

Ed Miliband goes where the prime minister cannot

The Labour leader has earned new supporters for tackling Rupert Murdoch



Allegra Stratton

guardian.co.uk, Thursday 14 July 2011 20.47 BST



Ed Miliband has been naturally reticent about attacking Rupert Murdoch in the past. Photograph: Murdo Macleod for the Guardian

As the Tories' fortnight miserabilis closes, they are in a better place but not in the best place. At times, you might have thought Andy Coulson still worked in Downing Street. David Cameron and co became so intent on doing the right thing by their former colleague – with snippy texts sent to anyone who criticised Coulson – they didn't do the right thing by the British public. When Cameron did eventually move to put some distance between himself and Coulson at PMQs on Wednesday, he did so over the objections of some of those closest to him. They think Coulson could end up not being charged, at which point they want to have been loyal.

Steve Hilton, Cameron's director of strategy and the one with his finger on the zeitgeist, has been horrified by recent events. Yes he has been proved right about problems lying in wait with both Coulson and Rupert Murdoch – he's instinctively wary – but it is Hilton's modernisation project that has also been looking in peril.

In recent meetings George Osborne, the normally loquacious chancellor, was said to have gone quiet, possibly tongue-tied by being the one who hired Coulson in the first place.

Hilton will also recognise the Ed Miliband tactics as ones Cameron honed in opposition – go where you know the prime minister cannot, because he's prime minister.

And, despite the BSkyB deal being effectively dead, the prospects of election leaflets featuring pictures of Dave and Rebekah or Dave and Rupert are still exciting Cameron's opponents.

The mood shifted and Cameron didn't get the memo that hiring Coulson might be trouble. Friends and supporters say he became the paywall prime minister in an open-sourced age.

The only person in Downing Street with a clear view of what should be done was a post-Coulson man and Wednesday's tougher words from Cameron suggest Craig Oliver – Coulson's successor – won out. Sources say Oliver argued from the start that Cameron had to distance himself from his friend. We may get Oliver's own account of these

conversations soon enough. He is said to be keeping a diary.

The former editor of the BBC's News at 10 may have had the best grasp of what needed to be done because he is the most recent to enter No 10 from the real world. Diaries of these tricky days in the bunker will show despair, but they could also show whether the inhabitants understood the fact there is a broader shift afoot.

A new piece of work by the left-leaning [Institute for Public Policy Research](#) documents the shift and argues that no political party shows signs of fully understanding modern Britain.

First bankers and sub-prime finance; then MPs and sub-prime expenses; and now Murdoch and sub-prime journalism. This much we know.

It is at this point that sociologists normally reach for samples of opinion from swing voters and core voters, from the upper, middle and working classes. But this is a very old school way to slice and dice the country. Graeme Cooke, at one time head of David Miliband's brains trust, has since been working on a thesis that the electorate has changed as much as the challenges for politicians.

He has analysed the [British Values Survey](#) and broken us all down into three types: Pioneers, Prospectors and Settlers. These are dispositions, not policy proclivities. These are the new tribes, and they do not have life-long loyalties to political parties.

Pioneers (41% of Britons) are global, networked, like innovation and believe in the importance of ethics. Prospectors (28%) like success, ambition, seek the esteem of others and if they think a party can help them help themselves, they are on board. Settlers (31%) see things in terms of right and wrong, are wary of change, seek security and have a strong sense of place – patriotism and national security motivate them to vote.

All the social classes split up in roughly the same proportions. Settlers were most numerous after 1945 but as people became steadily more affluent, "post-material attitudes" dominated and so now Pioneers are the largest group.

And so to Murdoch. Pioneers would have liked Ed Miliband to tackle Murdoch long ago but while they are a big group, they are not big enough to wage a campaign and indeed, eventually, win an election. A fortnight ago Prospectors would have been wary of what they would have thought a quixotic campaign against Murdoch. Settlers would have disliked the squall of a fight. After the Milly Dowler hacking revelations, a campaign suitable for Pioneers suddenly became appealing to Settlers too. Prospectors joined in as it became clear to them at some point that Miliband was "winning".

Prospectors are looking for someone who can advance their standards of living and social status.

It's reductive, yes, but it shows the spectrum of dispositions with which we all have come to the Murdoch tale, and will bring to future moments of reckoning. And it's how political strategists will be thinking about events.

Miliband had been naturally reticent about attacking Murdoch in the past, and at numerous points – as his backbenchers tirelessly picked away at Murdoch's case – their leader had to be cajoled into taking a tougher stance on News International.

As recently as three weeks ago Lord Glasman was pushing the Labour leader to take on a triumvirate of power – Murdoch, the unions and the City of London. Miliband seemed uncertain of how broadly the agenda would appeal. He took on one third when the hacking of Dowler's phone made it a no-brainer.

And that's why No 10 strategist and pollster Andrew Cooper will have been aghast as Cameron, by contrast, trailed in the instant opinion polls.

Cooper understands the new groups, and how you need to talk to them. Cooke reflects that: "When Gove talks about school discipline, he is talking to Settlers. When Cameron talks about increasing aid to 0.7%, he is talking to Pioneers. And when George Osborne is

talking about the deficit and tax, he is talking to Prospectors."

This informs the government as it enters the last week of parliament and tries to clear unfinished business.

Crime is a big issue for each group. This is why the government is frustrated by the difficulty for Cameron of fitting his crime speech in before parliament breaks up. Cooper forced previous U-turns when two of these groups – Pioneers and Settlers – were enraged about NHS changes and the sale of forests. Abandoning these reforms has inflicted collateral damage.

Even before phone hacking, the worry for Tory radicals who would like to go further than Cooper is that the coherence of their message to Pioneers is in the long run undermined if on the NHS they constrain reform.

These radicals group fear that free schools will end up being their only legacy to the country. But even this is danger unless schools are allowed to make a profit, without which the policy will remain stunted – producing a couple of hundred new schools at most. However in order to reassure the Settlers, profit-making has been ruled out of hand.

Miliband's natural base is Pioneers. But the Lib Dems and Greens appeal to this group too.

"We have seen an increase in Liberalism – and the rise of the Pioneer," Cooke says. "Rising affluence up against a conservatism that is attributed to globalisation, threats to jobs and living standards – which affects the Settler.

"The question is which politician can harness the Pioneer, the Prospector and the Settler in a convincing way." The trick for politicians is to match up the different interests of the three groups like on a fruit machine. It is a complicated manoeuvre but it's what Miliband has managed to do on phone hacking.

Ads by Google

Leeds Coupons

1 ridiculously huge coupon a day. It's like doing Leeds 90% Off!

www.GROUPON.co.uk/Leeds

Spread Betting - Try Now

Try GFT's Award-Winning Trading Platform. Free Practice Account.

www.GFTuk.com

Get York Deals

Amazing Daily Deals 50-70% Off Restaurants, Spas, Events And More!

www.LivingSocial.com