

In the interests of honest, fairness, business and the ...

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It would be all too easy to dismiss anything Chris Huhne writes as being from the mind of a man who revealed a less than an honest approach to his dealings. I do, however, think forgiveness is important and know we have all made mistakes. In that case the Guardian's willingness to give him space is fair, even if I do not agree with him on many issues.

With the very obvious exception of tax relief, it would seem. [This morning he writes:](#)

You might have thought the politics of hard times would be the same whatever the country, and that burgeoning public deficits would mean tough measures to collect tax. The surprise, though, is in the differences. In Germany and France tax evasion is hot politics. In Britain, there are some tremors about corporate tax dodging — but personal tax evasion seems the dog that does not bark.

He is right, of course. The problem starts with HM Revenue & Customs' outright refusal to recognise the scale of the problem we face with this issue. [Their claim that the UK tax gap is just £35 billion is as close to a fabrication of misinformation to support a politically chosen view as it is possible to get.](#)

And then there's the fact that he chooses to highlight, which is that HM Revenue & Customs are an incredibly soft touch when it comes to tax evasion. It's a theme often heard here of course but I don't care who disseminates the information, that it is understood is what is important. And as Huhne says:

The Treasury received 6,000 British names [of people who maintained secret bank accounts at HSBC Geneva]. To date, 1,100 people who had [such account], and who had testified on their tax returns that the accounts did not exist, have settled. The HMRC has received £120m in unpaid taxes, which means that the average HSBC tax dodger was probably evading £54,454 (allowing for the penalty).

Astonishingly, all those who settled were given anonymity and immunity from prosecution despite new powers that allow anyone who has evaded more than £50,000 in tax to be named and shamed on the HMRC website. Though there is more money

going into criminal investigation, there has been just one prosecution in the UK as a result of Lagarde's list: a multimillionaire property developer called Michael Shanly.

And he then properly compares this with the following situation:

[Abdurrahim Bendaw was convicted](#) in August of a 10-year fraud worth a total of £54,493, almost the average evaded by the British Lagarde listers. No immunity or anonymity for him. He has to repay the amount, faces confiscation orders, and was jailed for 10 months. Judge Leslie Hull warned: "If I don't send you to prison it will send the wrong message to the public." Clearly, the message is that tax evasion is just fine and dandy.

Quite so.

An official blind eye is turned to tax evasion by denying most of it exists.

And when it is found it is not prosecuted as it should be. Because this is large scale organised crime that undermines the fabric of our society and the services on which we all depend.

The time has come to close the tax gap.