

## Did Ed's First Speech Change The Story?

The new Labour leader Ed Miliband's first speech was very important for both him and the party. [Charlie Beckett](#) takes an in depth look at the speech and finds it to be wide ranging but not ground-breaking.



This article first appeared on [Charlie Beckett's blog](#) on 28 September.

So did Ed's first leader speech change the narrative [as I have suggested](#) it must start to do?

The jokes about nationalising train sets and Jack Straw's age felt laboured. The personal history was important but somehow too calculated.

You can change the world, was his first principle. His values are his anchor. I think Cameron might say the same. So what does Ed think is Right and Wrong?

He insists that the Party must change. It must be counter-intuitive. He spoke with approval of Clause 4 reform and Blairite slogans such as Tough on The Causes of Crime.

And he spoke with ease about the new liberal identity politics around sex and race – 'we changed attitudes'.

So what does he offer in terms of clues to what his Labour Party policy programme will be (bearing in mind he actually wrote the last sterile, disastrous manifesto)?:

| *'A long journey', 'a direction of change'.*

Other buzz words:

| *'Economy for all', 'valuing community', 'accountable' government, 'values'-driven foreign policy, 'a new politics'. "Not bound by fear or ghosts of the past".*

He talked about a Britain emerging from the recession, but he accepted the need for cuts. But somehow his cuts would be kinder than those of the Coalition. It was Keynesianism for Beginners which at least gives an ideological contrast to the current Government's thinking.

On issues like immigration he is a conventional north London liberal who hopes that regulation will counter prejudice. He recognises it's an issue but he gave no real sense of how he might engage with the feelings it provokes.

A 'living wage' could evolve into an aspiration of real substance, in the same way that the minimum wage was for New Labour. But otherwise, the direction on welfare sounded like a politically-correct version of Government policy: 'real help, real responsibility'.

### TALKING ABOUT NEW GENERATION

But it's not all about material goods for this New Generation: 'Strong families', 'green spaces', 'love and compassion' can all provide a Good Life for the victims of 'stressed out' culture. I think this may have an appeal as [there is research](#) that suggests people do want more rounded lives. But at the same time the polling evidence suggests they vote on material factors.

"I'm in it" he admitted, when he called on change for how we 'do' politics. Despite being a career politico he claims to believe in reforming the system he was part of. Significantly he backed AV and an elected House of Lords – but no new ideas beyond that to capture the imagination of the online generation.

### GREEN FIELD THINKING

Of course, no north London liberal could avoid a Gore-ite reference to protecting the planet for future New Generations. But this could be one area where he can open up fresh fields for Labour, so it was interesting that he gave that policy area a big tick, too.

I liked the self-deprecating but earnest riff on political name-calling. The biggest cheer of the speech was for his call for a 'grown-up debate' instead of silly labeling like Wallis (and Gromit) or 'Red Ed'.

He never really reached fever pitch – it felt tentative both for him and his audience in the hall. His rallying cry for optimism, humbleness and change certainly roused them (finally) to their feet, but almost out of relief.

### **COMPOSITE LACK OF MOTION**

This felt like a composite speech that tried to touch too many bases without breaking new ground. It didn't have a moment when it connected beyond the conference hall. It offered the slogan of a New Generation, but let's not forget that the electorate is actually aging. We all want change, but we also want security.

I felt that this was not the moment that Ed changed the story – for the Party or himself – yet. He is still vulnerable to easy media type-casting. But it was a beginning.

Don't judge too soon. This man is a brilliant campaigner who has already pulled off one stunning, if narrow, victory. He is a passionate and intelligent politician. Of course this first speech was bound to be nervous and uncomfortable as well as exciting for the speaker.

He does have some time now to build momentum and describe the trajectory of his leadership. But if he really wants to lead his party and the country in a different country then he must move quickly to establish a narrative with substance as well as rhetorical strength.

[This article was written instantly during/after the speech itself - but I have left it as it is, partly because I think it stands up well to the more considered reaction that has followed.]

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