

David Miliband: working for the man

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The news that David Miliband was giving up politics and going to work for a charity came as something of a shock for many people. Here was the archetypal Blairite, a man apparently only concerned with power, money and being of service to the American Empire, and he was giving it all up. Had we all got him wrong?

This was the man who had famously been exposed as not having any idea of the level of JobSeekers Allowance at the hustings during the campaign for the Labour Party leadership! And once he had lost that election decided to devote himself to making money, lots of money. In 2011-2012, he earned a modest £446,000 on top of his paltry £65,000 MP's salary. Oxford Analytica paid him £55,000 for eight days work and the venture capital outfit, Vantage Point, paid him £92,000 for four and a half days work. He seemed to be the classic Blair clone, busy enriching himself while supposedly representing a poor working class area, creating that interesting New Labour phenomenon whereby the local Labour MP is one of the richest people in the constituency. And now here he was, giving it all up.

Admittedly, the salary at his new job, £300,000 a year, seemed a bit excessive for a charity, but after all many charities today seem to operate on the principle that charity begins at home. Still, as Miliband himself pointed out, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) had been 'founded at the suggestion of Albert Einstein in the 1930s for those fleeing the Nazis' and, as he went on, 'given my own family history' there was an obvious 'personal motivation' behind taking up the job. But all was not as it seemed.

There is, in fact, an invaluable history of the IRC, *Covert Network*, written by Eric Thomas Chester and published as long ago as 1995. As this account reveals, what Miliband conveniently failed to mention was that while the IRC might

well have been founded by various American socialists with Einstein's support, after the Second World War, it was transformed into 'a vital member of the CIA's covert network'. The IRC, according to Chester routinely operates 'in close conformity with the policy mandates of US foreign policy'. This, one suspects, was what appealed to Miliband. Einstein, a committed socialist, would never have touched what the IRC became, but for Miliband this was 'working for the man', a Blairite fantasy come true.

In Vietnam, for example, the IRC certainly ran 'purely humanitarian programs', establishing refugee camps, providing shelter, food and healthcare. But other areas of its activity 'were directly tied to the intelligence community'. The IRC ran the camps while the CIA trawled them for intelligence sources and for recruits for the various paramilitary outfits it ran. And, on top of that the IRC was also instrumental in establishing the American Friends of Vietnam, a pro-war pressure group that vigourously supported US intervention in the country.

Even while the Vietnam War was only beginning to get underway, the IRC was also involved in providing assistance for refugees fleeing the Cuban Revolution. In April 1960, the IRC president, John Richardson, actually met with Allen Dulles, the CIA director 'to discuss potential projects'. The funds for the IRC's Cuban relief work were kindly donated by the US companies whose Cuban subsidiaries Castro had nationalised (Texaco, Standard Oil, United Fruit and others). Once again, while the IRC provided humanitarian assistance, the CIA trawled for recruits, recruits who were later to form part of the US sponsored invasion force at the Bay of Pigs in 1961. Richardson was to be appointed to a top job in the US State Department by Richard Nixon in 1969.

And inevitably, when the Russians invaded Afghanistan at the end of 1979, the IRC was involved in establishing refugee camps across the border in Pakistan. According to Chester, while 'the Agency recruited, trained and armed paramilitary units for guerrilla warfare...the IRC provided health care and basic education for the residents of these very same camps.'

The overlap in personnel is also quite remarkable with a number of American spooks showing a hitherto unknown interest in charitable work. William Donovan, the man who set up the forerunner to the CIA, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), was heavily involved with the IRC, as was William Casey, who went on to become CIA director under Ronald Reagan. Of particular interest is John Whitehead, a former co-chair of Goldman Sachs, who was IRC treasurer from 1960 until 1979, when he became its president, a post he held until 1985. In 1989, Whitehead went on to become the number two man at the US State Department under George Bush, who was, of course, himself a former director of the CIA. And today, such well known humanitarians as Henry Kissinger and Madeleine Albright, best remembered for her throwaway remark that the death of 500,000 children due to sanctions was a price worth paying for the containment of Saddam Hussein, are on the IRC board. Miliband is in good company.