

It's time we had a proper pro-business agenda in this c...

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I've been on both Sky and BBC Scotland this morning talking about the fact that HM Revenue and Customs has today again [published the names and photographs](#) of people it said [had cost taxpayers millions in lost revenue through tax evasion](#).

The first thing to note about this is how ineffective the campaign has been. Just one person has been arrested since the list was last published.

The second thing to note is that is pure diversionary tactics by HMRC. Just as their claim that they're prosecuting more is [being achieved by tackling easy cases](#), this list seeks to suggest that they know who tax evaders are when the vast majority of tax evasion relates to income or corporation tax and VAT on domestic trade and yet the prosecutions that almost all those pictured have committed relate to smuggling. That is not to say that tackling the organised crime associated with smuggling is not important; it clearly is. But to pretend that this is what most tax evasion is, as the HMRC campaign appears to imply, is absurd. It is not.

Most tax evasion is by people trading domestically. HMRC [admit that about 50% of all self employed tax returns](#) understate income. They know they lose over 10% of all VAT and yet deny this flows through to a loss of income or corporation tax on the suppressed revenues - which just cannot be true. If you lose tax on the sale you lose tax on the income generated by the sale. And [hundreds of thousands of companies disappear each year](#) - many owing tax, and nothing is done about it. The sums owing are not investigated. The half a million or more corporation tax returns not submitted each year are not pursued. Instead all corporation tax, income tax, VAT and NIC owing from these companies is just ignored.

For the government to claim it is stepping up its campaign on tax evasion when it is not backing Michael Meacher's [UK Corporate and Individual Tax and Financial Transparency Bill](#) is absurd. This would give HMRC the power needed to tackle this incredibly common form of tax abuse - much more common than smuggling. So, why won't it do it?

The answer is it is so frightened of the neoliberal business deregulation lobby they will do nothing to require companies comply with the law. And yet it is only with regulation

imposed on all companies, and with all companies paying the tax that they owe, that a level playing field on which all business can compete equally will be created. In that case imposing the law fairly and even handedly on all, and making all pay their tax is a pro-business agenda. But it's not seen that way by a tax profession and a political culture that sees paying all tax as a bad thing. And as a result it is the right wing think tanks and those who yell about burdens on business who are undermining the chances of honest small businesses - the sort that generate jobs - in this country.

It's time we had a proper pro-business agenda in this country. It's called tax justice.