

The Robin Hood Tax takes off: update, arguments and counterarguments.

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[From Poverty to Power by Duncan Green](#) →^a [Blog Archive](#) →^a [The Robin Hood Tax takes off: update, arguments and counterarguments.](#)

Duncan Green at Oxfam is a guy I respect. He's involved in the Robin Hood Tax campaign. I am not, directly. I've produced a different report on the issue of Taxing banks. But I like what he has to say today in response to those from the right (and on occasion not so right) wing blogosphere who argue against the tax:

Finally, some stick is being handed out to the Robin Hood Tax campaign for the (over)simplicity of its messages (see Tim Harford's [follow up post](#)). To which I would respond, duh, there's a clue in the title — it's a campaign, not a seminar. Campaigns need to have clear messages that inevitably do violence to some of the detail, but the groups that constitute the RHT are busily having detailed grown-up policy discussions with decision makers, reading the research, commissioning new work etc etc.

Quote so. The wonkers need to get out more.

But Duncan does not dismiss them. He says:

We should probably have devoted more attention to putting forward our thinking in policy wonkland, perhaps with a separate geeks website for debate, exchanges of information and research etc. That's something we need to sort out as the campaign develops. But there should be no let up on the public campaigning — Bill Nighy. Richard Curtis et al have brought this discussion to a level of prominence that — *undercover economists' could only dream of. All power to them.*

I also like his last word, and have strong sympathy with it:

Last word to Einstein: — *We should be on our guard not to overestimate science and scientific methods when it is a question of human problems; and we should not assume that experts are the only ones who have a right to express themselves on questions affecting the organization of society.* I'm with Albert.

I'm aware that there are those who say that someone they describe as a retired chartered accountant should have no role in tax policy. Leave it to the xperts so they say. Like them.

Look where that got us.

Experts can be very, very wrong on occassion.

The Robin Hood tax campaign has made errors - no doubt. It did not anticipate the capacity of the right wing blogosphere to nit-pick endlessly to no net gain to anyone. But until you've experienced it no one does. And when you have I know no one who can believe a) quite how rude much of their argument is and b) quite how naive their defence of their position is. The main line of argument is after all 'let's assume we have a perfect world in which markets solve all problems and therefore all markets have been solved'.

Which reminds me of the joke:

Q: How many economists does it take to change a light bulb?

A: None. If it had needed changing market forces would have ensured it had already been done.