parameters of a well-managed political system which can only assimilate so much. We have a carefully curated hierarchy of political subjectivity which is determined by the subjects adherence to certain pious hypocrisies imposed from above. Behind Chris there are millions like him who were cancelled out of the right to participate in this political system due to their dedication to a more just society.

**Lowkey, musician and activist**

Chris Williamson's '10 Years Hard Labour' is an eye-opening, and at times, infuriating, insider's account of the coordinated political assault on the British Left that took place inside a party that was once its home. It is also the inspiring story of a veteran of workers' struggles who stood on principle and weathered the establishment's attacks while so many around him caved.

**Max Blumenthal, author, editor and founder of The Grayzone**

Chris Williamson is as always concise, honest and optimistic - and his book is a must read. Detailing the campaign by Zionists and Labour Party conservatives to deny the British public of a once in a lifetime opportunity to be governed by principled people like himself and Jeremy Corbyn.

**Miko Peled, author and human rights activist**

Activists need to read this book to fully understand the extent to which powerful forces within the Labour Party were prepared to go to destroy any chance of a Corbyn election win. Chris Williamson has drawn on his experience to produce an analysis of the party following its defeat in the 2010 general election. His insight will hopefully enable us to be better armed next time.

**Sheila Coleman, Hillsborough Justice Campaign**

This book will bring joy to the hearts of those who have longed to see the reptiles of the Parliamentary Labour Party and Party hierarchy called out for treacherously undermining Corbyn. It also gives overdue vent to criticism of Corbyn himself for trying to appease the hyenas who were using the fabricated anti-Semitism issue to bring him down - a tragic mistake as futile as it was disloyal to people like Chris Williamson who stood their ground. This account

demonstrates what happens when a party loses touch with its popular base and every sense of decency, which should prompt thousands to tear up their Labour Party cards in disgust.

**Peter Ford, former British ambassador to Bahrain and Syria.**

A Fascinating insight into the dirty underhanded shenanigans that happened inside the Labour Party covering the Miliband and Corbyn years. From a man who was loyal to its leadership but paid a heavy price for standing up for its members and activists.

This book exposes the collusion that happened inside the party to ensure the power remained in the hands of the few and the offer of radical change and hope would never get the opportunity to flourish.

**Ian Hodson, National President Bakers', Food & Allied Workers Union**

Chris Williamson's emotional honesty and fierce political polemic make this 'ringside view' of an MP who was in the inner circle and shadow minister under both Miliband and Corbyn a shocking eye opener and powerful read.

The Left needs an honest account and reckoning of the rise and fall of 'Corbynism' - and I hope this book is the start of that much needed self-criticism and honest debate.

**Salma Yaqoob, peace activist**

An unflinching examination of the collapse of the left wing of the British Labour Party. Williamson courageously offers an inside account of corporate infiltration and how the party became reactionary and betrayed its origins. And he offers a searing indictment of the cannibalistic witch-hunt that libelled Corbyn and others with false accusations of anti-Semitism to cleanse the party of the left. This is a

necessary corrective history for British audiences and a warning for the left in all Western democracies.

**Rania Khalek, journalist, Breakthrough News**

## **IN MEMORY**

To: Lonny, my late wife, who was my soulmate,  
and Marilyn Murray, who was one of the  
kindest people I have ever known.

Chris Williamson

**TEN YEARS  
HARD  
LABOUR**

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**Chris Williamson** was born in Derby into a working class family in 1956. He left school at 15 to work in a factory, before training as a bricklayer. He has also been a market trader, a social worker, and a welfare rights officer.

He joined the Labour Party in 1976 and is a lifelong socialist, trade unionist, and animal rights campaigner. He has been a Labour councillor, council leader, and an MP.

He was a Shadow Minister under Ed Miliband and Jeremy Corbyn, and, from 2017 onwards, he was Corbyn's most vocal supporter inside the Parliamentary Labour Party.

He was suspended from the party in February 2019 and, after being briefly reinstated, was re-suspended in June 2019. Later, the High Court declared the second suspension to be unlawful, but a third suspension was imposed. He resigned from the party after Labour's National Executive Committee prevented him from standing as a Labour candidate in the 2019 general election.

***Some of the information contained in this book is a matter of public record, the rest is an account of Chris Williamson's own unique insights based on documentary records he kept at the time.***

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Before I began writing this book, I viewed it as a daunting task, and I never imagined that I would be able to flesh out 10 years of history, memories, and experiences. It was a long slog, but I was hugely assisted by so many people.

This book would probably never have been written were it not for my comrade and confidante Paul Mallet. As the dirty tricks mounted up against me in my later years in Parliament, Paul continually badgered me to “*write it down for the book*”. I would like to express my gratitude to Lee Garratt, who encouraged me to take the plunge and put pen to paper.

I also want to thank Dave Middleton, who did an excellent job on my first draft, proofreading and highlighting where more clarity was required. I am particularly grateful to Ammar Kazmi for his meticulous attention to detail in editing the final draft. I owe them both a huge debt of gratitude for their assistance in helping me to bring this project to fruition and for sparing my blushes.

I must also thank James Shires and Sarah Russell, who reminded me about a number of happenings during the decade after 2010.

So many comrades had my back when I was under attack. They inspired me to record what was a unique and turbulent time for the labour movement. I will be eternally grateful to those thousands of grassroots activists for their incredible solidarity, and I hope they feel that I have done justice to this period of our history in which they played such an important part.

However, my biggest thanks must go to my partner, Maggie Amsbury. Throughout the many tribulations I faced in my parliamentary life, and especially during the time of the witch-hunt, she supported me unequivocally with true love and encouragement. She also motivated me to finally set the record straight for posterity.

All errors and inadequacies in this work are, of course, my own.

Derby, 2022



## PREFACE

With some notable exceptions, left-wing British politicians have, in general, failed to engage in one of the greatest, timeless mediums of human expression: books. As a result, we continually fail to set the record straight and to promote our understanding of history, ceding ground to right-wing revisionists and propagandists to tell future generations the tales of our time. *“If there’s a book that you want to read, but it hasn’t been written yet, then you must write it”*, goes the clichéd – but nevertheless true – maxim of US American Nobel laureate Toni Morrison. That sums up the genesis of this treatise on my experiences of the Ed Miliband and Jeremy Corbyn eras.

Despite numerous works having been written about the period covered in this book, all of them are plagued by a failure to truly lift the veil and uncover its sordid underbellies. That is what I have tried to do now, for the first time.

Whilst I have done a lot of writing over the years, this is the first time that I’ve written a book. I’ve tried to make it as readable as possible, with short chapters filled with subheadings. I’ve also attempted to keep it as chronological as I can, but there are inevitably some relevant thematic overlaps that I’ve preferred to keep together.

Most political memoirs are written by people who are beguiled by Westminster, but I was never so enamoured. So, mine is a unique and critical perspective. I had a ringside seat to the action. I saw first-hand the machinations of the Miliband years, the explosion of hope

generated by Corbyn, and the unscrupulous ways in which powerful vested interests plotted to take him down.

In this book, I recount my experiences of the post-New Labour era. I shed new light on the major policy battles between 2010 and 2015, and I examine why, despite what many had hoped, Ed Miliband failed to escape New Labour's clutches.

I also evaluate the Jeremy Corbyn epoch. Why did Labour's bureaucracy act as a hostile fifth column? How did Corbyn's trusted advisers let him down? Why were Labour MPs completely out-of-step with Labour's supporters? How did trade union leaders deliver a fatal blow to the Corbyn project? And how did the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs facilitate the witchhunt against longstanding anti-racist socialists? These are issues that many other commentators have simply refused to address.

After being relentlessly smeared, I now seek to set the record straight and offer some thoughts on the future of the movement that was awoken by Corbyn's transformative vision. Britain continues to face insecurity, tyranny, and war. It is thanks to powerful forces, who benefit from these tragedies, that neoliberalism continues to dominate Britain's domestic agenda and international policy, despite its destructive impact on the lives of ordinary people. The failure of the Corbyn project should serve as a cautionary tale as we rebuild from the rubble.

We don't have to accept the inequality and injustice that 40 years of neoliberalism have visited on the people of this country and those around the world. We must build on the solidarity that we saw at the height of the Corbyn years. In words inspired by Percy Shelley: we are many, they are few. If we want it, the world is ours to win.

## LIST OF MAIN ACRONYMS

BICOM - Britain Israel Communications and Research  
Centre

BoD - Board of Deputies of British Jews

CAA - Campaign Against Antisemitism

CLP - Constituency Labour Party

CPS - Crown Prosecution Service

CST - Community Security Trust

DPP - Director of Public Prosecutions

DWP - Department for Work and Pensions

EHRC - Equality and Human Rights Commission

FBU - Fire Brigades Union

FCR - Fiscal Credibility Rule

IHRA - International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance

JLC - Jewish Leadership Council

JLM - Jewish Labour Movement

JVL - Jewish Voice for Labour

LAW - Labour Against the Witch-Hunt

LFI - Labour Friends of Israel

LOTO - Leader of the Opposition's Office

LRC - Labour Representation Committee

MMT - Modern Monetary Theory

MP - Member of Parliament

NCC - National Constitutional Committee

NEC - National Executive Committee

OULC - Oxford University Labour Club

PCC - Police and Crime Commissioner

PCH - Portcullis House

PLP - Parliamentary Labour Party

PMQs - Prime Minister's Questions

PRS - Private Rented Sector

SCG - Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs

TUSC - Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

UJS - Union of Jewish Students

UNSC - United Nations Security Council

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE STARTING GUN

In the early hours of 7 May 2010, at the election count in Derby North, I could feel a burning excitement in the pit of my stomach. The vote was looking dangerously close, and the stoicism I had previously been displaying was starting to wither. I'd already taken myself away from the frenzy and tried to compose myself outside and, when I returned, I was keeping a distance from the delirium of the count. Minutes felt like hours. *"Just give us the damn result!"*, I kept thinking. It was at that point of total exasperation when I finally saw a familiar face approaching. It was one of my closest comrades and confidantes, Fareed Hussain.

*"You've won! You've won!"*, Fareed exclaimed, embracing me with a bear-like hug.

*"No, no, I don't want to look. Don't tempt fate!"*, I said.

*"Look at the votes piling up! You've done it!"*, he insisted.

To be elected to serve my hometown was one of the proudest moments of my entire political life. There we were, in the small hours of a spring day, marching to the local Labour club, where I belted out the words to 'The Red Flag' hymn. We had defied the predictions of local hacks and had bucked the national trend, and I was soon to be

heading down to the House of Commons. The euphoria was indescribable.

In the following days, I spoke to many grassroots activists and trade unionists who were hoping that the Labour Party could be reimagined under a new leader. Britain had already endured over three decades of neoliberalism. New Labour, which in 2002 Margaret Thatcher reportedly described as her greatest achievement,<sup>1</sup> was finally out of office after 13 years in government. It was replaced by a Tory-Lib Dem Coalition Government that inflicted a new era of austerity on the country, underpinned by a deepened commitment to the same failed economic ideology of the previous decades. Those three decades had seen an exponential rise in inequality and a public policy regime that had essentially implemented socialism for the rich and crumbs from the table for the rest. The government found at least £500 billion to bail out the banks in 2008. But the British people, who'd been immiserated, never received a bailout.

When I arrived in the Palace of Westminster on 10 May 2010, it felt intimidating. I was in an unfamiliar environment, with its antiquated conventions and its archaic parlance, which sets it apart from the people whom it is supposed to represent. But I was determined not to be overawed by the place, and so I applied to make my maiden speech - the first speech given by a newly elected MP - on the first sitting of the new Parliament. I recall being in the Commons chamber feeling incredibly nervous. I was mindful of the great orators that had graced the green benches before me, and I had an enormous sense of self-doubt. It was a classic case of imposter syndrome. I felt like a fish out of water. I was also self-conscious about the convention of having to stand up at the end of every speech to catch the Speaker's eye, indicating that I wanted to



participate in the debate. I knew that all my friends and family would be watching on TV, so the pressure was on.

When I was eventually called, a relief came over me. The debate under consideration was the Coalition Government's first Queen's Speech setting out their policy programme, so I had plenty to speak about. I talked about poverty, inequality, climate change, local government, and the previous Labour government's record. I was complimentary about some of New Labour's achievements (an indication of my naïvety at the time in not fully recognising how much of an Establishment tool it had been). I also expressed my concern that the Coalition's plans would *"take us back into a period in which people are forced into poverty pay"*, and make local authorities cut services *"to deflect attention away from the Coalition Government's proposals"*.<sup>2</sup> Given what happened in the decade that followed, my worries proved prescient.

I was full of hope and anticipation about what I could achieve as the MP for my home city. I wasn't going to just disappear into the Westminster village. I wanted to be a visible presence in the constituency: a resource for local people. So, when the outgoing Derby North MP Bob Laxton asked if I wanted to take over the lease on his constituency office, which was located on the third floor of an anonymous office block, I politely declined. I told him that I wanted a city centre shopfront so that I could be easily accessible to constituents. Laxton's reaction was priceless. He said, *"That's a big mistake. You want to make it as difficult as possible for people to get in touch with you"*. I thought that was a curious attitude for an elected politician, particularly as Laxton was a people person. It shows that 13 years in the Westminster bubble can addle the brain.

As I was to discover, parliamentary pomposity is endemic. A perfect example of this was when Jim Dowd, one of the few Labour MPs with a working class background, loudly lambasted me for having the temerity to show some students around the Members' Cloakroom. Dowd came in afterwards and started yelling at the top of his voice that "*strangers*" were not allowed to enter what he seemed to consider an inner sanctum. Dowd wanted access restricted to parliamentary plonkers like him. Just to reinforce the point, he complained to the House authorities who then installed a bigger sign at eye-level, reminding everyone that the cloakroom was for MPs only. The pompous prat stood down in 2017, and he later became one of 15 former Labour MPs who urged voters not to back Jeremy Corbyn in the 2019 general election.<sup>3</sup> They signed a full-page advert that appeared in a number of local newspapers across Labour's heartlands in the north of England, targeting marginal constituencies. Like so many other Labour MPs, Dowd should never have been allowed within a million miles of an elected role for the party.

However, those parliamentary peculiarities, as absurd as I found them, were not my main issue of concern. At the time, I had been the Labour Group leader in Derby for the previous eight years, and so I knew that local government was going to be in for a rough ride. I was therefore pleased to get a seat on the Communities and Local Government Select Committee. This gave me the opportunity to directly scrutinise and challenge the disastrous proposals being pushed by Eric Pickles, the Local Government Secretary throughout my first stint in Parliament.

Just as I was beginning to get to grips with the Select Committee, Ed Miliband appointed me as the Shadow Fire Minister in October 2010, only five months after I was first elected to Parliament. I guess it was a reward for the

support I'd given him in his leadership bid. I'd backed Ed because I believed that he was the only contender capable of beating his brother David, the continuity New Labour candidate. There was growing dissatisfaction in the country with Blairite politics, and I was concerned that David Miliband would further alienate the party from working class communities. In fact, I think it would be fair to say that, without my support, Ed wouldn't have been elected; his margin of victory was miniscule, just 1.4 per cent over his brother. I not only voted for him myself (with a higher weighted vote as an MP), but I also led a mobilisation campaign in Derby North and Derby South where members gave Ed their first preference. Only 69 other constituencies did the same.<sup>4</sup>

Some mischievous, self-professed 'left-wing' critics have since slated me for not supporting Diane Abbott. The allusion is that my later support for Corbyn wasn't genuine, and that I was really a Blairite wolf in sheep's clothing who had somehow reinvented himself upon returning to Parliament in 2017. It's a curious criticism, because Dennis Skinner attracted no censure for backing David, nor did the seven other socialist MPs who also voted for Ed. In fact, only six left-wingers gave Abbott their first preference. If I had backed Abbott, David would have won and that would have meant, ultimately, that Corbyn would never have been given the chance to stand as leader in 2015.

## **Ditching New Labour?**

Ed Miliband had promised to turn the page on New Labour. Many of us wondered whether he meant it and, if he did, whether he was even capable of doing so. He certainly didn't get off to a great start with the people he appointed to his Shadow Cabinet. To be charitable to him, the PLP

wasn't exactly brimming with talent. During his reign, Blair had stuffed Labour's benches with empty suits: lackeys who would fill out space and blindly follow the whip. People like Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell were considered beyond the pale. Whilst Miliband did appoint Diane Abbott to the junior role of Shadow Public Health Minister, she was never in his Shadow Cabinet, and he sacked her three years later for "*fail[ing] to show sufficient loyalty*".<sup>5</sup> Sadly, Miliband's first Shadow Cabinet was a *Who's Who* of New Labour drones.

There wasn't even a place for an experienced left-wing thinker like the late Michael Meacher, who had served with distinction as a government minister from 1997 to 2003 (later to be sacked by Blair). Meacher had even backed Miliband in the leadership election, but he received nothing in acknowledgment. I believe Meacher would have made an excellent Shadow Chancellor. He regularly spoke about the economy and tax issues, inside and outside the Commons. In 2012, he published a Private Members' Bill to address tax avoidance.<sup>6</sup> Compare Meacher to Alan Johnson, the man who Miliband appointed as his first Shadow Chancellor. Johnson admitted that he would need to "*pick up a primer in economics for beginners*", and he then coined the absurd mantra about the Coalition "*cutting too far and too fast*".<sup>7</sup> This particular Johnson refrain betrayed his deeply conservative economic perspective. Just like Denis Healey a quarter of a century earlier, Johnson had failed to grasp, or perhaps didn't understand, the fiscal and monetary policy levers available to a currency-issuing government like ours. To argue that the government was cutting too far and too fast was to concede that some level of austerity was necessary, when in reality austerity was making it harder to recover from the 2008 financial crash. In its 2012 World Economic Outlook, even the International

Monetary Fund's chief economist, Olivier Blanchard, acknowledged that austerity was causing more economic damage than experts had anticipated.<sup>8</sup>

Johnson's tenure as Shadow Chancellor was over in less than three-and-a-half months when he resigned after his marriage broke down.<sup>9</sup> However, in the short period that he held the position, he wasn't totally useless. He at least had the courage to attack Chancellor George Osborne. The problem was that Johnson's rhetoric displayed and replayed the Tory line about running up debt, encapsulated in his catchy but unhelpful "*deficit deniers*" attack. He said, "*If countries ... had not run up debts ... to sustain their economies, people would have not lost their credit cards, but lost their jobs, lost their houses, and lost their savings*".<sup>10</sup> It was a great soundbite, no doubt, but it was more economic mythology. The government had simply created the money through 'quantitative easing', via the Bank of England. The notion of paying back money that one owes to oneself is plainly farcical but, instead of making that very point, Johnson chose to perpetuate the debt fallacy, unnecessarily ceding political ground to the Tories. Consequently, Labour was consistently on the backfoot in the Commons chamber and in interviews with the corporate media.<sup>11</sup>

Ed Balls, Johnson's replacement, was even worse. The Balls blueprint was to tell the electorate that he wouldn't cut back quite as severely as George Osborne. In other words, he was offering austerity-lite. Both Johnson and Balls, uncritically and credulously, sought to appease, rather than to resist, the Coalition Government's austerity agenda. They validated the simplistic, neoliberal 'household budget' analogy about how the economy functions. This was a product of Thatcherism and has remained in the public consciousness ever since. They should have outlined

an alternative economic model, explaining how an interventionist government, with its own sovereign currency, could eliminate poverty, maintain full employment, and provide world class public services in a thriving economy. Instead, they argued for 'Compassionate Conservatism'.

The Miliband leadership team was obsessed with trying to shake off the accusation that New Labour had spent too much whilst in office. There was even an absurd discussion at a PLP meeting about publicly apologising for government 'overspending' prior to the 2008 financial crash. This was policy by focus groups, and it was unconvincing nonsense that did little to win over wavering Tories. It just deterred people who would have otherwise voted Labour. What they ought to have apologised for was the extension of bank deregulation by Gordon Brown<sup>12</sup> and for not spending enough. The New Labour government could have embarked on a bigger fiscal stimulus for new infrastructure and housing projects, provided much needed investment in public services, and reintroduced meaningful regulation of banks. But New Labour was in thrall to neoliberal dogma, and so was Miliband. People were increasingly saying on the doorstep that there was very little from which to choose between Labour and the Tories. And they were right.

Meanwhile, in the land of make believe, a leading economist and former member of the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee, Danny Blanchflower, was drooling about Balls in his September 2010 column for the *New Statesman*. He concluded his flattery by talking up the potential parliamentary performance of Balls, saying that *"he certainly has the credentials to be the next shadow chancellor. If I were Osborne, I would shudder at the prospect of debating with such a sharp economist at the*



*despatch box*".<sup>13</sup> The reality was considerably different. Contrary to Blanchflower's acclamation, Balls was a disaster as Shadow Chancellor. As well as being an unusually poor performer at the despatch box, his oratorical impotence was in no way counterbalanced by his policy propositions. In fact, the opposition from Miliband's entire Shadow Cabinet to the Coalition's austerity agenda was feeble. The best that they could muster was that the cuts were too severe.<sup>14</sup> The party's leadership supported the public sector pay cap.<sup>15</sup> And when Rachel Reeves was the Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary, she said that Labour didn't want to represent people who were out of work.<sup>16</sup> It became increasingly clear that there was precious little hope of Miliband turning over a new leaf for the party. The New Labour page had been glued down.

## **Corporate infiltration**

The influence of Labour's traditional allies in trade unions and civil society groups like the peace movement were treated with disdain. By contrast, lobbyists and corporate capitalists seemed to have the ear of senior party figures. Even securing a commitment from Labour's Shadow Cabinet for policies that reflected what many people thought were the party's most basic values, let alone 'socialist' principles, was like pulling teeth. When Miliband eventually committed Labour to scrapping the hated bedroom tax, over 18 months after the idea surfaced in the Welfare Reform Bill, it was presented like he was making a ground-breaking announcement.<sup>17</sup> To penalise low-income households for having a spare bedroom (by limiting housing benefit for council and housing association tenants) should have been wholeheartedly repudiated by Labour at the outset.

However, we shouldn't be too surprised about Labour's positioning back then. A similar restriction for private sector tenants had been introduced by the Tories in 1989, and it had been reinforced by the New Labour government in 2008.<sup>18</sup> Many of Miliband's frontbench, including Miliband himself, were ministers in that government. But Labour wasn't always such a brazen Establishment tool, and it didn't have to remain that way. Indeed, Labour in 1989 was forthcoming in the Commons about its opposition to those restrictions on private tenants<sup>19</sup> (although overturning them was omitted from the subsequent election manifesto in 1992). It wasn't until the 2017 manifesto that Labour offered any hope for private renters with its commitment to *"end insecurity for private renters by introducing controls on rent rises, more secure tenancies, landlord licensing and new consumer rights for renters"*.<sup>20</sup>

The deficiency in Labour's policy offer under Miliband was, I suggest, a direct result of welcoming corporate lobbyists. Labour even seconded staff from multinational accountancy companies to advise on policy, like KPMG and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC). After Miliband made me the Shadow Fire Minister in the Shadow Local Government team led by Caroline Flint, I discovered that a PwC employee had been seconded into the team. This has been recorded in an entry by Flint in the parliamentary Register of Members' Financial Interests in 2012.<sup>21</sup>

Even though I had only been an MP for a short time, I thought it was odd that the Labour Party should be accepting input on its policy positions from private corporations. I wondered what was in it for them. Looking back, I wish I had challenged this practice, which turned out to be widespread. It was revealed in 2014, for example, that Labour's frontbench had accepted over £600,000 for

assistance with research from PwC alone, to help form policy on tax, business, and social security.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the following year, Miliband was forced to reveal the identity of a mystery £600,000 donor. It turned out that the individual was Martin Taylor, a Mayfair hedge fund manager.<sup>23</sup> Miliband also elevated Charles Allen to the House of Lords in 2013, who was a director of the cleaning and catering corporation ISS at the time. ISS had been criticised for its involvement in the privatisation of public services, including the NHS, and for profiteering at the expense of its low-paid workers.<sup>24</sup> Yet, that didn't deter Miliband, who invited Allen in 2011 to review and rebuild Labour's organisation.<sup>25</sup> Allen even chaired the Labour Party's executive board from 2012 to 2015.<sup>26</sup> This insidious influence on the party's internal structures and policy development by the corporate sector helped to stifle any ideas that would unduly fetter free-market capitalism.

This was highlighted in painful clarity at the 2011 Labour Party conference, at which I spoke at various fringe meetings to argue for rent controls. The Shadow Housing Minister, Alison Seabeck, disagreed with my stance. She and her partner, Nick Raynsford, who had been a Housing Minister under Blair, had attended one of the meetings at which I'd spoken. Seabeck collared me later that day to say my proposal would create a homelessness crisis because landlords would abandon the private rented sector (PRS) resulting in fewer homes being available to rent. Seabeck's approach was clearly blinkered by New Labour's neoliberal influence. She offered nothing new and only wanted to tinker with the existing broken system rather than replace it, as I was recommending. Seabeck's successor, Jack Dromey, was better, but his housing policy horizons were also limited.

I'd been advocating for a much more radical, and common sense, approach. Even if Seabeck's apocalyptic prediction about the PRS shrinking had been right, that wouldn't have mattered if it corresponded with an increase in public housing. That could be quickly achieved through a municipalisation programme where councils could acquire properties on the open market and then make them available for rent. This could also have been supplemented by a council house building programme and a mutual home ownership initiative. In addition to rent controls and providing new council housing, which is self-explanatory, I also produced an explicit policy idea for a future Labour government to embrace cooperative/mutual home ownership. It wasn't only me pushing these ideas; they were supported by groups like the Co-operative Party<sup>27</sup> and Defend Council Housing,<sup>28</sup> as well as the London Labour mayoral candidate Ken Livingstone.<sup>29</sup> Neither Seabeck nor Dromey took any of those ideas forward. Such was the innate conservatism of Miliband's Shadow Cabinet that Hilary Benn explicitly ruled out rent controls.<sup>30</sup>

Before moving on in Ed Miliband's Shadow Cabinet reshuffle later in 2011, Caroline Flint contributed some policy ideas on housing for Progress, a right-wing pressure group. In 2011, Progress published Flint's proposals in *The Purple Book*.<sup>31</sup> But she offered nothing to actually address the housing crisis. All she did was to suggest some punitive measures, such as housing ASBOs (anti-social behaviour orders) banning evicted tenants from living within five miles of their former homes.<sup>32</sup> The book mapped out a range of right-wing policy ideas for the Labour Party. In addition to Flint, the contributors included senior figures from the New Labour era, such as Andrew Adonis, Douglas Alexander, Frank Field, Tessa Jowell, Peter Mandelson, and Jacqui Smith. The late Michael Meacher said that the book