

View from the House

Easter is the time of year when we think about a renewal of our commitment to each other in society. Many constituents have written to me to say they are concerned that those of Christian faith cannot wear their preferred symbols of their faith – such as the Cross. Given that the cross symbolises selfless sacrifice and love, it cannot be right that Christians cannot wear the cross as they go about their work.

In Parliament, prayers are said by the Speaker's Chaplin before the start of Parliamentary business. It is a quiet time which allows MPs to reflect before we embark on debating the issues that we undertake on your behalf. Long may that continue.

Our thoughts also turn to the new tax year. The Budget tax cut of over £40,000 each year to those 14,000 people earning £1million reveals the priorities of this Government. They have made millions of us pay more so that millionaires can pay less. With 1 million young people and 1.13m women out of work, austerity is not working and the economy has stalled.

At the same time, changes to tax credits are hitting the lowest earners. The Citizens Advice Bureau, who are independent of Government, said this will mean a new and large group of people will be in the position of working for no more than unemployment benefit levels of income. Couples with children will only be eligible for Working Tax Credit if their joint weekly hours of work are at least 24 and one of them works at least 16 hours a week.

So, one of the couple needs to be working a minimum of 16 hours. Official figures show that 212,000 households, including 470,000 children, could lose the £3,870-a year credit. Many families will see their disposable income reduced to unemployed benefit levels or in many cases, when in-work expenses are taken into account, to below this.

Confusion reigns over when a pasty is a hot pasty or a cold pasty- so attracting VAT. In my view any tax system should have clarity otherwise it is left to interpretation which leads to unfairness.

And finally, metal theft particularly of memorials remains an ongoing issue. I was saddened to hear that a brass plaque with the name of a Victoria Cross holder who worshipped at St Mary's The Mount RC Church has been removed. I would urge the person who took it to please return it.

Valerie Vaz

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