

The Courageous State and Amazon

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The pedants are already out in force seeking to attack The Courageous State. One of the unexpected challenges relates to the fact that the book is on sale on Amazon. The [Kindle edition is on sale now](#) at £7.15 and the book will be there in the next few days, just as soon as they have physical supplies.

Why the challenge? As [one commentator said on the blog this morning](#):

I'm a supporter of what you're trying to do but this time your two-faced hypocritical attitude stinks. Not only do Amazon use tax havens but they also use LVCR through the Channel Islands thus making thousands of people poorer. If by selling your book through Amazon is not supporting companies using tax havens, I don't know what is. Shame on you! Now post this if you dare?

Another on Twitter reads:

Inspired by your pragmatism, I shall keep using BVI and IOM subsidiaries whilst praying for someone to shut them down

Well, to the first commentator, if you think I wouldn't dare post that you underestimate my courage, by a very long way.

Second, and more importantly, I really do think those making such comments really do show a profound misunderstanding of what I say, and what I propose.

The simple fact is I could, I suppose, become a monk and live wholly self sufficiently in some remote place to try to avoid all the harm tax havens cause. And no one would notice. And nor would it help. I would not change a thing.

I do seek to change things. Indeed, I can fairly claim I have. Many in the Crown Dependencies will more than readily testify to the impact I have had on them and their economies. The latest such impact is active involvement in and support for the campaign to end Channel Islands' VAT abuse - which is another campaign now successfully concluding.

These changes, and many others would not be possible without using a computer - supplied I know via offshore entities, using software supplied in the same way, powered by electricity supplied by companies who use offshore, and on, and on and on in all aspects of my life.

I could sweat about this stuff and devote all my effort to trying to avoid companies relating to offshore but as Action Aid have shown, using my methodology, in the modern economy that is going to be very hard indeed.

So I have to make another choice. I seek to be tax compliant. Tax compliance is seeking to pay the right amount of tax (but no more) in the right place at the right time where right means that the economic substance of the transactions undertaken coincides with the place and form in which they are reported for taxation purposes. Selling books and Kindle editions through Amazon is tax compliant on my part. My refusal to sell through these media would reduce the chance of my message being heard. And it would make no difference to Amazon at all. If I thought it would I'd do things differently, but I know it won't - and meaningless gestures don't get us far. So given I'm compliant, I move on and instead devote my effort to changing the system, not the minutiae within it.

And that is fundamentally different from the hopelessly hypocritical position of the Twitter commentator (who is hiding behind a pseudonym, of course). He is consciously choosing to be non tax compliant. I'm not. I'm being completely tax compliant - and am at the same time making it harder for companies like Amazon to abuse.

In the messy real world in which we all live that's the best I can do. You can call me a hypocrite if you like. But since I never claimed to be a saint I'm really not sure how that helps you. But systemically opposing tax abuse by major corporations will change things.

No doubt those raising the question would like me to spend my time worrying about the small stuff. Well, bad luck: we'll continue changing the system. That's much more important, and we're good at it.