

Where was tax?

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I watched, and tweeted, the Battle for Number 10 last night. Our next prime minister was interviewed and it seems almost everyone agrees Ed Miliband rose better to the occasion. So be it, that is not my reason for referring to that debate.

What struck me was two things. The first was how long it took for the NHS to even get a mention. It was well into David Cameron's questions before that happened.

The second was how little attention was, overall, given to tax. I recall little being said on it by Cameron, excepting his claim that millions of people have been taken out of the tax system, which is a straightforward lie. People who do not pay income tax are still very much in the tax and national insurance systems, and in fact have overall higher tax rates than average in a great many cases.

For Ed Miliband, the focus appeared to be on why he was stigmatising higher rate taxpayers, which he handled well, and discussion of the 50% tax rate and the mansion tax, both of which would have done him no harm with a majority of voters and which weaved into the narrative he told of what he thought democratic socialism meant (which he conveyed with more conviction than many on the left have done for a long time).

But, and this is my point, there was no justification made of tax. And there was not even justification made of not taxing - because we might need to run deficits right now.

Nor were some very important tax issues, like avoidance and evasion, addressed at all (being just about mentioned but then not followed up in the Cameron interview).

We got immigration and food banks instead.

Both are symptoms. Both are in part well beyond government control. Neither are causes. That was disappointing. Is it really true that we have to decide issues at that level, and not at the point where politicians can really make a difference? Maybe so, but I craved more substance.