Funding the Future

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Rupert Jones, the former attorney general of Anguilla, wrote an article for the Guardian yesterday in which he suggested that the UK's lethargic response to the Hurricane Irma induced crisis that has hit that island and others in the Caribbean is due to the UK's uncertain attitude towards its Overseas Territories due to their tax haven status.

He graciously referred to my comments on this issue on this blog, as did the Guardian when quoting me at length in a related artcile on their web site. I have to say, he and I seem to be of not dissimilar mind. His central argument is that the UK is deeply embarrassed by tax haven activity and the refusal of these places to comply with requests for improved transparency but as he notes:

The UK may hold the local governments of these territories responsible for these failures. What it does not say is that the UK could legislate to require reform tomorrow if there was the political will. There is not, perhaps because of the fear that it would highlight the UK's ultimate responsibility.

This ability on the part of the UK to impose its will on these places is something I have long argued exists, but is strenuously denied in Whitehall. It is good to see it confirmed by someone with very good reason to know the facts.

I also welcome this statement, with which I concur:

Both UK and local politicians also recognise that the islands' economies, heavily reliant on offshore financial services, might flounder with the major loss of jobs. Then the UK may have to provide alternative investment.

I have long argued this is our duty.

In essence what we agree upon is what Rupert Jones says at the end of how own artcile:

I hope he [Boris Johnson] will maximise the UK's response to the devastation wreaked by Irma, as well as using it as an opportunity to discuss our relationship with the overseas territories. It's a conversation long overdue.

I can hope.

But I do not expect it will happen.