

It's true, I upset people. So does the Tax Justice Netw...

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I think it's time to talk about something that's happening quite a lot at present. Messages are being sent to me through various messengers from the great and good in tax saying "if only you were more reasonable Richard you'd be so much more acceptable." They even go so far as to say I'd be more successful. The message is always subtle but is that I'm upsetting people and they really don't like it.

I'm not surprised that the message is being sent. Tax justice is on the national agenda now, in a way that the great and good of the tax world don't like. That's why we [get absurd articles](#) of the sort published in the Church Times earlier this week.

They could live with us when the Tax Justice Network and I were talking about tax havens. That was, after all "over there" and they could pretend they'd got nothing to do with that rather nasty evasion stuff. But now the issues are tax avoidance, transfer pricing and accountability and this very definitely affects the great and good. The result is that they're going through what Schopenhauer described as the three phases an emerging truth. In the first stage, it is ridiculed. In the second stage, it is violently opposed. And in the third stage it is accepted as self-evident. I'd actually add a fourth stage: first of all it's ignored.

We've been through being ignored and ridicule. Both have failed. And now we're moving towards violent opposition - not physical of course, bit highly stressed reaction none the less. And what characterises this reaction is fear on the part of those suffering the reaction. Right now I don't think they know what is creating that fear. So let me offer an explanation.

As the Tax Justice Network entry in the [Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust Triennial Report](#) says:

The Tax Justice Network is an ex- pert-led group that aims to defend democracy and tackle poverty and inequality by challenging tax abuse and offshore tax havens.

We are addressing what may be the greatest faultline in the global economy. We are creating a new, coherent narrative to explain how the offshore system has channelled

wealth and economic and political power upwards, at the expense of ordinary people across the world. We are interested not only in tax — but also in other escape routes that tax havens provide: lax financial regulation and criminal laws; secrecy, and more.

The economist J.K. Galbraith said all successful revolutions involve kicking in a rotten door. We have identified the door and we're kicking — hard. We believe we have helped ignite a genuine revolution in modern economic thinking.

I think that's fair. But what it means is we're not tinkering at the edges of tax. We're saying the whole economic system is wrong. And the great and good of tax and accountancy do, of course, have a great deal invested in that current economic system.

The result is they say we're arrogant. Well, to some extent we are by their definition. You've got to have a certain degree of self confidence that can easily be misunderstood as arrogance to say most people - or at least most people in power - have got things wrong. And that's what we're doing.

And that's what the messages being sent to me are about too. They're saying "come back into the fold, join the cocktail party circuit, and things will be all right".

I've got news for those sending the messages. First, we're not rejoining the fold. Second, things aren't going to be all right for them. Third, I'm quite sure the change we're demanding is going to happen now - and that we will reach the point where it is self evident that it was going to happen all along. But of course the great and good are frightened as a result - their power and cash is under threat.

No wonder they want us to become nice compliant people. They want to stop us challenging their failed world view.

But most of all they're angry because they just don't get why people like John Christensen and I do this sort of thing. They don't realise that principles matter more to us than playing the games of the power elite - and that we really do this because we want to defend democracy from these people and we do believe that we will help relieve poverty by creating reform. And that belief in place of the self interest that is all they understand is what makes those sending the messages most baffled of all.

My suggestion to them? Engage with the issue and stop trying to shoot the messenger. Most of all - telling us we're arrogant really won't work - not when our arrogance is simply having the impertinence to be winning the argument. Argue back, or give up. But stop calling names now, please.