

View from the House

At Westminster I chaired a meeting with speakers Polly Toynbee, and the General Secretary, PCS union Mark Serwotka, in support of the sacked PCS representative Candy Udwin. A packed meeting heard about and opposed the transfer of the staff to the private sector. This is what the Government wants to do, roll back public services. The staff have knowledge and skills which will be lost. They are not just security guards.

Moreover the National Gallery still do not pay the staff the London Living Wage. I have tabled two Early Day Motions in support of the staff. By coincidence another speaker was Bob and Roberta Smith, the artist who designed the Esther room at our New Art Gallery.

And when it comes to tax, the majority law abiding citizens are treated differently from a minority. HMRC having had a massive staff reduction, find it difficult to pursue people who may have not paid their fair share of tax. It is deplorable that some people use non-dom status or distribution hubs in another country to avoid or evade paying tax. That a bank should be encouraging people to minimise a tax bill is astonishing. More needs to be done as only 1 out of 1,100 people who have avoided or evaded tax have been prosecuted.

And the banks should be lending more to small businesses. At BIS questions I mentioned the Bank of England's own statistics. They show lending to small businesses has fallen in the last quarter by £1 billion. The Minister could not respond to the facts or answer the question.

The lack of bank lending to small businesses is a missed opportunity along with the Airport Commission's decision not to include Birmingham Airport following the consultation on future airport capacity. More than 35 million people live within 2 hour's drive and the Airport is linked by direct train services to more than 100 stations.

There will be an exhibition at Moxley People's Centre to build a car park for 196 cars on open land. Do make your views known about the Bradley Lane Metro Park and Ride consultation which closes on 13 March.

The Revd Rutter would also like to hear from you about your memories of people's long associations with St Margaret's Hospital at Great Barr Hall and the Church. Many people visited, worked, set up groups for the residents and welcomed them to Church. Contact the Parish Office of St Margaret's Church.

Valerie Vaz MP

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