

Time to call Centrica's bluff - and use the N word (tha...

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The [Guardian reports this morning](#):

The dispute between energy firms and the government over the level of tax paid for offshore UK drilling dramatically escalated on Sunday with British Gas threatening to shut down an important gas field on the Irish Sea.

Centrica, which owns British Gas, closed the Morecambe Bay field for routine maintenance and warned it may not reopen it because of the 12% tax rise on offshore drilling profits that was announced by the chancellor, George Osborne, in the budget in March.

Now I'm not saying Osborne / Alexander got their decision on extra energy taxes right - or managed them well - but I am saying this is posturing by Centrica. It's a variation on the 'if you tax us we'll go away' theme. As the Guardian also reports:

In February, Centrica reported record profits of £742m at British Gas — a 24% leap on a year earlier — provoking criticism from consumer groups. Centrica had pushed through a 7% increase in energy bills just two months earlier.

And there is, of course, a simple solution. If they refuse to extract the gas then we should nationalise their assets and do it instead. That was what British Gas was created to do. The mistake was Thatcher's. She thought the private sector was efficient. That's not true. But they're definitely a bunch of charlatans when it comes to making threats about not paying tax - and it's time to call their bluff.