

# Miliband's Hugo Young lecture does not challenge real p...

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I [have read the short version of Ed Miliband's Hugo Young lecture](#), to be delivered tonight. I am disappointed by it.

The opening is good. It's welcome that a politician says "For decades, inequality was off the political agenda. But there is growing recognition across every walk of life in Britain that large inequalities of income and wealth scar our society." But if that's true then you'd expect the politician in question to go on to say what he is going to do about wealth inequality.

But Miliband doesn't. He does not even go near the issue. Instead he talks about cuts. And as a surrogate for taking action on real issues - like addressing the tax gap and the wealth gap, which would require real political courage - Miliband talks about Labour's success in privatising cataract operations.

I accept, he does so to indicate limits on the power of the privatisation agenda to deliver reform. It's right for him to say "A Serco-G4S state can be just as flawed as the centralised state." But it's then completely wrong to say that the mass privatisation of power will resolve this, which is what Miliband seems to think.

Miliband wants people to design their disability budgets. And some will do that.

And he wants people to have power over schools. Which some already have. One is Toby Young. I did once; I chaired the governors of a school for quite a number of years.

And he wants to devolve power to local communities without saying how.

Now I have nothing against participatory democracy. Or localisation. Or patient involvement. All can be of benefit. But this is a speech by a man who yearns for power and who thinks it is all that matters in life. And he's wrong. My own experience tells me that most people are more than willing to forego decision making on many issues to others, most of whom they will consider to be experts on issues where they need advice. And others - very many others - simply don't want power.

I remember when I was quite a young auditor asking questions of a senior manager in a company and he made quite clear I was addressing my questions to the wrong person. As he made obvious he was number two in the company, and it was by choice. "I am a great number two", he said. And he was. "And I'm not suited to be number one. He's next door. Go and ask him." And I did.

John (for that was his name) was a wise man, and he taught me a valuable lesson. It's not just that not everyone wants power, but that some are wise enough to realise it is not for them to have. They don't want to, and maybe can't, make the decisions that power demands of them. Which is absolutely fine. They can manage the consequences of power, implement the decisions taken with considerable ability and prepare information that informs the decision making process. But to pretend all want power is absurd. Some (in fact, I'll be candid, experience suggests that this is many) don't want to be in charge on a whole wide range of issues. I think none the less of them for that. I just think it's absurd to pretend they have a quality they don't possess when they have plenty of others to celebrate instead.

In that case Miliband's barking up the wrong tree. People don't want to sack head teachers. Sacking anyone is tough (I know; I've had to do it) and few want the responsibility for doing so. And most people don't want to design their health care package, although they do want professionals to have the time to discuss what the options are with them before choices are made, which is something entirely different and which requires money; the issue Miliband has implied he will not address.

To put it another way, Miliband's agenda does not change real power structures; it just passes the buck. And it does not change inequality because wealth remain where it is.

In that case this is not a programme for real change. It's just a repackaged choice agenda. And that was always a lame apology for an agenda.