

Labour, benefits and what Liam Byrne did not say about ...

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I spent almost all day yesterday in meetings and so had little time to comment or blog. As such I did not refer to Liam Byrne's announcement on benefits. I could do so now but Kevin Maguire did it so much better in the Mirror and [so I'm going to quote him](#):

Here we go again with the Labour leadership in danger of doing the Tories' dirty work, undermining the welfare state.

Too few jobs are Britain's biggest problem, not a feckless minority when at least 10 are on jobless benefits for every vacancy.

The fiddled £1.2billion is dwarfed by £16billion means-tested help which Citizens Advice calculates the Government doesn't pay.

Or the £70billion crusading accountant Richard Murphy reckons is dodged in tax — with the filthy rich and corporations the worst offenders.

So Shadow Cabinet Minister Liam Byrne needs to balance his arguments instead of playing to the Right-whinge gallery.

I dream of the day when Labour's leading lights kick the tax-avoiding wealthy harder than the poor.

So do I.

I also share Kevin's view on Byrne's discussion of housing benefit:

Most tenants needing housing benefit are in work, low pay and high rents imposed by private landlords to blame.

The bill wouldn't be £20billion if the last Labour Government had built council houses.

Precisely.

And it's time Labour was addressing the real issues, such as a shortage of social housing, rather than bashing people who are out of work and on low pay through no fault of their own.

And it's also about time that Labour asked why it is so important that the state subsidise the lifestyle of so many people working for large companies who do not pay high enough wages, and have no intention of paying enough to ensure their employees have a hope of making ends meet. Because let's be clear what these benefits are - many of which go to those in work. What they actually represent are straightforward subsidies to the profit of companies who can underpay their staff as a result, and as such they're another shift from the poorest to the richest in society.

But Byrne didn't say that. And he should have done.