

Choose your advisers with care

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Stephen Byers wrote an article attacking inheritance tax for the [Sunday Telegraph](#) this week. Byers, you might recall is one of Tony Blairs' Cabinet failures, but is still close to No. 10. He brought out all the usual wrong arguments on Inheritance Tax that the right love, such as it being double taxation. I won't repeat why he's wrong here - I've [already done so](#).

Poll Toynbee wrote [an excellent response](#) to Byers for the Guardian. I recommend it. I once had little time for Polly Toynbee, which was when we worked together. I have to say these days she's really on form.

But the most interesting thing is the response of Chris Wales to Toynbee's article, [published as a letter](#) in the Guardian. Wales (who I know) is, in his own words '*Former member, Treasury council of economic advisers; adviser to Gordon Brown on tax policy 1997-2003*'. For the record, he's also a former Andersen's partner, is rather proud of his doctorate, which is actually in mediaeval history, and was when last I heard, seeking employment. But it's his closeness to Brown that is important. He says:

The reality is that it is a low-yielding tax makes no political or economic sense.
He adds:

The tax system works best when it goes with the grain of the economy. Inheritance tax doesn't. There is no doubt that it will be abolished.

And continues:

There is a strong case for a broad review and public debate about the taxation of capital and inheritance tax should be considered as part of that process.

Let's be clear. This is from the man who already reduced capital gains tax to 10% in most cases, and put tax on pension funds to compensate - his two big achievements, both of which shifted the burden of tax onto the less well off. And this is from a man who has told me he is convinced the UK must have a 15% corporation tax rate. And who now wants no inheritance tax.

Do you see my drift? Brown's favoured tax adviser for more than 6 years was intent on ensuring the tax burden on the well off was reduced and that on ordinary people was increased. Which, by the way, is exactly what Byers' favoured reform of Inheritance tax would also do since he would levy environmental taxes on all as an alternative to Inheritance Tax on the very few who have the means to pay (always, since it's almost always charged on the dead, and they have no further use for cash).

Does Brown's choice of adviser tell us a lot about the man? I admit I rumbled Wales the first time I met him (and he, I think likewise, me). Nothing has ever convinced me of the coherence of his thinking, let alone his proclaimed Labour credentials. His latest comments do not increase my confidence.