

Hug A Hero

Published in *Anticipations*, the Young Fabian magazine, Volume 16, Issue 2, Winter 2012

We've all seen it, the most retweeted tweet in history; the photo of Barack and Michele Obama hugging in victory. The sky above them could have come from a children's picture book. Obama's face expresses relief and tranquility. He is safe in his wife's arms, as well as being safe in the role of President.

To me, it is the perfect photo to sum up the loving family man Obama portrays. We imagine ourselves receiving that hug; a tight, grateful embrace for those that voted him in, or supported his campaign. For that reason, I would have expected the media to denounce the photo as staged. On the contrary, everyone seems to have endorsed the photo as a key image, as evidenced by the thousands of retweets. It appears the strength of Obama's credibility is such that he has become almost hyper-genuine. I do not think it really matters whether the photo was staged or not; we want to believe the photo is real and therefore it somehow is.

This public devotion is something our beleaguered British politicians can only dream of. The electorate has taken the main political message to be not so much 'We're all in this together' as 'We're all the blinking same'. A politician with far less public popularity could make any photo seem fake, just think back to the Olympics and that embarrassing photo op of David Cameron 'watching' the boxing. He somehow manages to stare at the TV while simultaneously checking the camera is there, clutching his mug and wearing a Team GB shirt that was still in its packaging moments before. Even John Prescott's parody, which was obviously deliberately staged, seemed more genuine.

Ed Miliband needs to forget kissing other people's babies and concentrate on kissing his wife. A strong, trusting relationship with those closest to him should make the public see him as someone they can trust. Political leaders have been criticised in

recent times for parading their wives as good luck mascots, but American politics shows us that the First Lady can make or break her husband's career. Michele Obama's stint as ambassador for the US Olympics team showed her loyalty to the country, but it was her tireless touring of schools, getting involved in workshops, that showed her to be an inspirational powerhouse. She has recently published a book on her White House vegetable plot, continuing the theme of the Obama's as a wholesome couple in touch with the needs of working families. Public perception of the Obama's could be summarised as *Little House on the Prairie* meets *The Good Life*.

So where does this leave Ed? How does he position himself as a friendly family man while still maintaining the authority needed to smash the opposition come election time? Well, I would argue he is on the way to achieving this mix already. While the Milibands aren't splashed across the tabloids after endless family outings, they are not shying away from the limelight. It comes across that Miliband understands that his family will be put under public scrutiny, but as a responsible father he does not want his children to suffer too much exposure. Justine is keeping in the background but her appearance at conference shows she is ready to step forward when needed.

In my opinion the Milibands *en famille* need to step forward more often. The joy of the Obama photo is its spontaneity. We need to see more glimpses of Ed and Justine as a couple and as loving parents so we can feel emotionally invested in their success. The Queen is currently enjoying an all time high in popularity, this must in part be down to everyone's favourite newlyweds, William and Kate. The public expected one kiss on the balcony after the wedding, but the defining moment for me was the second kiss, after William asked 'shall we give them another one?' It is often said that politics is a popularity contest, and Ed and Justine need to become the equivalent of the high school quarterback and cheerleader. Ed Miliband must be a forceful presence in the Commons debating chamber, but relaxed and congenial when out on the doorstep. If he can develop even half of Obama's charisma, Ed will surely be a popular public choice to be the next Prime Minister.