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# Labour's chief union backer attacks Miliband

## Unite boss says Labour leadership is on course to alienate core support

**Patrick Wintour**  
Political editor

The Labour party's chief union backer today accuses Ed Miliband of undermining his own leadership, disenfranchising the party's core support and leaving the country with all three main parties bent on using austerity to save capitalism.

In an article in the Guardian, the Unite general secretary, Len McCluskey, launches a strident attack on Miliband and Ed Balls, the shadow chancellor, prompted by the party leadership's weekend decision to endorse a continuation of the government's public sector pay freeze.

He suggests their stance "challenges the whole course Ed Miliband has set for the party, and perhaps his leadership itself". He also claims Blairites will now seek to capitalise on their policy coup and come for Miliband himself, a path he says "will lead to the destruction of the party as con-

**Len McCluskey, general secretary of Unite, says the Labour party's new approach leaves half the country disenfranchised**



stituted and certain election defeat".

Up until now, criticism of Balls's painful endorsement of the government's clampdown on public sector pay has prompted only attacks from unions not affiliated to Labour. Unite, however, are the single biggest funders of the party.

McCluskey's broadside represents the biggest union warning yet about the political direction of Miliband's leadership and shows the risks the Labour leader will face as he struggles to convince the electorate that the party is serious about the necessity of spending cuts to reduce the deficit.

At the weekend Balls stressed that he could not, at this stage, promise to reverse a single government spending cut, even though he said he still opposed the way in which the chancellor, George Osborne, was cutting too far and too fast.

Balls believes he has to reassure an electorate that his support for a short-term Keynesian stimulus to kickstart growth now does not mean he thinks cuts are avoidable later.

In remarks delivered in the knowledge that he was about to be attacked by McCluskey, Miliband delivered an uncompromising message to Labour MPs at their weekly evening meeting yesterday: Labour must be the party prepared to take hard decisions in both good and bad times, he said. "Every shadow cabinet will have to show how they can create longer-term wealth, take on vested interest and make different choices," he added.

After insisting Labour can be the party for tough times, he reminded his MPs that the party failed in 2010 and must succeed in 2015.

But McCluskey says Balls's "sudden weekend embrace of austerity and the government's public sector pay squeeze represents a victory for discredited Blairism at the expense of the party's core supporters".

He says that when the public sector unions confront the government over the pay freeze, they would "now be fighting the Labour frontbench as well".

He adds: "It leaves the country with something like a 'national government' consensus where, as in 1931, the leaders of the three big parties agree on a common agenda of austerity to get capitalism - be it 'good; or 'bad' - back on its feet."

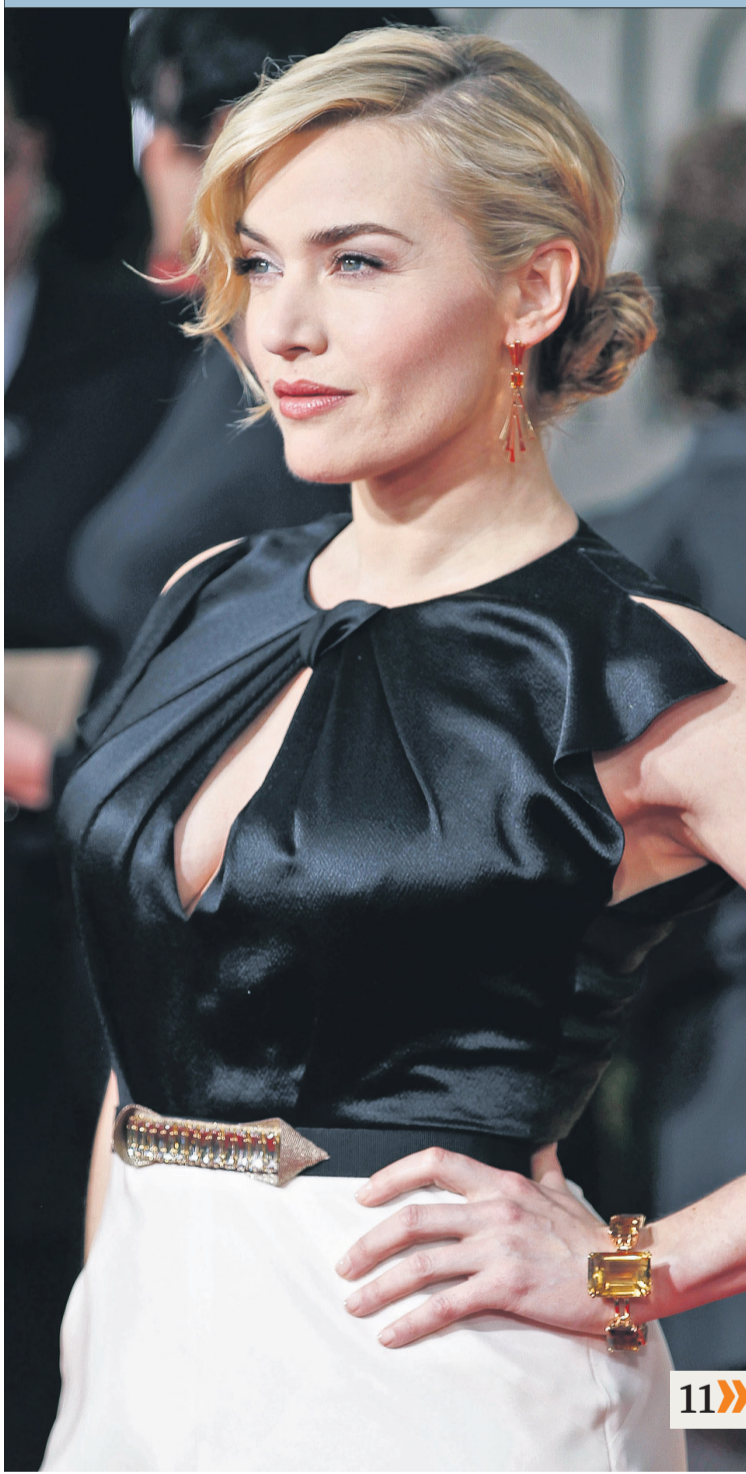
Balls argued in a Guardian interview and speech to the Fabian Society that he wanted to put those out of work ahead of the pay of those in work, but the Unite leader dismisses the argument as the "hoary old fallacy that increasing the wages of the low-paid risks unemployment".

He then argues: "The view that deficit reduction through spending cuts must be a priority in order to keep the financial speculators onside has been the road to ruin for Labour chancellors from Philip Snowden to Denis Healey."

He adds: "This is the last gasp of the neoliberalism which led to 2008 and the final point on the arc of 'new Labour' poli-

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**Golden girl**  
Kate Winslet triumphs at the Globes



Kate Winslet at the Golden Globes in Los Angeles, where she received an award for her performance in the TV mini-series *Mildred Pierce* Photograph: Matt Slayes/AP

# PM throws backing behind new royal yacht

**Patrick Wintour**

David Cameron has swung behind plans for a new, privately funded royal yacht that will double up as a university of the seas, and provide accommodation for royalty in the ship's stern.

Cameron has endorsed the idea after lobbying from the higher education minister David Willetts and the education secretary Michael Gove. The idea, at one point described by Gove as a gift from the nation to the Queen on her diamond jubilee, also has the backing of the Prince of Wales and Princess Anne, according to letters sent to the prime minister by Willetts.

Downing Street sources said the prime minister regarded the idea as excellent, and discussions have been held with Portsmouth city council for the yacht to be berthed in the south coast port.

The £60m yacht has so far found £10m in backing from financial leaders in Canada and an unnamed £5m private donation, as well as an offer by Foyles to contribute £500,000 for books for a library.

Cameron's enthusiasm comes despite a storm of protest yesterday after the Guardian revealed ministers had recently discussed taxpayers paying for the yacht as a "present" to the Queen - prompting critics to accuse the government of being out of touch with the nation's economic priorities.

After the leak of a December-dated letter from Gove lobbying fellow cabinet ministers for a royal yacht to the Guardian on Sunday, government officials yesterday released further letters showing that ministers have been urging the prime minister to back the plan since September. The plan for the yacht is the brainchild of Rear Admiral David Bawtree, a former naval base commander in Portsmouth.

In the Commons yesterday Gove denied he supported public funding for the yacht, although the letter leaked to the Guardian showed he did at one time see public funding as the chief option. The education secretary's office yesterday insisted Gove had, in an earlier letter, rejected the possibility of public funding.

Ministerial sources also conceded that Gove was concerned the diamond jubilee could be overshadowed by the London Olympics and he was anxious to promote celebrations for the Queen this year.

Willetts wrote to Cameron in September with details of a "future ship project

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# 'We are terrified': the families putting their trust in the Lords



As the upper chamber prepares for another heated debate on welfare reform, **Polly Toynbee** talks to people living in fear of the impending disability cuts

Some people's lives are almost unimaginably hard, stricken by bad luck. The welfare state is there to mitigate misfortune, or it was. Emma and Chris Ford have three severely autistic children below the age of eight. Emma was once a well-paid PA, but that life is a world away, as both parents have given up work to care for the children full time. They stand to lose £2,716 a year in the welfare reform bill now being debated in the House of Lords.

The Fords are remarkably resilient, but after her third child was born, Emma suffered a long bout of postnatal depression. The children get harder to

look after as they get older and, she says now, "If I'd understood what the diagnosis of the others meant, I wouldn't have had a third."

But she's not complaining - or at least, she hasn't until now. Their two-bedroom, housing association home in Horsham, West Sussex, is cramped for three hyperactive children. Rhys, six, is in special school, a child with no sense of danger, on impulse throwing himself down stairs, pulling furniture down on top of himself or hurtling into the road regardless of traffic. Outside he needs a wheelchair. Barely speaking, he eats with his hands, smearing food everywhere and he needs Ritalin to manage at school. He wakes at 4am every morning

and has to be watched every waking minute from then on. As we talk, he sits for hours in a big woolly hat, peering through his thick specs at a repetitive computer game that keeps him calm and happy.

Martyn, seven, manages in mainstream school with a teaching assistant to help: he bounces about the sitting room with the youngest, Caitlin. She has just had a heart operation, wears a hearing aid and, aged three, hardly talks, so she starts in special school soon. Life is a struggle, but a kind volunteer comes in for two hours a week so Chris and Emma can go for

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