

Byers calls on Labour to help middle class parents [UK] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Stephen Byers, the former cabinet minister and Blairite outrider, yesterday called on Labour to make universal pre-school child care its top priority and not to put cash solely into Sure Start schemes aimed at the poor.

Mr Byers pointed out that child care was now costing middle class parents as much as £8,000 a year in London, arguing that they also needed help if backing for the welfare state is to be sustained.

Speaking at the national childcare charity, the Daycare Trust, Mr Byers said good quality, affordable and flexible childcare was vital if Labour is to achieve social justice and opportunity for all.

He argued that universal child care "is a means by which some of those deep-seated problems - inequality, poverty, lack of social mobility - can be tackled".

Siding with the so-called universalists inside the Cabinet, he said: "The availability of child care places mustn't be a lottery with the winners decided by postcode. Public provision of child care needs to be universal. This would require the government to move beyond its present highly targeted approach.

"A commitment to universal provision would demonstrate that Labour is in touch with the needs and aspirations of hard-pressed parents who are juggling with the responsibility of being a good parent and the task of holding down a job."

He insisted that the policy is part of a new agenda in which redistribution is not just measured by spreading income, but also by spreading opportunity and choice.

- reprinted from the Guardian

Region: Europe ^[2]

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