

Stephen Byers does it again

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Stephen Byers [has responded](#) to Polly Toynbee's article in the Guardian newspaper in which she attacked his plan to abolish inheritance tax, [on which I have already commented](#). And he comes up with a classic argument for abolishing inheritance tax. He says:

"Toynbee claims that, at a time when City dealer's bonuses are soaring and mid-ranking bankers are due a £1.5 million top up on their salaries, it is vital to keep one of the few instruments that spreads wealth more fairly. Yet she must know that it is precisely the super rich who, along with the well-established landed gentry arrange their financial affairs so that, quite legally they avoid paying (inheritance) tax."

So, Byers (and we can take it as read therefore that Blair agrees) thinks that the existence of tax planning is sufficient to negate all attempts to impose taxes that might redistribute income or wealth, an argument to which we previously knew George Bush subscribed but which now appears to have permeated the New Labour camp. Goodbye social justice then in the face of wheelers, dealers and dodgers; no mention being made of the possibility of reforming the tax to tackle such issues instead.

Far from it in fact, for Byers goes on to enjoin:

"Toynbee should listen to the informed view of Chris Wales, a former adviser to Gordon Brown on tax policy, who says that inheritance tax has a negligible effect on the redistribution of wealth."

I've mentioned [Wales](#) before as well. Byers forget to mention in his article Wales' former service with Andersens (where no doubt he did his bit to prevent wealth redistribution, that being the mandate of such firms). He also forgot to mention another chapter in Wales' career which has relevance in the context in which Byers wrote. When he left the Treasury Wales joined Goldman Sachs, one of those banks paying bonuses of the order indicated. Could it just be that Wales has a perspective on these issues that is, shall we say, a little out of the ordinary given his former employments, and that the selective mention of his work as a former adviser to the Chancellor may be spin?

Whatever it is, Byers proves quite convincingly why he is out of office, and why I would not be surprised if New Labour follow him.