

Funding the Future

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A wave of trolling hit the blog yesterday. It was easy to work out why. My suggestion for the reform of tax relief on ISA accounts enraged those who think all tax is a 'bad thing' and they set out to make their opinions known.

So, let me deal with the issue of substance here.

Removing a tax relief is not unfair when it simply means that those from whom it has been removed will now pay tax at the same rate as most other people.

And removing a tax relief from a person with wealth is not unfair when they pay an overall lower rate of tax than someone with less income or wealth.

Nor is it unfair to redistribute the benefit of tax reliefs towards those who might actually need them.

In fact, doing such things promotes justice.

There are, on the other hand, things that are most definitely unfair that have been done by our government. For example, the bedroom tax was totally unjust, arbitrary and created real hardship.

Increasing interest rates extortionately on a random selection of mortgage account holders so that they are at risk of losing their homes has been totally unjust.

So is freezing tax allowances during a period of inflation grossly unfair.

All of those are unjust. Asking people to pay normal rates of tax on considerable income and wealth is not unjust. It's just fair and appropriate.

Unless you're a troll that is. Then you come out of the woodwork with all your usual tricks and claim otherwise.

Most of the abuse has not, of course, appeared on the blog. I do not want to waste people's time with it. I provide a moderated safe space for comments to be made precisely so that the commentary on this blog is worth reading, as many tell me it is.

These trolling comments degrade that experience, and so I delete them and block those making them.

The trolls should be aware that a number of things will always identify them for what they are. Amongst the characteristics that make clear that they are not here to add to constructive debate are comments that suggest:

- * They're very disappointed in me, expressed in deeply patronizing terms.
- * I am a failure.
- * I do not know what I am talking about.
- * My proposal will not work, without suggesting why not or offering an alternative.
- * I am just wrong.

There are numerous variations around these themes. They will all result in deletion.

What I would also add is that such comments will not change my mind. Nor will they deflect me from my task. I have now been involved in publicly promoting issues around tax justice for twenty years. During much of that period I have been subject to comments that the proposals that I have made are wrong, bizarre, poorly designed, inappropriate, absurd, and much else. The comments have come from tax haven governments, other governments, the Big Four firms of accountants, tax specialists who claim that they know what they're talking about, commentators of a right-wing persuasion, and many others. One blogger, I am told, has written about 5,000 comment posts on what I've had to say without ever once adding any value to debate, except to his band of right-wing followers.

Experience has taught me to ignore those who comment in this way.

I was right on tax havens and won the argument.

I was right on country-by-country reporting and its technical feasibility, and I won the argument.

I was right about the possibility of automatic information exchange from tax havens, and it has happened.

I was, with others, right about the need for a Green New Deal, and still am.

There are many other issues where I am totally confident that the arguments that I have presented are also right, even if the proposals made have yet to come to fruition. Experience tells me that it takes at least ten, and sometimes quite a lot more years for ideas of the sort that I am engaged in promoting to turn from a blog post to reality. Meanwhile, I am always told that I am wrong.

The old saying was first they ignore you. Then they mock you. Then they get very angry. Finally, they adopt your idea and claim it was theirs all along. It looks like that on tax reform we have jumped straight to stage three.

My point is that I am used to being told that I am wrong. I do not automatically assume that it is a badge of honour. It is obviously possible that I can be mistaken. But in general, when I make a proposal of the sort I have with regard to ISAs, and it raises right-wing and troll hackles then I am entirely confident that the suggestion is both on target and probably appropriate. In that case, and only to that limited extent, those posting trolling comments on the subject do provide me with a very limited public service. That, though, will not stop them being blocked.