David Miliband visits the Department of Politics and International Studies

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On Friday 28 October, the Department of Political Science and International Studies (POLSIS) played host to former cabinet member David Miliband MP, for a live conversation and Q&A with current students, staff and alumni.

The event, which attracted over 700 students and members of staff to the University's Great Hall, was chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, Professor David Eastwood.

The former Foreign Secretary took part in a twenty minute discussion with **Professor Stefan Wolff (/schools/government-society/departments/political-science-international-studies/staff/profiles/wolff-stefan.aspx)** touching on issues of UK foreign policy, before proceeding to answer questions from students on a variety of issues, including the Arab Spring, University tuition fees and next year's forthcoming U.S. presidential elections.

Answering a question about the current situation in the Middle East, Mr Miliband, who was a junior minister in the Department for Education & Skills at the time of the invasion of Iraq, commented that, "If I knew then what I know now, I wouldn't have voted for the war". He also went on to state that "the worst thing that happened to Tony Blair was George Bush".

Professor Mark Webber (/schools/government-society/departments/political-science-international-studies/staff/profiles/webber-mark.aspx), Head of the School of Government and Society commented that "Today's event has been one of the largest student-centred events held at the University this year. Over 700 students and staff were able to quiz the former Foreign Secretary on a range of topical issues and were provided with a rare insight into the workings of international politics, from one of its key practitioners. It also afforded them the opportunity to see a leading political figure in the flesh."

The event was coordinated by current POLSIS students, with help from members of the department; it is oneof a number of events taking place in the School of Government & Society during this academic year designed to enhance the student experience. Two weeks ago, POLSIS hosted a visit by two former US members of Congress, and there are also **trips planned to the Model United Nations and Model NATO events in February 2012. (/schools/government-society/teaching/enhancing-student-experience/index.aspx)**

Review by Jon Robinson, BA Political Science; 3rd Year

It was my pleasure to be involved in setting up the David Miliband MP talk at the University of Birmingham. I think it's fantastic for the POLSIS department to be able to attract such high profile names and to be able to host such a large and inquisitive audience in the grand setting of the Great Hall.

David Miliband is widely perceived in the media to have been the "smarter" choice in the Labour leadership contest. Indeed, he demonstrated exactly why this is in both his intriguing and smart one-to-one debate with Professor Stefan Wolff, and then further in his responses to the brilliant range and depth of audience questioning. He was eloquent, entertaining and knowledgeable. That said, I left the event with more conviction than before that perhaps Labour made the right choice. In David Miliband we saw the archetypal career politician – and the embodiment of New Labour. He speaks perpetually to comfort; to the middle-man, as if driven by a biological urge to triangulate any argument.

I was particularly eager to see how a highly educated individual, son of one of the greatest British Marxists ever to live, holding a 1st in PPE from Corpus Christi, Oxford, and a masters degree in Political Science from MIT, would reconcile an obviously strong theoretical grasp of the political with the mundane compulsions of the TV-era politician. I was, on this count, a little disappointed. One of the most probing audience questions, asking whether Miliband feels, upon reflecting on his support for the Iraq war, that it is even possible for politicians to rationally resolve such complex moral dilemmas, was met with a stock response; he exonerated himself from blame for the Iraq war, seeming to lump it all on Blair and co, and moved swiftly along.

We were blessed with the presence of our Vice-Chancellor, David Eastwood, who chaired the questions from the audience, before tagging a question of his own on to the end. This led to a moment of discernable tension when Miliband was asked for his opinions on tuition fees and the involvement of Vice-Chancellors such as Eastwood in the Browne review (perhaps to the disappointment of the majority of the audience, this was silkily sidestepped by Miliband, who managed to simultaneously condemn high fees whilst offering a fig leaf – "it's not really his fault" – to Eastwood.) Aside from this tense moment, the presence of our esteemed Vice-Chancellor only adds to such an event, aside from his politically interesting decision to take audience questions at a ratio of about four men to every one woman.

I was highly grateful for the opportunity to have the involvement that I did in this event, and feel that I took a lot from the experience even beyond the enjoyment that I am sure we all took from such a stimulating evening. I really hope the politics department can continue to host such great events in the future.

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