

The BBBC is up to all its usual tricks on tax havens

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I have long felt the BBC should be renamed the British Business Broadcasting Corporation. I do most especially this morning.

I [have already noted this morning](#) the news that the British Overseas Territories have agreed (or been coerced) into joining the new UK multilateral tax information agreement.

Now I presume that's no surprise to anyone that these news stories do not just emerge. I began discussing it with journalists yesterday afternoon. Amongst them was Hugh Pym from BBC television, and he then referred me on to Radio 4's Today programme. I then repeated quite a long briefing to explain just what these deals mean, including a lot of background information. That takes quite a lot of time, as you can imagine.

Having briefed Today they asked me to do the programme at 8.35am today. I agreed.

And then a while later they rang to say they'd changed their minds. I presumed the story had been dropped, but no, they said they'd found someone else to comment. "Who?", I asked. They told me. Ronnie Ludwig of Saffrey Champness, Edinburgh. He has just broadcast.

Now I have come across Mr Ludwig before but it may be [better to use his own website to tell the story](#):

A partner in the Edinburgh office, and head of the firm's Private Wealth Practice Group, Ronnie specialises in advising private clients and businesses across all aspects of strategic financial improvement strategies and tax planning.

Now what might that mean?

He is a specialist tax advisor and develops bespoke and innovative tax solutions for his clients.

He's a tax avoider then, although there's nothing illegal in that of course.

And what of offshore? Ronnie says he has:

Advised on numerous tax efficient business improvement structures for clients, both onshore and offshore.

Now we all know what 'tax efficient' means: it is a euphemism for paying less tax.

So the BBC made a choice. They could have had a commentator who has helped the civil society demand for reform of tax havens for a decade and has also [co-written the most used book on tax havens in universities](#), or they could have a man who has openly advertised that he has used tax havens to avoid tax. So they chose the latter.

Now of course Mr Ludwig welcomed the deal on tax havens when he spoke, and said moves to stop tax evasion were welcome. That's hardly surprising. he could have said nothing else.

He also made clear that the problem is with the use of offshore companies and trusts, which no doubt he is familiar with given what he advertises he does, although I am sure everything he arranges is fully disclosed. It's what he also said, and did not say, that mattered.

First, he offered no solutions to the problem of trusts and companies: he just said it was a problem and implied there was nothing that could be done about it. Of course, that's not true.

Second, he said the offshore problem is small and that few people who use these places actually evade tax. That is completely untrue. The Tax Justice Network estimate of [\\$21 trillion of illicit assets being located in these places](#) is now widely accepted as the best available estimate. That is one sixth of world wealth. That is not a small problem. It is absurd to say, as was said and implied, that the scale of it cannot be estimated and to dismiss it as a minor issue. That is untrue.

Third, he implied we could not legislate for these places. That is wrong. We can, and they have acquiesced precisely because they know that to be the case.

Fourth, he suggested these places and the money they provide were an advantage to the UK because they passed money on to the City. And yet this is the entire problem we are tackling, which is a UK financial services sector built on secrecy, built on tax avoidance and built on the basis of hidden and illicit flows that has utterly de-stabilised our economy. But he explicitly endorsed this process. He overlooked in the process that much of that money may have been tax evaded out of the UK in the first place.

In other words, he took the opportunity to support tax havens and all they do whilst taking part in the ritualistic condemnation of tax evasion they all offer as well, before suggesting there was really little that could be done about much of it.

This is typical of the BBBC - The British Business Broadcasting Corporation. Why do they always chose to broadcast the view of the tax avoider, and not those of the people who promote tax payment, the rights of the ordinary taxpayer, and something if anything more important still, and that is our democratic way of life? That is dependent upon tax being paid. Tax havens undermine that way of life and the very fabric of our society, and the BBC seem intent on giving airtime to those who excuse their doing so. Usually it's Bill Dodwell. Today someone else, but almost never a critic.

There can be no doubt I know this subject and am a competent broadcaster. This then comes down to straightforward undiluted political bias by the BBC and the Today programme in particular. It was not that long ago that the Tax Justice Network were told by Today we could not be on the programme as we asked businesses to pay tax and so were an anti-business organisation. No we're not. We're pro-ethical fair business that competes on a level playing field by paying its tax. And we're also pro the democracy that tax havens undermine.

The question has to be asked as to why the BBC is so reluctant to give such views airtime?