

## Britain and its Unions, destined for divorce?

[Harry Ashcroft](#) comments on the ongoing struggle between the Labour Party and their once close friends, the trade unions

Friday 19 July 2013



Image: Docklandsboy

This week the relationship between the Labour Party, the party of Her Majesty's Opposition, and that of the Trade Union Congress has been brought into question, perhaps, dependent upon how strong Ed Miliband's leadership is.

Allegations of fixed elections in the race to replace Eric Joyce's Falkirk seat have drawn controversy to Len McCluskey's UNITE Union; the leaders of the Labour are now asking how much power the unions should have, and how much money should they take from them. Perhaps at this time, a time when the unions are being scrutinised more than ever, it is important to consider the business case for the Trade Unions, do they defend workers being subjugated to unreasonable conditions? Or do they stretch the hypocrisies, egos and powers of those who have risen to the top of them? Bringing the fortunes of the economy with them?

Like the Tories and big business, Labour have long been dependent on Union money, and Unions have long been accused of representing more than a voice of their members. Arthur Scargill famously ran the Miners Strike of the 80's from an office of opulence; log fires, self-portraits, and an oak desk larger than the average families dining room, whilst Bob Crow or McCluskey will both command salaries larger than the standard wage of a Member of Parliament. In this environment we see a trigger-happy approach to bringing aspects of the economy to standstill, often before negotiations are complete, or any business decisions permanent. Mark Serwotka's transport union threatened to bring the tube to a standstill on day of the Olympic Opening Ceremony, whilst other unions labelled the Games as a "legitimate target for strikes". An event which time will tell created thousands of jobs in London, many permanent, and a massive yet unquantifiable increase in interest in British culture and produce.

Recent strikes have not been known for their success, but their ridiculousness. In 2010 on the eve of the General Election, British Airways cabin crew went on strike, in protest to new terms and conditions, relating not to the boards greed, but the failing state of the company. This strike was at the height of the global financial crisis; Oil, obviously important in the travel industry, was trading at a sky-high price having beaten \$100 a barrel as standard price only the year before, and in according to many industry

analysts would only continue to do so.

This came against the backdrop of falling demand, not only were Britons less prepared to go on foreign holidays, a luxury surely in this time of economic crisis, but those who still chose to do would travel with Easy Jet or Ryan Air, much cheaper alternatives. Not only was the company failing but its business model was out-dated and its reputation tarnished, the board had to act, and proposed reducing the salaries of the cabin crew, surely better than redundancy, and surely no problem if you command over £65,000 a year for a job not requiring a high level of skill, and surely reasonable if it would save the company?

Yet here the Unions acted in their own interest, and not the firm nor the countries best wishes. Time and again we see from Unions common sense fail in favour of vested interests, and it is this arrogance whereby one could force a candidate of their choice upon the democratic process which makes me believe that not only the political landscape needs to change, but the business one too.



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### 3 comments

Tony Burke

19 Jul '13 at 6:12 pm

Suggest you get some facts right before you go any further! "Mark Serwotka's transport union threatened to bring the tube to a standstill on day of the Olympic Opening Ceremony, whilst other unions labelled the Games as a "legitimate target for strikes".

Mark Serwotka is the General Secretary of the Public and Commercial Services Union (civil servants) not a 'transport union'. Unite is a transport union, the RMT union is a transport union - who's General Secretary is Bob Crow and they organise staff on the London Underground.

Must try harder! See me!

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Same old union bashing

19 Jul '13 at 7:02 pm

'Time and again we see from Unions common sense fail in favour of vested interests'

Oh for god sake. 6.5m members and counting - the largest civil society body in the country - is not a vested interest but has a fair claim to speak up on behalf on millions of ordinary people - including politically, particularly at a time when all major parties have signed up to the same failed austerity dogma and the rotten neoliberal ideology that got us into this mess. We need stronger unions, not weaker and more cowardly ones.

Some of the best economically performing countries in Europe have incredibly strong unions. Why? Because increasing workers' bargaining power boosts pay and thus overall demand in the economy, rather than the money being sent offshore to tax havens or festering in executives' bank accounts.

Personally I think unions should break from the Labour Party - not because unions are a hopeless cause, but because the Labour Party is. Unions need to put their efforts into actually progressive alternatives.

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Bernd

6 Aug '14 at 3:44 pm

I hope this helps you guys non to compensate tip authentic \$ for reps! I don't rock and roll reps or ain whatsoever myself, i merely dont wishing others to pose screwed ended by person merchandising you

reps as authentics. No hate at all for ppl that sway reps, its exactly non my matter! Thanks for watching!

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