



A VALUES ANALYSIS OF ED MILIBAND'S NEWHAM DOCKSIDE SPEECH

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Introduction

This document offers some annotations on Ed Miliband's speech on social security, delivered at Newham Docksides on 6 June 2013. It highlights the 'values' that the speech engages. Here, I use the word 'values' in the precise sense used by social psychologists to mean 'guiding principles in life'. As such, values are important in underpinning our attitudes, behaviours, and – more specifically – support for a political project.

Why I have put these comments together

Our political leaders play an important role in influencing the values to which we come, collectively, to attach particular importance – those values which infuse our sense of collective identity. Perhaps some of the most powerful – but underappreciated – influences on this collective identity are the public policies which political leaders enact. Remember Margaret Thatcher famously commented that “economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul”?

But political rhetoric is also important in shaping our collective values priorities. Anyone who is concerned about social justice or environmental problems has an interest in asking: what would strengthen those values which underpin public expressions of concern about these issues? One thing that will be important here is what our political leaders say. It is for this reason that I am motivated to examine the values reflected in Miliband's speeches.

But there is another reason for interest in the values reflected in a speech, which relates more directly to the interests of the Labour Party (or, for that matter any other party).

Public support for a political party will be importantly influenced by the values that it is seen to reflect. The American cognitive scientist George Lakoff makes this point strongly. He argues that the reason for the success of the American right in recent years (both in winning power, and in shifting the overall political spectrum to the right) is rooted in a clarity about what it stands for.

Lakoff argues powerfully that the right is successful because its political leaders say what they believe. His advice to his fellow Democrats is this: ***“Get clear on your values and use the language of values. Drop the language of policy works... Remember that voters vote their identity and their values, which need not coincide with their self-interest”*** (2004:33, my emphasis). Democrats, Lakoff argues, are not doing this. All-too-often they ***“move to the right” – adopt some right-wing values in hope of getting ‘centrist’ voters... It’s a self-defeating strategy. Conservatives have been winning elections without moving to the left.”*** (2004:43)

Although Lakoff doesn't draw on social psychology research in making this case, it is clear that such research corroborates it. Indeed, the evidence from social psychology allows us to go further, and to analyze a text for coherence in appealing to compatible values, and for dissonance in appealing to conflicting values. In reading the analysis below, it is important to be clear about some of the principles that govern how values work.

What are values, and how do they work?

Social psychologists have identified a finite set of values. It seems that just about everyone holds the full complement of these values. So, for example, almost everyone, at some level, places importance on values such as 'independence', 'freedom', 'social justice', 'loyalty', 'respect for tradition', 'moderation', 'national security', 'wealth', 'authority', 'influence' and 'self-indulgence'. Of course, the relative importance attached to these different values varies markedly between individuals, and will also change over the course of a person's lifetime. It is also possible to characterize nations in terms of the values that citizens hold, on average, to be the most important.

Social psychologists have established a number of principles which govern the way in which values interrelate with one another. In thinking about the values reflected in a political speech, it is important to understand these principles.

Principle 1: Some values invoke others

Some groups of values are mutually reinforcing. Invoking one of these values is likely to increase the importance that a person places on another. Strengthening the importance that an audience places on broadmindedness, for example, is also likely to strengthen that audience's concern for equality, social justice or environmental protection. (This is true even for people who don't particularly value broadmindedness.)

Psychologists have identified some groups of values, related in this way, which are of particular interest to those concerned about social and environmental problems. These include a group of 'intrinsic' values and a group of 'self-transcendence' values. Intrinsic values are those that are inherently rewarding to pursue – including 'community feeling', affiliation to friends and family, and self-acceptance. 'Self-transcendence' values are closely related. These include values related to the well-being of others, including universalism ("understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature") and benevolence ("preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact").

Principle 2: Some values conflict with others

Some values are in conflict. It is easy to see that it's difficult to attach importance, simultaneously, to 'social power' and 'equality', or 'independence' and 'obedience'.

Other conflicts are less intuitively obvious. Studies have found marked conflicts between values such as 'helpfulness' and 'social recognition', or 'wealth' and 'protecting the environment'. (Note that this is not to imply that wealthy people are necessarily less likely to care for the environment, but rather that people for whom the *pursuit of wealth* is more important are likely to care less for the environment: some wealthy people care little about wealth. It is important to differentiate between what a person *has*, and what they *strive for!*)

'Intrinsic' values, mentioned above, stand in opposition to 'extrinsic' values. Extrinsic values are centred on external approval or reward. They include conformity, image, popularity and financial success.

Similarly, 'self-transcendence' values, also mentioned above, stand in opposition to 'self-enhancement' values. Self-enhancement values include power ("social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources") and achievement ("personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards").

Social psychologists have studied people's responses to texts written to model political speeches, and have found that combining conflicting values in the same speech reduces the appeal of the politician delivering the speech.

Principle 3: Values are learnt

Many of the experiments which reveal the way in which values work and influence our attitudes and behaviour are short-term. In these experiments, participants might, for example, be presented with short texts, written to reflect different values. Investigators then measure behavioural responses through, for example, tests for competitiveness or co-operation; prejudice or openness to strangers. Such experiments show that briefly reminding people of particular values can have a very significant impact on their attitudes and behaviours in the short-term.

It also seems that repeated reminders of particular values tends to increase the importance that we place on them, and to strengthen the attitudes and behaviours associated with them, in a more durable or 'dispositional' way. This extends to the observation that the values held to be most important, on average, by representative samples of citizens in a country shift over time. There is evidence that such shifts can occur rapidly as a result of singular events (the fall of communism or 9/11, for example). But it also seems that they can occur more incrementally, in concert with more gradual political changes.

What were the likely impacts of one of Ed Miliband's recent speeches, from the perspective of the values that he communicated?

The speech delivered by Ed Miliband at Newham Docksides on 6 June 2013 was billed as politically significant – signaling the repositioning of Labour around the perceived 'traps' being set by George Osborne.

It was, in effect, an attempt to navigate between Labour and Tory interests – to demonstrate both economic hard-headedness and compassion. As such, it required particular care if it was to avoid creating dissonance in terms of the values that it reflected. Unfortunately, from this perspective, it failed badly.

Further, the speech sought to help establish understanding of 'Labour values'. But the question of what these values are seems to have been left deliberately open – they are more often defined in terms of what they are not. So here, too, the speech failed: it failed to build a coherent and compelling understanding of the values that infuse the political vision of the Labour Party.

The speech is reproduced in full below, with annotations.

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Introduction_ The Speech

It is great to be here in Newham, where a Labour Mayor and council are doing so many great things to help get local people back into work. On Monday, Ed Balls gave a speech about how the next Labour government would control public spending. The biggest item of expenditure alongside the NHS, is the social security budget.

Miliband chooses to use the phrase 'social security' rather than welfare, marking a deliberate break with the language of New Labour, which effectively expunged 'social security' from the political vocabulary, in favour of 'welfare'.¹ This seems sensible - welfare has been successfully imbued with particular meaning by the right, and has become a pejorative term.

In values terms, the phrase 'social security' is probably also helpful. Exacerbating a sense of insecurity (as is achieved through the prominence of the "security services") is likely to engender a heightened sense of threat and, therefore, insecurity. This is likely to be counterproductive from the perspective of strengthening values associated with social and environmental concern: insecurity tends to drive people to attach greater importance to 'extrinsic values' such as wealth and power, which are antagonistic to pro-social and pro-environmental values.

But speaking of the importance of 'social security' seems unlikely to have the effect of heightening people's awareness of their insecurity. Rather, it seems likely to **strengthen a sense of safety**: the perception that the state will ultimately help citizens if things get bad. This is likely to have the effect of engendering a greater sense of security – therefore leading people to attach greater importance to social and environmental issues. But the phrase 'social security' could also convey the understanding that it is right that we collectively provide this security for others. Implicit here is a sense of our responsibility to others who are less fortunate – though Miliband could have done more to draw out this connotation.

¹ For more on this see Ruth Lister, Benefit cuts: how the language of welfare poisoned our social security, 1st April 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/apr/01/language-welfare-social-security>

The next Labour government will have less money to spend.

Here Miliband uncritically accepts the 'austerity frame'. This is a frame that – whether consciously or not – may **heighten** a sense of insecurity, with the negative consequences (for both social and environmental attitudes and support for progressive politics) outlined above. Constant reminders of sources of threat (here, economic threat) are found to drive an audience to attach greater importance to extrinsic values, diminishing their concern for social justice. Of course, the 'austerity frame' has become so prevalent – so central to today's political 'common sense' – that it is difficult to disavow directly, but Miliband would do well to think carefully about how and where he chooses to actually invoke it.

If we are going to turn our economy round, protect our NHS, and build a stronger country we will have to be laser focused on how we spend every single pound.

Miliband's choice of 'our economy' rather than 'the economy' is important. Here he is connecting with a sense of wider community – our collective ownership of the economy. But this is not a theme that he develops further (through, for example, wider reflection on how the economy as currently configured is not helping most people).

Miliband connects with popular concern to 'protect the NHS'. This may invoke two further concerns – my desire to protect the NHS in case I myself become sick, and my desire to protect the NHS because I believe it is important that everyone is guaranteed health care, irrespective of their ability to pay. Miliband leaves it to the listener to provide this context but he situates his reference to the NHS in a paragraph that is primarily focused on economic concerns and prudence. This economic framing is likely to invoke more self-interested values, and probably therefore invites a more self-interested construal of the importance of the NHS. Again, this will be counter-productive in terms of strengthening values of social justice and environmental protection.

Social security spending, vital as it is, cannot be exempt from that discipline.

Here it is good that Miliband makes it clear that social security spending is vital. But he relegates concerns about 'social security' beneath concerns about economic prudence. This implies a deeply unhelpful hierarchy of values ("wealth" trumps "social justice").

Now, some people argue that if we want to control social security we have to leave our values at the door. But today I want to argue the opposite.

There is some evidence that invoking a frame in order to negate it (“some people argue that if we want to control social security we have to leave our values at the door”) actually risks strengthening this very frame – here the perception that we can’t afford to control social security spending while also remaining true to our higher principles. I’m not completely convinced by this evidence but it seems to be a potentially dangerous rhetorical device.

Controlling social security spending and putting decent values at the heart of the system are not conflicting priorities.

It is only by reforming social security with the right values that we’ll be able to control costs. And the system does need reform.

And it is only by controlling costs that we can sustain a decent system for the next generation

The reference to a ‘decent system’ here is good. Decency implies values of honesty and responsibility; both values which are associated with concern for social justice and environmental protection. Miliband is trying to align concern for control (invoking values of “authority” and “social order”) with ‘concern for future generations’ (invoking a wider set of pro-social values). The empirical evidence is (i) this is very difficult to achieve, and (ii) that he is more likely to achieve the precise opposite – that in invoking values associated with ‘control’, and the implicit anxiety about ‘runaway welfare spending’ that attends this, he will actually diminish his audience’s concern for social justice.

In every generation the world has changed and Britain’s welfare state has to change with it.

There are strong echoes of Blairism here – “the world is changing, and we must change with it, or be left behind”. There is no examination of the nature of the changes to which Miliband alludes; what the drivers of those changes are; whether they are desirable; and, most importantly, whether they are inevitable – or whether, collectively, we could decide not to embrace them. This creates the impression of powerlessness in the face of changes over which we can exert no influence. Here Miliband negates values of “self-determination” and “independence”, both of which are closely associated with values of social concern.

We're no different.

Today we have women at work, not the male world of work that William Beveridge envisaged in the 1940s.

We have persistent worklessness, not the full-employment of the past.

Identifying 'worklessness' as a problem may subtly acquiesce to the frames of the right, which cast unemployment as arising importantly from the decision of the unemployed to remain 'workless'. It is another example of Miliband's perilous navigation between the values of the left and the right – a navigation which is very unlikely to convey the impression of a compelling vision, rooted in a coherent set of values.

So jobs for everyone who can work and help to make that happen, must be the starting point for social security reform: cutting the costs of worklessness.

'Cutting the costs of worklessness' again conflates values that are psychologically difficult to reconcile: a concern for the unemployed rooted in values of social justice, and a concern for 'cutting costs'.

Today, people often don't get paid enough in work to make ends meet.

Here is a clear appeal to values of "social justice". The question is whether – coming well into the speech and after the invocation of other conflicting values, Miliband's audience is still able to respond to it.

And the taxpayer is left picking up the bill for low pay.

But then, in the next breath, he undoes this good work. Why should you worry about low pay? Because it's taxpayers' money that's spent to deal with the consequences. There are at least two potential problems here. Firstly, framing concern about low-pay in terms of the economic costs of low pay is problematic. Studies have found that 'community feeling' and concern for 'financial success' are almost perfectly opposed (in one circular model of values, they are found to lie 191° apart, with 180° representing perfect opposition). And yet Miliband has invoked both values in two short consecutive sentences – likely creating cognitive dissonance and undermining his attempt to create a coherent political vision. Secondly, Miliband is appealing to self-interest (at least, the self-interest of those in his intended audience who pay taxes). To these people, he is saying, it is your money that is spent to 'pick up the bill'. But the 'taxpayer frame' is probably more problematic even than this, because it is implicitly divisive – drawing tacit distinction between those who pay tax, and those who do not.

We must change our economy, so that welfare is not a substitute for good employment and decent jobs.

So are we changing the economy to help the social security system, or are we changing social security to fit the new jobs market? It's becoming very unclear, and the picture is muddied further by Miliband's reversion to the term 'welfare'.

Today the welfare state, through housing benefit, bears the cost for our failure to build enough homes. We have to start investing in homes again, not paying for failure. And, today, people's faith in social security has been shaken when it appears that some people get something for nothing and other people get nothing for something – no reward for the years of contribution they make.

Here Miliband casts social security in a transactional frame. This frame invites the perception that there should be mechanisms to ensure that I only get out what I put in, and that I **do** get out what I put in. This is corrosive to the values of social justice upon which the social security system is predicated, and in values terms it is a remarkable concession.

Our **experience** of the social security system, whether in contributing to it (as tax-payers or national-insurance contributors) or in relying upon it, ought to serve to reinforce our understanding that it is right and proper to live in a society organized such that we look after one another. Framing social security in this way would help to ensure that a person's day-to-day experience of the system serves to invoke and reinforce precisely those values upon which public support for the system is predicated (and, incidentally, the values upon which public support for a social democratic party will be built).

But Miliband undoes this. He invites his audience, implicitly, to reflect on their on-going experience of the social security system through a transactional frame, rooted in 'what can it do for **me?**', rather than what it does for **us**.

In values terms, this is the most dangerously counter-productive passage in the speech.

We have to tackle this too.

Overcoming worklessness, rewarding work and tackling low pay, investing in the future and recognising contribution: these are the Labour ways to reform our social security system.

In values terms, 'rewarding work' is a very unhelpful frame. It invokes the understanding that we work to receive extrinsic (financial) rewards. If Miliband was interested in conveying more socially helpful values, he might draw attention to the importance of **meaningful work** in helping people to establish **a sense of purpose**, and to feel that they are **fully participating in society**. He could also have highlighted here that there are many crucially important, though *unpaid*, ways in which people participate in society.

And what I want to talk to you about today.

And it is very important I do, because there is an extra responsibility on those who believe in the role of social security to show real determination to reform it.

Real long-term reform not the short-term, failing approach of this government.

Which leaves hundreds of thousands of people in long-term idleness. Hits the low-paid in work and pretends they are skivers. Forces families into homelessness, driving up bills. Never truly getting to grips with the root causes of social security spending.

Here, again, Miliband invokes conflicting values: concern for social justice (concern for homeless families) and the threat of spiraling economic costs. He also seems to imply that people not in paid work are idle (when of course they may be participating in crucial but unpaid work). There is also a danger of implying that, because those in low-paid work are not skivers, those not in work are skivers.

So here is the choice:

Remake social security to make it work better for our country and pass on a fair and sustainable system to the next generation, with the Labour Party.

This is a good passage. It could have provided the frame for the whole speech, had this been bolder. 'Work better for our country' is inclusive; concern for the 'next generation' engages values associated with wider concern for social justice and environmental protection.

Or

Take the Conservative way: taking support away from working families and those who need it most, always seeking to divide our country and not tackling the deep causes of rising costs.

Work

Let me start with the importance of work.

As I have said before: Labour—the party of work—the clue is in the name. Our party was founded on the principles of work. We have always been against the denial of opportunity that comes from not having work.

This is also good. But Miliband could go further in invoking self-direction values associated with work: freedom, independence, self-respect, choosing one's own goals, developing a sense of meaning, knowing one is contributing to society as a whole.

And against the denial of responsibility by those who could work and don't do so.

This good work, though, is undermined by vilifying those of the unemployed who could work but don't. In choosing to differentiate the unemployed from the rest of us in this way, he risks hardening the perception of the unemployed as an 'out group' who invite suspicion. He also fails, again, to underscore the importance of unpaid work.

Miliband chooses to invoke a mythical, never quantified, group of scroungers as the target. He could have chosen to highlight the companies that refuse to pay a living wage. Is responsibility just for people who struggle most?

This country needs to be a nation where people who can work, do.

There's an implicit coerciveness here, which is unhelpful in building commitment to progressive values. A better frame might be: "*This country needs to be a nation where everyone who can undertake paid work finds a meaningful and fulfilling job, where unpaid work is properly valued, and where we look after those of us who can't work.*"

Not a country where people who can work are on benefits. That's about values.

Unfortunately, it's far from clear **what** values.

And it's also about making social security sustainable for the future. History teaches us this.

The growth rate of social security spending was higher under the Thatcher and Major governments of 1979 – 1997 than under the New Labour governments of 1997 – 2010.

How can this be?

Given the Conservative governments pared back benefits, year after year. Whereas the Labour government took action, of which I am proud, to increase tax credits to help make work pay and to address pensioner poverty in a way no previous government had done since the War.

The 'make work pay' frame is deeply unhelpful in values terms. It conveys the idea of citizens as rational economic actors – who will remain idle until they can get more money by going to work than by watching daytime television. Maybe some do think in these terms. The evidence is that most do not. But promulgating this frame is likely to undermine the intrinsic motivations for work that underpin most people's enthusiasm for it. To the extent that such a frame percolates into public consciousness, it corrodes perceptions of the intrinsic value of paid work. The danger is that this type of frame becomes self-fulfilling, and demotivates people to undertake paid work if the economic cost-benefit doesn't stack up in their favour.

It is also a frame that is likely to undermine the values upon which support for the Labour Party is predicated.

The reason is this:

Because among the biggest drivers of social security spending are the costs of unemployment. That's what happened under those Tory governments. Unemployment went up.

Now we have heard so much from this government, and from Iain Duncan-Smith, about the importance of work. So surely they've promoted it?

The answer is they haven't.

After only three years, just like the Thatcher government, they have a dirty secret about social security. Something they don't want you to know. Long-term worklessness is now at its highest level for a generation. From this government, that preaches to us about work.

About people not being on benefits.

Today, there are more men and women – half a million – who have been out of work for over two years than at any time for sixteen years, in fact since the Labour government took office in May 1997.

This worklessness, this waste, under these Tories, is totally at odds with the values of the British people.

Miliband invokes 'British values' at several points, although it's not made clear what these are. Maybe this vacuum is deliberate (so that the listener can paste in their own values, in the hope that they can establish their own reasons for finding the speech compelling). It should by now be clear that such hope is likely to be misplaced.

In 2012 youth unemployment alone cost Britain £5 billion.

Or is the implication that an overriding concern about the economy exemplifies British values? Here Miliband is again invoking financial values which we know are inimical to the strengthening of social concern.

And long periods of unemployment store up costs for the future. This level of unemployment among young men and women means further costs of at least £3 billion per year in the long term in further worklessness and lost tax revenue.

The negative aspects of unemployment are determined economically – not in terms of the loss of meaning, purpose or wellbeing among the unemployed.

Billions of pounds that could be put to far better use. There's nothing in Labour values that says that this is a good way to spend tax-payers' money.

Miliband has retreated from defining what Labour values **are** at any point in the speech – but he is now attempting to hint at what they might be (without risking saying what they actually are) by finding a suitably anodyne, and therefore inclusive, statement of what they are not. (Inclusive, that is, for those in his intended audience who identify themselves as 'taxpayers'). The effect is to accentuate the vacuum that he seems to lack the courage to fill.

Britain just can't afford millions of people out of work. Now just as there is a minority who should be working and don't want to, there is a majority who are desperate for work and can't find it.

This is an apparent sop to Miliband's opponents who work to create the impression that this minority is numerically very significant. Miliband could have taken the fight to them by asking, rhetorically, just how big this minority really is, and how much smaller it would become if people had the necessary support to help find employment? He chose not to.

I think of the young man I met in Long Eaton recently, out of work for four years, desperate for a job.

There is a lost opportunity for establishing empathy with individuals here. Miliband provides no detail that could have established grounds for identifying with, or even sympathizing with, this man's desperation.

The problem is this government's Work Programme can leave people like him unemployed year after year after year. We would put a limit on how long anyone who can work, can stay unemployed, without getting and taking a job.

For every young man and woman who has been out of work for more than a year, we would say to every business in the country, we will pay the wages for 25 hours a week, on at least the minimum wage.

Fully funded by a tax on bankers' bonuses.

This is good, but it misses an opportunity for situating this imperative in the broader context of an understanding of the importance of social justice and the need to redress huge inequalities.

The business would provide the training of at least 10 hours a week. And because it is a compulsory jobs guarantee, young people will have an obligation to take a job after a year or lose their benefits.

Again, the emphasis placed on the coercive aspects of this policy reinforce the perception that it is imperative the unemployed are **made** to work – it negates the intrinsic motivation that leads most unemployed people to **want** to work.

And we will do the same for everyone over 25 unemployed for more than two years.

And to those who say the work simply isn't there, I say with a national mission, led from the top of government, we can get thousands of businesses, tens of thousands, in the country behind the idea.

Businesses and social enterprises that are desperate to give people a chance.

This is good – framing businesses not as the 'drivers of UK economic competitiveness', but as organisations that **want to help people**. Establishing the perception of businesses as organisations that do (and that therefore **should** as a natural part of their purpose) serve a positive social purpose, for more-than-economic reasons, is very important.

And while the jobs guarantee is national we will make it happen through local action.

The kind of local action I've seen here in Newham.

Devolving power and resources to local communities so there can be advice and support suitable for the individual who is looking for work and tailored to the particular needs of businesses in the area.

But we need to go further.

Parents need choices, particularly when their children are very young. We know the difference stay-at-home mums and dads can make in the earliest period of a child's life. But we also know that the ethic of work is an important one to encourage in a household.

We do not want worklessness passed down from one generation to another.

The evidence suggests that 'intergenerational worklessness' is a rare phenomenon. Rather than help reinforce his opponents' insistence that levels of intergenerational worklessness are significant, Miliband would be well advised either to ignore it, or place it in the wider social context that gives rise to it, where it does occur.

The last Labour government made significant progress in getting parents in workless households back into work. But the truth is there is still more we can do.

Too many children still live in families without work. And under the current government too little is being done about this.

At the moment, if both partners in a couple are out of a job, or a lone parent is out of work, they risk completely losing touch with the world of work when their child is under 5.

But all of the evidence is that the longer anyone remains disconnected from the workplace, the more likely they are to stay unemployed for a long period.

Bad for them and bad for the country.

There is a lot that is unstated again here. **Why** are these things 'bad for the country'? Miliband seems again here to be offering his audience a blank slate, such that they can chalk in their own values. Perhaps this is in the expectation that such an approach will broaden the potential appeal of his message. As we have seen, leaving values out in this way is likely to be counter-productive.

And there is something we can do.

Thanks to the last Labour government, we now have nursery education available for all 3 and 4 year olds, for 15 hours a week.

The principle of 'availability for all' is a good one, in values terms. It is a theme that could be carried through other parts of this speech. Intrinsic values often seem to be most easily applied to children and childhood – perhaps because this is a sphere in which neo-liberal values still struggle to establish a firm foothold. The invocation of these values in relation to children could be seen as presenting a spring-board for their wider extension to other areas of public debate.

The very least we should offer and demand is that while their children are at nursery, both partners in a workless household, as well as single parents who aren't working, should use some of the time to undertake some preparations to help them get ready to go back to work.

Which is it, "offer" or "demand"? This will create cognitive dissonance – both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are invoked here. It's another instance of Miliband trying to have his cake and eat it, in value terms. In fact, this approach likely obscures the values that underpin his political project, making it more difficult to connect with this project.

Attending regular interviews in the Job Centre, undertaking training, finding out what opportunities exist. To be clear, under this policy there would be no requirement to go back to work until their youngest child is 5. But there would be a pathway back into work for them.

We should also support disabled people. Those who cannot work. And those who want to work and need help finding it.

Successive governments did not do enough to deal with the rise in people on Incapacity Benefit. It was a legacy of unemployment from the years Mrs Thatcher was in power.

But the last Labour government should have acted on it sooner. Towards the end of our time in government, we did introduce tests for the Employment and Support Allowance.

That was the right thing to do. And we continue to support tests today.

But when over 40% of people win their appeals, it tells you the system isn't working as it should.

And too often people's experience of the tests is degrading. So this test needs to change.

This is a good instance of appeal to intrinsic values associated with wide social concern. It could perhaps have been communicated through a personal story that provided a clearer basis for empathy.

Miliband's recognition that the test is 'degrading' is important. This is a theme that might be extended into other areas, and to the experience of groups who are popularly seen as less vulnerable or deserving of sympathy (such as the long-term unemployed).

It needs reform so that it can really distinguish between different situations.

Disabled people who cannot work.

Disabled people who need help to get into work.

And people who can work without support.

The test should also be properly focused on helping to identify the real skills of each disabled person and the opportunities they could take up.

This is a great re-framing. It's not about weeding out the charlatans. It's about helping people to identify what they can contribute to society – taking for granted that given the opportunities and (where necessary) support, people want to contribute to society.

I meet so many disabled people desperate to work but who say that the demand that they work is not accompanied by the support they need. So these tests should be connected to a Work Programme that itself is tested on its ability to get disabled people jobs that work for them.

This is also a skilful inversion of neo-liberal 'common sense'. Miliband is introducing the notion that the **system** needs to be tested (albeit alongside the disabled people). Is the system giving people the support that they need? Much more could be made of this.

So the first piece of a One Nation social security system that controls costs begins with the responsibility to work and the responsibility of government to help make it possible.

Rewarding Work

In speaking of 'rewarding work', it is clear that Miliband uses 'rewarding' as a verb (reinforcing the transactional frame), not an adjective. He says little about what makes work rewarding and meaningful.

But it is not just about work.

It is also about the kind of work that can properly support people and their families.

Today in Britain almost three million men and women and almost one and half million children live in families that are going to work and are still not able to escape poverty. People doing the right thing, trying to support themselves and their children.

The last Labour government took action on this, and was right to provide tax credits for those in work.

But we didn't do enough to tackle Britain's low wage economy, a low wage economy that just leaves the taxpayer facing greater and greater costs subsidising employers. To tackle the problem of poverty at work and to control costs we need to create an economy that genuinely works for working people.

I want to teach my kids that it is wrong to be idle on benefits, when you can work.

There's an implication here that those not in paid work must, *ipso facto*, be idle.

But I also want to teach them that the people in this country who work 40 or 50 or 60 hours a week, do two or even three jobs, should be able to bring up their families without fear of where the next pound is coming from.

Here Miliband implies that those who are not in (paid) employment can (and should?) expect to bring their families up in a state of financial anxiety.

That's as much an issue as the responsibility to work.

Of course, this government has nothing to say about this. Worse than that, they are taking our country in the wrong direction.

Their failure on the economy means that real wages have fallen £1,900 since this government came to office. We know that this government will never stand up for low and middle-income working people. But our approach for the future needs to make good on what the last Labour government did not achieve.

As William Beveridge envisaged seventy years ago when he founded the social security system we need to understand that there are three sets of people with responsibilities:

Government. Individuals. And the private sector, including employers. That's what One Nation is all about. Responsibility being borne by all.

For too many people in Britain the workplace is nasty, brutish and unfair. The exploitation of zero hours contracts to keep people insecure.

It is significant here that Miliband is suggesting that zero-hours contracts are exploited **in order to** keep people insecure (rather than simply to maximize 'workforce flexibility'). Feeling secure, is something to which Miliband attaches importance – and rightly so: it will be difficult for citizens to ascribe importance to the values that underpin wider social and environmental concern, unless they themselves enjoy reasonable security.

Using agency workers to unfairly avoid giving people the pay and conditions offered to permanent staff.

Recruitment agencies hiring just from overseas. And some employers not paying the minimum wage.

These issues too are about our responsibilities to each other.

In values terms, this is a powerful passage. Having outlined a series of injustices, Miliband situates these on a wider canvas. These injustices are not simply about unscrupulous employers (that comes in a moment!). Rather, he frames these injustices as being “about our responsibilities to each other”. This invites reflection what we see these responsibilities as being, and the implications of this for the type of society that we decide, collectively, to create.

About the failure of government to set the right rules and the failure of a minority of employers.

Be in no doubt: all of this is on the agenda of the next Labour government.

So, for example, we will change the law to stop employment agencies using loopholes to undermine the pay of what are effectively full-time employees.

And we will do everything in our power to promote the living wage. If local councils can say if you want a contract with the council then you need to pay the living wage, then central government should look at doing that too.

Here Miliband is highlighting the concrete steps that his government would take to “set the right rules”, as the context for our expressions of responsibility to one another. Although it’s not a point that he makes explicitly, there is an implicit understanding here that it is the role of a policy framework to validate and support citizens’ sense of their “responsibilities to each other”.

And for every pound that employers pay above the minimum wage towards a living wage, government would save 50 pence in lower tax credits and benefits and higher revenues.

But now, in values terms, Miliband undermines the compelling ethical case that he has built in his last few sentences by again retreating into economic cost-benefit analysis (and thus engaging values antagonistic to social and environmental concern).

We should look at offering some of these savings back to those employers to persuade them to do the right thing and pay the living wage.

It will be tougher to tackle big issues facing our society like child poverty in the next Parliament. But I still think we can make progress if everyone pulls their weight.

And it starts with tackling child poverty among families in work, as part of a long-term goal that no-one should have to work for their poverty.

So the second plank of our approach is about an economy that works for working people so that we can both keep social security costs under control and work towards a fairer society.

Investing for the Future

The third plank of our approach is wherever possible we should be investing for the future, not paying for the costs of failure. It is why it is far better to be investing in putting people back to work than paying for them to be idle.

Miliband suggests that it's important to invest in getting people back to work **because the alternative is to pay for the costs of failure**. Following passages in the last section, which open up the scope of his vision to include social justice imperatives, he now once again shuts this down, to focus on the economic costs of unemployment.

It is why it is so important to invest in childcare so we support families as they struggle to balance work and the needs of family life.

And the same is true when it comes to one of the biggest drivers of the growth of social security spending in recent decades: housing benefit.

We can't afford to pay billions on ever-rising rents, when we should be building homes to bring down the bill. Thirty years ago for every £100 we spent on housing, £80 was invested in bricks and mortar and £20 was spent on housing benefit. Today, for every £100 we spend on housing, just £5 is invested in bricks and mortar and £95 goes on housing benefit.

There's nothing to be celebrated in that.

And as a consequence we are left with a housing benefit bill that goes up higher and higher. For the simple reason, that we have built too few homes in this country and therefore we see higher and higher prices, particularly in the private sector.

Now, this government talks a lot about getting housing benefit under control. But let me be clear: any attempt to control housing benefit costs which fails to build more homes is destined to fail.

For all the cuts this government has made to housing benefit, it is still rising and it is forecast to carry on rising too. Of course, there is an issue of values here too.

In 2011, there were 10 cases where £100,000 a year was spent on housing benefit for individual families.

Again, an opaque allusion to what Labour values might be – defined in terms of what they are **against** (spending more than £100,000 per annum per family). Miliband could have chosen to frame Labour values in a more positive way – in terms of what these are – by focussing on those in need. It seems that he is striving to define Labour values in terms that will appeal to Conservative voters, and is led as a result to define them in terms of what they are **not** (because to state what they are would be less appealing to this constituency). As I have argued, in retreating from clarity about what he stands for, Miliband is doing himself a disservice.

That's 10 too many. And it is one of the reasons why Labour has said we would support a cap on overall benefits.

Here is the support for Conservative values enshrined in a policy commitment. Does such positioning lead Conservative supporters to be more supportive of the Labour Party, or does it rather confirm Conservative supporters in their prior convictions?

As Ed Balls said on Monday, an independent body should advise government on how best to design this cap to avoid it pushing people into homelessness and costing more. But the real, long-term solution is clear: we have to do what hasn't been done for three decades and to move from benefits to building.

Currently Britain is building fewer new homes than at any time since the 1920s. Ed Balls talked on Monday about how we invest for the future of our country.

Clearly, the building of homes is high on that list.

This will be a priority of the next Labour government. But just like tackling worklessness, we can't do it from central government alone. We will need every local authority in Britain to be part of this effort.

At the moment, we expect individual families to negotiate with their landlords. In these circumstances, it is almost inevitable that tenants end up paying over the odds. And so does the taxpayer, in the housing benefit bill. It's time to tackle this problem at source.

So a Labour government would seek a radical devolution to local authorities. And Labour councils in Lewisham, Liverpool, Leeds, Manchester, Sheffield and Birmingham have all come to us and said that if they had power to negotiate on behalf of tenants on housing benefit, they could get far greater savings than the individual on their own. So a Labour government would give councils this power.

This is a significant proposal, in values terms. It establishes the principle that it shouldn't be left to the market – landlords negotiating with individual tenants – to set rents. Rather, there is a role for local government in defending the collective interests of the people that they represent.

Bringing the cost of housing benefit down.

And what is more, we would let them keep some of the savings they make on the condition that they invested that money in helping build new homes.

This is the way we can start to bring about the shift from benefits to building. Bringing the housing benefit bill down for the long-term too.

And it is a One Nation solution: enforcing the responsibilities of government and private landlords. So the third plank of a One Nation social security system is to invest in the future, not to pay for failure.

Recognising Contribution

The fourth and final plank is around recognising contribution.

Again a transactional frame, based on 'what you've put in'; not 'what you need to lead a dignified life'.

We do that by recognising the importance of supporting families, through maternity and paternity leave and pay, child benefit and child tax credit.

Here the frame could be about what type of 'welcome' society provides for its newest members – does it drive their parents back to work at the earliest opportunity, or does it afford them the space and support to ensure new members of society have the best possible start in life?

We do that by providing support to people with disabilities, both those who cannot work and also to those who can work, but whose extra needs it is right to recognise.

Of course, it is right to make sure that we have the right tests in this area too. Which is why we support tests for Personal Independence Payments, but again they must be done in the right way.

We also recognise contribution by supporting elderly women and men who have contributed to our country throughout their lives.

The implication is that the support for the elderly is contingent upon individuals having made adequate (economic) contributions during their working lives. Here is an opportunity to articulate the value that society should place on those of its members who have been around longest - our parents and grandparents, our one-time teachers, nurses and bus-drivers. But the implication is again an economic and transactional one - that we should support people in old age because they have put money into pension funds.

On pensions, we know we have a rising elderly population and a rising budget.

The way to make this sustainable is to ensure that we increase the number of people in the working population supporting our elderly. And therefore to show a willingness to adjust the retirement age.

Of course, there needs to be proper notice, but as people live longer, the age at which people retire will have to increase. All of Britain's elderly men and women deserve dignity in retirement, after a lifetime of contribution to our country.

Further reinforcement of the transactional frame, here serving to imply that the 'reward' of dignity is properly conditional upon adequate financial contribution: this conflation of intrinsic and extrinsic values is likely to create dissonance.

That's why there will always be a place for universal support at the heart of our welfare system.

This is a good clear statement of a principle of universality. But how does it sit with the implication in the foregoing passage that Labour's aspirations for social security are anything but universal? Rather, Labour sees social security as, when properly construed, **transactional**, and therefore **conditional**.

Like an NHS for all. A proper basic state pension for all those who've paid in.

Here the contradiction is yet more stark. “Like an NHS **for all**”, except that the basic state pension is seemingly only for “those **who have paid in**”.

But whether it is relation to pensioners or children there is always a balance that has to be struck between universal, contributory and means-tested benefits. With so many difficult choices facing the next Labour government, we have to be realistic about what we can afford.

Leave aside, for a moment, the unreflective assumption of the austerity frame, and focus on what this ‘pragmatism’ reveals about Labour’s values. Ideally, Miliband would have established, by this point in his speech, a clear vision of what he wants to achieve – rooted in ‘Labour values’. He might then legitimately reflect on how this compelling vision can be best articulated in the context of economic constraint – without undermining the integrity of that vision.

Miliband is implying, in this section, that this is the position he has now reached in his narrative. But as we have seen, he has manifestly failed to construct a compelling vision of what Labour values are, and how these apply to social security policy. Rather, he has been obfuscatory about Labour values.

This obfuscation makes it difficult to persuade the audience that at this point he is genuinely striving to align his moral compass with his economic pragmatism: his audience have been given little to help them deduce which way his compass is pointing.

So it doesn't make sense to continue sending a cheque every year for Winter Fuel Allowance to the richest pensioners in the country.

Miliband has just assured his audience that “there will always be a place for universal support at the heart of our welfare system”. Winter Fuel Allowance is clearly not that place. But he doesn’t communicate any sense of wrestling with an ethical tension here. Far from it: universal support on winter fuel simply “doesn’t make sense”. We are not left with the impression of a principled man uneasily derogating from a principle that he holds dear.

Equally, when it comes to the decisions of the next Labour government it won't be our biggest priority to overturn the decisions this government has made on taking child benefit away from families earning over £50,000 a year.

But in one important respect our social security system fails to recognise contribution: the service of those currently of working age.

Last week, I met somebody who had worked all his life, for 40 years, in the scaffolding business.

What does the social security system offer him if he falls out of work? It's the same as someone who has been working for just a couple of years. That can't be right.

It's not made clear why this 'can't be right'. The listener is left to conclude that an individual should only be allowed to take out of the social security system in proportion to what they have put in. What effect does this framing have? It conveys a sense of **entitlement** to take out what I have put in (and hardens my prejudice towards those, who I now see myself as 'subsidizing', who take out more than they put in). In this sense, it is an individualizing frame: it invites me to think of my contributions to the social security budget as analogous to payments into a private fund. It erodes my understanding therefore, that my payment, as a tax-payer, is an expression of the responsibility I have towards the wider society of which I am part.

I can't promise to turn the clock back to Beveridge and nor do I want to. Our society isn't the same as it was back then, with most men at work and women at home. But the idea that people should get something back for all they've put in is a value deeply felt by the British people.

Further reinforcement of the transactional frame.

So I believe we should look at the support that is offered to those who fall out of work and the contribution on which it is based.

Currently, after two years of work, someone is entitled to “Contributory Jobseeker’s Allowance” without a means test for six months.

They get £72 per week. Whether they’ve worked for two years or forty years. Two years of work is a short period to gain entitlement to extra help.

And £72 is in no sense a proper recognition of how much somebody who has worked for many decades has paid into the system.

Here, the transactional frame is laid out very clearly.

As so many people have told me: “I have worked all my life, I have never had a day on benefits, and no real help is there when I needed it.”

So I have asked our Policy Review to look at whether, without spending extra money, we can change the system. Asking people to work longer – say 5 years instead of 2 – before they qualify for extra support.

Again, the implication is that this is something Miliband is considering on the grounds of **principle**: here the principle that you should only get out what you put in. But this is a principle that invokes values antithetical to wider social and environmental concern. Social and environmental concern would be better supported through an appeal to social justice, not transactionalism.

But at the same time making that extra support more generous to better reward contribution. This is particularly important for older workers who find it harder to get back into work at a level similar to their previous occupation.

And we will look at accompanying this with extra help back into work for older workers who lose their jobs.

And as we look to reform this contributory part of our welfare system, we should also examine ways to take account of some of the other kinds of contribution people make, like mums looking after very young children and children looking after their elderly parents.

Here's an important – if belated – acknowledgement of the importance of unpaid work – particularly care for others.

Because we want to send a signal about the real importance that the next Labour government attaches to recognising contribution.

Planning the Budget

So the four building blocks of a One Nation social security system are: work, rewarding work, investing for the future not paying for failure, and recognising contribution. A system that is sustainable. And one which reflects the values of the British people.

But I believe we need to do more in these tough times in how we plan social security spending. In Labour's last period in office we introduced the three-year spending review. Enabling Departments, like any business, to properly plan three years ahead.

Throughout previous generations, there had been an annual spending round, rows between ministers, arguments between Departments, leaks to the newspapers. A bit like now really under this government. It makes much more sense to plan ahead.

I believe we should extend this approach from Departmental spending to social security spending. So that planning social security over three years should become a central part of each spending review.

And I also believe that a cap on social security spending should be part of that planning process.

Here again, security (a fundamental requirement for a decent life) is subjugated to economic imperatives. Isn't basic security something for which the economy should be made to provide? To suggest otherwise is to conflate means and ends. It is to implicitly relegate the outcomes of a properly functioning economy (i.e. facilitating citizens in leading meaningful and enriching lives) beneath the imperatives that the economy has accrued on its own terms (i.e. wealth creation *per se*).

This reflects – and contributes, incrementally, to further entrench – a worldview which accords overarching importance to wealth creation and only secondary importance to social justice.

Because what governments should be doing is looking three years ahead and setting a clear limit within which social security would have to operate.

Now, clearly there are detailed issues that need to be worked on to make any cap sensible. The government has also talked about a cap on social security. And we will look at their proposals.

In particular, they are right we need to be able to separate the short-term costs of social security – those that come from immediate downturns in the economy – from the big, long-term causes of rising spending that should be within a cap, like housing costs and structural unemployment.

And we need also to consider how to cope year to year with higher than expected inflation and how to treat the impact of an ageing population.

The starting point for the next Labour government will be that in 2015 – 2016 we would inherit plans for social security spending from this government. Any changes from those plans will need to be fully funded.

For example, if we were in government today we would be reversing the millionaire's tax cut to help make work pay through tax credits.

Properly construed, reversing the 'millionaires' tax cut' is an example of a proposal which keeps fiscal policy and social justice in the proper context. But here its proposed reversal is to 'help make work pay'. It invokes, in the same sentence, the assumptions that most people are motivated by economic cost-benefit analysis, and that therefore public money is needed to incentivize people to work. In values terms, this engages those very values which are likely to be aligned with **opposition** to increases in tax on the wealthiest.

If public support for increases in taxation on the wealthiest citizens is to be built, this will be upon values of 'social justice' and 'equality' – not values of 'wealth'.

Today I am delivering a clear statement about One Nation Labour's principles for social security spending:

The next Labour government will use a 3-year cap on structural welfare spending to help control costs.

It's not clear how this constitutes a 'principle'. It's a mechanism and one which could lead to greater hardship for many of those who have to rely on social security. The speech dodges the possible consequences of such a cap, and how it fits with values of social justice and equality or even 'one nation'.

Such a cap will alert the next Labour government to problems coming down the track. And ensure that we make policy to keep the social security budget in limits.

Introducing greater discipline, as ministers from across Departments will be led to control the big drivers of spending.

Conclusion

So here is the choice that people will face at the general election. I have set out how we can control the social security budget.

Not in anecdote or as part of a political game or as a way of dividing the country. But as a way to reform the system so that it meets the values of the British people.

Miliband repeatedly invokes the 'values of the British people', although there is no clear statement of what he takes these to be. Of course, this is a rhetorical flourish. But it is important to recognize, in passing, that the 'values of the British people' are not some monolithic structure around which the flimsy scaffolding of party politics must be erected. Rather they are contested, and the Labour Party and its leader – should they so choose – could play their part in bringing the best of these values to the fore. Of course, if Miliband were to want to help in this he would have to decide which of these values are the most important. And he would have to be forthright in articulating these. He would need to outline his political vision and policy aspirations in the light of these values – even if, at times, it was necessary to demonstrate to citizens that he was reluctantly forced to deviate from these – under, for example, severe economic pressures.

I have set out the values that would drive a One Nation social security system in government. But there is another choice on offer from David Cameron.

I will tell you that there is a minority who don't work but should. He will tell you anyone looking for work is a skiver. I will tell you that we need to protect the dignity of work and make work pay. He will hit the low-paid in work.

I will tell you that we do need to get the housing benefit bill down with a cap that works, but crucially by investing in homes and tackling private landlords. He will make the problem worse by making people homeless and driving up the bill.

I will tell you that we always need to value contribution in the system. He will hit people who work hard and do the right thing.

We will tackle the deep, long-term causes of social security spending and tackle the costs of failure like housing benefit, worklessness and the problem of low pay. They will not.

We must pass on to our children a social security system that is sustainable. And a system that works and is supported. We can use the talents of everyone.

Demand responsibility. And seek to move forward as a united country.

This is a good appeal to intrinsic values – but much of what has preceded this is subtly divisive; privileging entitlement (as established through economic contribution to the system) above the principle of universalism.

Or we can have politicians who seek to use every opportunity to divide this country and set one group of people against another.

I believe this country is always at its best when it is united. One Nation. Everyone playing their part.

Self-transcendence values (such as those for social justice) are epitomised by the question: ‘what can I do for others?’ Self-enhancement values (associated with lower social and environmental concern) are epitomised by the question: ‘what can others do for me?’

Implicit in this is the understanding that citizens are most free and most fulfilled when they have a sense of vocation or social purpose – when they are contributing to something bigger than themselves as a form of self-expression: when, for example, they feel that they are ‘playing their part’ in contributing to the pursuit of a collective (national) vision.

Yet in the context of Miliband’s speech, there is by now an implication of coercion in the phrase ‘everyone playing their part’. It seems to mean ‘no shirking’. This implication – if it is felt – diminishes autonomy, and reduces motivation to contribute to the realisation of Miliband’s (ill-formed) vision.

Ideally, ‘everyone playing their part’ would be explicitly built on an understanding of individual autonomy, participation in society, and motivation to establish a sense of meaning as part of a larger whole – that is, contributing to a society which supports each and every one in achieving his or her own sense of purpose.

That is the social security system I want to build. That’s the future I want to build for Britain.