

Is it really business as usual at HMRC as ministers sup...

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As the [Guardian has reported overnight](#):

The minister in charge of tax expressed support for a strategy to undermine evidence from a whistleblower who uncovered the notorious Goldman Sachs "sweetheart" deal, according to emails seen by the Guardian.

David Gauke, the exchequer secretary to the Treasury, approved of a plan to brief a journalist with information to help discredit testimony from Osita Mba, a solicitor with HM Revenue and Customs.

Now the evidence that's been published is not unambiguous, I admit. Certainly Gauke did, in the end, leave Hartnett to make his own comment but yet again I think Margaret Hodge (who has, I suspect seen the whole correspondence) seems to have got this right, saying:

"The government claims it is committed to ensuring that big business and wealthy individuals pay their fair share of tax, she said. "But this raises serious questions about whether, behind the scenes, it is simply a case of business as usual.

"The minister responsible appears to have gone along with HMRC's efforts to dismiss out of hand our criticisms, and public concerns, around these 'sweetheart' deals, efforts which involved attempting to discredit the evidence of a whistleblower who had come forward. Clearly, he [the minister] and HMRC have questions to answer."

And that this is the case is supported by a no doubt well sourced comment in the Guardian that says:

A Treasury spokesperson said Gauke was "entirely supportive" of HMRC's large-business strategy, and agreed that inaccurate statements about it should be corrected by HMRC.

There's much to make any reasonable and informed observer think that all that the government says on tax is simply PR guff. Whilst saying it will be tough on tax

avoidance it has entered into aggressive tax competition on rates whilst massively increasing the opportunity for big business to move profit out of the UK in a series of moves over the last three years. Now it's clear that they did not support a whistleblower who was entitled to legal protection when reporting that HMRC had acted incorrectly at the highest level (something now admitted). What next, I wonder? A UKIP inspired tax haven UK?