Sarah Wollaston (Totnes, Conservative)

I certainly feel that the tone of this debate is important, and that we should not be talking about shirkers. I do not believe that people on welfare benefits are shirkers. Having made that clear statement, I would like to ask the right hon. Gentleman this question: for how many days did the Labour Government apply the top rate of tax when they were in office?

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill, Labour)

I know that the hon. Lady is new to the House[ Interruption. ] I will seek to answer her question as soon as those on her own Front Bench calm down a little. I think that she would acknowledge that the economics and the politics of this Parliament are very different from those in the last three Parliaments. There was an important principle at the heart of the debate—namely, that those with the broadest shoulders should bear the biggest load. That is why, when Labour was in power, we put up the top rate of tax. We knew that, as part of the plan to bring the deficit down, those with the broadest shoulders should bear the biggest load. That is why we put up the top rate of tax, and that is why we object to the Chancellor of the Exchequer cutting it and giving £3.4 billion to Britain's richest citizens when he is taking money from Britain's working families.

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