

It's childcare, not the NHS, that holds the key to Labour winning the next election ^[1]

A radical, universal childcare plan is the kind of policy that can appeal to those who normally shun politics

Author: Waugh, Paul

Source: iNews

Format: Article

Publication Date: 28 Sep 2022

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

Labour's conference session on health and education was billed "Public Services That Work From The Start". But following the decision to bring forward Keir Starmer's speech, health and education were at the end, not the start, of the gathering in Liverpool.

Faced with a hall depleted of delegates, it felt like Shadow Health Secretary Wes Streeting and Shadow Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson were firmly in the "graveyard" slot on the final day of conference.

Of course, neither health nor education are afterthoughts in Labour's programme for government, even though this week Starmer was focused more on fighting 2024 as the "economy" election.

As well as their public services briefs, Streeting and Phillipson have much in common. Both are from the "modernising" wing of the party, both are in their 30s, both have had to fend off strong Tory challenges in their constituencies.

But both of them also grew up in single-parent families on council estates. And although they share the reluctance of many who experienced childhood poverty to talk about it at length, they know better than most just how tough life can be.

Streeting referenced his background in today's speech with a single line: "For kids from working-class backgrounds like mine, life chances and even life expectancy can be determined from the moment we're born."

In her speech, Phillipson: "My mam brought me up on her own. I remember my time at school under the Tories. Classes too big, books too few. Money short and opportunities rare. Families like mine judged, not helped."

Both shadow ministers were lucky to have strong social networks and school support that help parents juggling, and often struggling, to balance work and family life. And the one thing that would ensure others didn't have to rely on such luck is comprehensive childcare Britain currently lacks.

Phillipson did announce a plan to introduce breakfast clubs for every primary school in England. She rightly pointed out that they're "about the club as well as the breakfast", improving standards, attainment, attendance and behaviour.

She also gave a tantalising glimpse of Labour's wider plan to build "a modern childcare system, one that supports families from the end of parental leave, right through to the end of primary school".

Yet although Phillipson admitted her breakfast clubs (cost £365 million) were "the first step on that road", for many there is still a frustratingly huge hole where the party's offer on childcare should be.

The suspicion that childcare remains the cinderella public service, even among Labour's priorities, was underlined inadvertently by Streeting's own speech. With trademark gusto he trumpeted the big ticket spending item of the week, the £2bn pledge to use most of the 45p tax cut reversal on more NHS nurses, midwives, health visitors and doctors.

With every penny more tightly controlled than ever, Streeting hinted at his own bids for more cash for an underfunded and broken bit of our public realm: social care. His wait-and-see language was uncannily similar to Phillipson's, describing "the first steps on the road to a National Care Service".

But a big, bold offer on childcare is actually the policy that an increasing number of Labour MPs and shadow ministers believe could make a significant impact at the next election. Even Tory MPs tell me they're worried Labour will outflank their own attempts to tinker with childminder ratios or offer tax cuts on childcare.

Phillipson set out the rationale today. Childcare is a key cost of living issue, with many parents spending more on it than on their rent or mortgages. The UK has the third highest childcare costs in the OECD making up 29 per cent of average income. Nurseries are closing, costs are rising. A Mumsnet survey found that 41 per cent of parents can only afford childcare thanks to unpaid family help or by going into debt,

according to founder Justine Roberts.

Region: Europe ^[3]

Tags: child care ^[4]

universal system ^[5]

policy ^[6]

Source URL (modified on 3 Oct 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/22/10/%EF%BB%BFit%E2%80%99s-childcare-not-nhs-holds-key-labour-winning-next-election>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/22/10/%EF%BB%BFit%E2%80%99s-childcare-not-nhs-holds-key-labour-winning-next-election>

[2] <https://inews.co.uk/opinion/childcare-nhs-key-to-labour-winning-the-next-election-1883049> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/europe> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/child-care> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9099> [6]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/policy>