

# Edward Troup's defence should have been "I've changed m.

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I [wrote yesterday referring to a 1999 Financial Times article by Ed Troup](#) who is now the permanent secretary for HM Revenue & Customs in which he said “taxation is legalised extortion”.

Ed Troup was questioned on this at the Public Accounts Committee hearing in the afternoon. As [the Independent have reported it](#):

*Perhaps the most radioactive moment in Monday's often acerbic and — thanks to The Independent's campaign against tax scams — rich confrontation came when Margaret Hodge asked Edward Troup, Her Majesty's tax assurance commissioner, if he had once written that “taxation is legalised extortion”.*

*Well, said Mr Troup, with polite defensiveness, he was gratified that people had read old articles of his in the Financial Times, in which those words had “appeared.” (Ms Hodge, who is sometimes reminded of her own history as the firebrand leader of the leftist Islington Council, interjected: “You can never get away from your past, I can tell you.”)*

*It was — of course — all a matter of “context”. The article had argued that tax was not a matter for “discretion of the tax authorities” but had to be “left to the rule of law”.*

*Poachers turned gamekeepers are an old story, and at the time Mr Troup was back working at the top firm which had originally employed him as a tax lawyer. But was he just a little too sympathetic with the poachers he was supposed to be catching? Ms Hodge mused: “I would never dream of using those four words together.” Before going on to ask Mr Troup whether “given those views, are you really the best person to lead the fight, the people's fight against tax avoidance?”*

Now we've all written things we have since regretted (me included) and Margaret Hodge was right to allow for that. But I continue to think the question is valid. Ed Troup showed no sign of regret for what he wrote and did instead defend it. That was his mistake. He only had to say "I've changed my mind" or "I got that wrong" and the

matter would have been laid to rest for good. He didn't.