

# Crickhowell is not good protest, it is just poor televi...

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There was a [lot of publicity yesterday](#) about a new BBC documentary on the Welsh town of Crickhowel opposing tax haven abuse by way of its traders apparently seeking to take advantage of that same abuse as a form of supposed mass (on a small scale) civil disobedience to protest about the actions of major retailers and others who reduce their tax liabilities by taking advantage of tax haven arrangements.

Quite a lot of journalists phoned me during yesterday, firstly either assuming I was advising the protestors or the BBC programme and secondly assuming I endorsed their protest. I had to tell the journalists in question that neither was true.

For the record, I was asked to advise on this programme and refused to do so for three reasons.

First, I do not approve of tax haven abuse whoever does it, or why.

Second, I felt the plan outlined to me by the production company created quite unreasonable tax risk for those taking part that I could never advise anyone to take, especially as it was wholly unnecessary.

Third, I think that this protest is akin to protesting about street crime by going out to do some street crime: the logic behind it is, to be candid, quite bizarre. If the programme succeeds in its aim it will prove all retailers could be abusing the tax system at considerable cost to society. If it fails some traders may face unwarranted increased tax risk, cost and potential adviser's fees to sort out a mess they have created solely to appear on television, and 15 minutes of fame is not, in my opinion, worth that.

I would have much preferred the whole town turn on tax avoidance, the traders join the Fair Tax Mark or sign the Fair Tax Pledge, and the people of the town say they would not trade with those who did not. That would have been a positive story. As it is, this story seems wholly negative and not a little irresponsible by the BBC and the production company. And tax is too important to me for such irresponsibility.

That opinion of mine [is also reported by the Independent here](#) and is roundly criticised

by the Independent's business editor, Jim Armitage, [here](#). Armitage claims I have totally missed the point but he concedes that he has no idea how the village is claiming to move offshore, and quotes an unnamed tax adviser who shares that bemusement.

And that is my point, a stunt that does not work and which puts people at real risk is not a stunt worth doing. And nor is copying abuse a way to end abuse: it's not even that anyone needs to provide publicity to make it clear that this abuse is happening; we all already know that. It will take a great deal to make me change my mind. This is not good protest, it is just looks like poor television to me.