

Funding the Future

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I've [blogged about the enormous success](#) of Saturday's TUC rally. What about UK Uncut's actions?

As I've said many times before, I do not speak for UK Uncut, have never been on a UK Uncut event and have no responsibility for their actions - although it seems that on occasion they have used my work, as is anyone free to do.

I approve of peaceful protest in a democracy. That includes the right to enter property when invited to do so (and stores, banks and others do invite people onto their premises). I never condone violence. I do not condone damage to private property. And I never will.

UK Uncut chose to hold an event on Saturday. Let me be honest: I wish they hadn't. I think that there was a sufficient event on Saturday to get all the attention that was needed: The TUC march was the main event. Nothing else was needed on Saturday. I think UK Uncut did not need to hold an event on the same day. By doing so they, unfortunately, provided opportunity for those seeking to be violent to use them as cover. That was a mistake. Those people seeking to be violent would have been out on Saturday anyway, I believe. But UK Uncut's peaceful style of protest did not need any such association. That this has happened is to be regretted. Since the risk was foreseeable I think it was a mistake to hold the events on Saturday.

Is it wrong for UK Uncut to protest? No, of course, not. Let me give a simple example: Overall the Budget forecasts (table c.3) tax increases in revenue between 2010-11 and 2015-16 of £170 billion - up 32.4% in the period. But corporation tax goes up by just 28.8%. I will return to the data later, but if the increase in corporation tax simply matched income tax more than £5 billion extra would be collected over the next few years. And that's not the whole story by far: corporation tax should rise significantly in this period because economic recovery is forecast and CT is a heavily cyclical tax. It's clear that we're not all in this together. Protest about that is legitimate, in itself.

Was Fortnum's the right target? I have no clue. I have never looked at its accounts. I am not sure whether there is a tax issue with Associated British Foods and I was unaware of the link between the two. I have certainly not advised on any such issue.

But I think that misses the point because let's not pretend that this issue is just about tax. UK Uncut are protesting about what is behind the decision to cut corporation tax and to provide benefits for one section of society, who are already the most privileged, over all other groups, who will suffer as a consequence.

The protest is about letting large corporations with the capacity to pay off tax.

The protest is about promoting the market at cost to society.

The protest is about the choice to not tackle the tax gap which even the government now estimate at well over £40 billion a year. I, of course, think it's somewhat larger.

The protest is about choosing to leave money with the tax evaders and the cheats when pensioners, the young, the sick, the disabled, students, the poor, the unemployed, public servants and their dependents all suffer.

The protest is therefore about making the wrong choice.

I still think any event on Saturday by UK Uncut was a mistake.

But let us not for a moment confuse those in UK Uncut who are rightly saying that the government has made the wrong choice in an imaginative, thoughtful, peaceful, and even humorous fashion should be confused in any way with those who chose to undertake violence. They are not in any way related as the most basic understanding of their different political philosophies will make obvious.

And let me close with a final thought. John Christensen and I carried a tax Justice Network banner on the march. Shortly before it began a man wearing military style fatigues approach us, attacking us saying in typical libertarian fashion that all taxation was theft and must therefore be abolished. He had no place on that march. It was clear he had no sympathy with the protest. Why then was he there? Was he alone in wearing such an outfit which was so out of keeping with the day and expressing such sentiments that were so at keeping with the march, or was he there for another purpose? I wonder.