

# Miliband has no choice: he has to fight the Blairites i...

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[Seamus Milne has argued](#) in the Guardian this morning that:

*For the past fortnight the Labour leader has faced a barrage of open or thinly coded attacks from Blairite zombies and former allies alike: from shadow cabinet ministers such as [Jim Murphy](#) to the maverick peer [Maurice Glasman](#) and a string of MPs, ex-ministers and long-forgotten New Labour advisers.*

The common themes were the need to get serious about cuts, the danger of tax-and-spend, and Miliband's "anti-business rhetoric": the fixations of New Labour die-hards.

Seamus is right. I don't want to make this personal, and a such don't like Milne's description of those on the right of Labour as zombies, but clear red water had to be drawn on this issue.

The reality is that those leading this attack on Ed Miliband - for that is what it is - are wedded to the neoliberal culture and all that goes with it. Take my former TUC colleague Adam Lent, who is one of those on this right wing of Labour. He [said of Ed Miliband's speech yesterday](#):

*The examples he gave though — reversing the cut in corporation tax and keeping the 50p tax rate — come straight from Labour's comfort zone. The reality is if Labour is serious about a major shift in spending priorities to promote jobs, growth and inherent fairness in the economy, then the party will almost certainly have to face up to the need to save money in the big spending areas of welfare, health, and pensions.*

This is not the talk of a person from the centre left, as Lent and those like him in the [Policy Network](#) and [Progress](#) (which calls itself "the New Labour pressure group which aims to promote a radical and progressive politics for the 21st century", which really says it all) like to brand themselves. This is the talk of the centre right. And this is the talk of this who believe in "fiscal conservatism" (Lent's own phrase) which otherwise means "severe cuts in welfare, health and pensions".

Labour cannot and must not be party to such decisions. Most especially they must not be so when the likes of Lent want to use the cuts to fund job creation in the private sector. If he hadn't noticed it the private sector is enjoying a massively increased share of GDP right now, has near record rates of return and is sitting in a cash mountain it has no idea what to do with - which is why it's lending it to the government. Maybe he hasn't read Martin Wolf persistently pointing out all these facts, but facts they are. The private sector needs no cash to generate jobs; it has all the cash it needs and more besides. What it does not have is the will or the demand for what it might make to persuade it to invest. That's what's missing and cutting welfare, pensions and healthcare can only make the creation of that demand so much harder given the propensity of those on welfare, pensions and with ill health to consume.

I'd rather hope Lent and his fiends [have also read this](#), in the Guardian this week by nurse Christie Watson. It was aimed at Cameron, but since these New Labourites are well to the right of Cameron it is as relevant for them. [She said](#):

*On the few occasions that I've worked on a care of the elderly ward I have not had that time [to care for patients]. There was usually a fairly newly qualified staff nurse in charge, and a health care assistant. And 32 beds. It was impossible. We worked a 13-hour day with no time for breaks. Many of the patients were incontinent. People were left in wet or soiled beds while we prioritised patients who had suddenly deteriorated. There was no chance to think about dignity or nutrition — things that nurses value so highly. It was heartbreaking. I felt so sorry for our patients. The standard of care we were able to give was terrible. These elderly patients deserved the very best of nursing, but it was a miracle that they were simply alive at the end of the shift.*

*We were forced to make some terrible choices, and to have to make such decisions on a day-to-day basis is beyond my capabilities. I've experienced how awful it feels to see a loved one suffer due to poor nursing care. The nurses I worked with wanted to care — there were simply not enough of them to be able to do the job properly. I have so much admiration for the nurses who work in those areas and manage to give good — even adequate care — with such inadequate levels of staffing.*

This, I know, is happening. This is why doctors are now prescribing water for their patients. And this is not just happening in hospitals. It is happening in care homes where the amount being paid by local authorities is not now enough to ensure people are looked after with even a because respect for their dignity, needs or right to be treated as a person. As one doctor put it to me recently, they're now increasingly sure that people are now dying in the UK of thirst simply because no one has time to check they have had a drink.

This is the Tory and New Labour prescription for the elderly of the UK.

Read the [Guardian today on welfare reform](#) and you'll realise that the prescription of New Labour and the Tories is to cast millions of the least able to protect themselves and their children adrift and into deep poverty.

Read [Richard Horton of the Lancet](#) today and you'll see why there is no private sector alternative that can work on these issues: it could only make things much, much worse.

Miliband, if he is to match the mood of the country, has to say no to these cuts. He has to do so for all who are Labour. He has to do more than that. He has to say no for everyone, even if they are misguided enough to believe in these cuts now.

And he has to say no because we can afford to look after our elderly.

We can pay benefits. We do not need to leave people starving, homeless, in despair, sick and disabled and without protection.

We're a society that can afford to employ some of the 2.5 million without work in caring.

And we can redistribute to meet need.

But we have New Labour saying we can't do that. We have them saying such redistribution to relieve need and poverty would be wrong and that we should support the private sector that already has all the resources it needs to create jobs that will enrich the 1% more than anyone who gets a job.

That's not social democracy. That's market orthodoxy. And Labour should be nowhere near it. And it needs to say so. Now. And it needs to say to those who do not agree that Labour's not on their wavelength. Now.

PS I'll explain the economics of why I'm right in the next day or so - I'm working on it.