

Memo to George: trade unions and charities aren't oppos...

Published: January 13, 2026, 9:11 am

George Osborne [has said today to the Institute of Directors that businesses:](#)

get out there and put the business argument. Because there are plenty of pressure groups, plenty of trade unions and plenty of charities and the like, that will put the counter view.

It is, I know, a difficult decision sometimes to put your head above the parapet, but that is the only way we are going to win this argument for an enterprising, business, low-tax economy that delivers prosperity for the people and generations to come.

Let's remember who Osborne said this to and what they think.

The IoD is the body that with the Taxpayers' Alliance put forward the [2020 Tax Commission](#) that demanded that:

- * no tax rate exceed 30% in the UK,
- * corporation tax should be abolished,
- * stamp duty and wealth taxes should all be abolished and
- * that government spending should not exceed 33% of GDP meaning that spending equivalent to the whole of the NHS would have to be cut.

These are George's friends and this is their vision of a 'enterprising, business, low-tax economy'.

I am proud to have worked with trade unions and NGOs who oppose that view of society which has implicit within it these assumptions:

- * that the market will always make the best judgements
- * that the government should not intervene in the operation of markets
- * that rewards are fairly distributed by the market and that if some cannot survive on

what they get that is their problem to resolve

- * that it is not the state's job to provide such basic services as education, health, pensions and a social safety net for all
- * that state spending can be cut to levels last seen before World War 2 when the school leaving age was 14 and there was no NHS.

To suggest when we say that we are opposed to such a view of society does not mean we are opposed to business. It says we are opposed to this Downton Abbey view of society.

And it says that we do not think a modern society made up of modern businesses could prosper without both the supply of state infrastructure and well trained and healthy employees who have confidence that they can take the risk of working for a single employer because there is a safety net provided by the state if something goes wrong with that company.

But when we constructively oppose business - as we have, for example, most successfully on tax in recent years - we do so precisely because we know that unless business operates on the fair and open level playing field that is only possible if tax haven, tax avoidance and tax evasion are beaten by the tax transparency that we have demanded then society can never secure the benefits that business can provide for all, but which are otherwise diverted to the few who cheat the system. As a result it has been the work of trade unions and charities in highlighting tax abuse and demanding change on that issue that has been the single most pro-business campaign run by anyone in this country in recent years.

That George Osborne does not know or appreciate this tells us a great deal about where his sympathies lie on this issue. He's not telling the IoD to go out and talk about business. He's promoting neoliberalism, market abuse and the small state that leaves most people without essential services and support when he makes the sort of comment he made today. Which is precisely why trade unions and charities have to exist to protect those who would be exploited in the world he seeks to promote.