

From: sbwhoeop [redacted]
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To: H
Subject: Melanne's event was wonderful. Get Shaun Woodward's memo? Miliband interview below. Sid

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<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2009/jun/12/david-miliband-gordon-brown-labour-leadership/print>
 The Guardian

David Miliband: Labour is facing the fight of its life

Foreign secretary thought about quitting the government in last week's turmoil

David Miliband expressed his frustration at a lack of vision from the Labour leadership. Photograph: Martin Godwin

Voters still don't know what Labour and Gordon Brown stand for, David Miliband admits today, as he reveals how close he came to quitting the government during last week's turmoil at Westminster.

Speaking to the Guardian at the end of 10 extraordinary days, the foreign secretary says the party's high command was given an "electric shock" by the disastrous European election results, and he urges fellow ministers to get out and prepare for "the fight of our life".

But Miliband also concedes that he considered following his close friend and ally James Purnell, who resigned from the government last week and called for the prime minister to stand down.

Miliband said: "I'd made my decision on Thursday. Sometimes you can make your decisions with great planning and calculation and sometimes you have to make them rather more quickly. James made his decision in good faith, I made my decision in good faith ... we all have to live with our decisions."

The Labour party has a settled view of who should be leader, he said. "This divides people who are close and people feel passionately one way and people feel passionately the other way."

Describing the task now facing Labour, he says: "It could not be more urgent that there is a maximum of 11 months until the next general election, that we got 15% of the vote nationally [last week], that we came second in Wales and that one in 20 people voted for us. If that does not electric shock us out of our ministerial chairs to think: 'By God, we have got the fight of our life on our hands because whatever the Tories are they certainly don't deserve a landslide' – then nothing will."

Miliband has not given a domestic policy interview for nearly nine months since he felt dogged by accusations that he was manoeuvring for the premiership. He refuses to acknowledge that his decision to back Brown last week saved the prime minister, saying "it is impossible to tell".

But the foreign secretary feels his loyalty has given him the freedom to speak his mind without his motives being questioned by anyone in Downing Street.

Miliband betrays frustration at the absence of a clear Labour vision, saying: "We need the message to go out that we have got the humility to learn about what has gone wrong.

"It is not a masochism strategy. It is about saying what we believe in. It is about clarity, priority, adding up to purpose. I know what we stand for, I know what our instincts are, but the voters don't. Actually, I know what Gordon Brown stands for.

"We have a responsibility to make sure that, come the election, [voters] know what Labour stands for. We were not being listened to, people felt that they had been forgotten, we neither inspired nor reassured."

He calls for cabinet colleagues to show stronger leadership in the battle to restore Labour's fortunes. "We need to make sure the talents and energies of not just the whole of the cabinet, but the whole of the labour movement

are give n free rein because one in 20 people voted for us. The truth is that we are not automatons. We all have to get out there."

Asked whether he felt voters had stopped listening to Brown, Miliband said: "He himself has said he has to build on his strengths and work on his weaknesses. That is a good maxim for all of us. He is someone who made the right decisions on the biggest issue of the day. We have got a chance to fight with honour and dignity for what we believe in. The stakes are very high because we know that parties can slump into very dangerous positions."

Providing what he describes as a route map from the disaster, he said: "Labour first needs a period of competent, effective, stable government; secondly, we need to reset our political compass so ministers are no longer locked in their departments, but link their policies to their values; and thirdly, the government has to be at the cutting edge of policy."

On the issue of political reform, he demands a speeding-up of the pace of political reform, saying it is not a piece of middle-class frippery. For the first time, he reveals that he now backs the Alternative Vote for the Commons, saying MPs' legitimacy will be strengthened by being able to say 50% in my constituency voted for me.

He says the change cannot be made before the general election. He also backs a fresh push on Lords reform, saying "we have got an agreed blueprint".

He rounded on Tory spending plans, but said Labour would clarify its own intentions before the election. "They will be credible and clear. We will come to that in an open and honest way."

But he defends delay in setting out these figures, arguing "when you are in the middle of a Tornado it is a bad time take a forecast".

In an oblique reference to the Damian McBride briefings, he also calls on the media to abandon unattributable briefings, saying all politicians' spokesmen should be named, or not quoted by media outlets. "The gotcha culture of politics is not in anyone's interests," he said.

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