

Reflection: Why do social media?

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This morning, I published a video in a slightly different format from the one I usually use. Firstly, it is audio only. That just seemed to suit what I wanted to do. Secondly, it is as much a personal reflection as it is about current events. The topic it addresses, which is why I use social media as much as I do, is, however, one that will be of interest to readers here.

<https://youtu.be/h2b6yyKLi3I?si=N-dskZXnv8dSunMI>

The audit version is here:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=uh8wf-16ae7d7-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

The transcript is:

It is sometimes worth standing back a bit and asking why you choose to do certain things in life. I thought this might be an appropriate theme for a post on this channel.

Let me start with an appropriate question. That question is why do I spend so much time producing social media content?

I first started blogging on what was then the Tax Research Blog, and which is now the Funding the Future blog, in June 2006, and it has been published consistently since then, with an average of 3.3 posts per day, 365 days a year, every day ever since. It now has around 20,000 reads a day, on average.

I joined Twitter in 2008 but did not take it seriously for another five years. Since then, I've published about a hundred thousand tweets and have around a quarter of a million followers, which I find quite extraordinary given that I am a political economist and accountant, and no one else in either category appears to come close to that figure in the UK without also working in the media.

Other platforms, including Facebook, LinkedIn, Mastodon, Instagram, TikTok and others, have all followed with varying degrees of success, but without a doubt, my third largest platform is now YouTube, and the likelihood is that my video traffic will soon exceed that on my blog. For someone aged 66, I create a lot more social media content than most people do.

So why do that? To put it another way, why is it that I wake up most mornings at around six and have, by around eight o'clock, usually published three blog posts, with it not being unusual for a fourth or fifth to be added soon thereafter?

And why do I now dedicate up to a day a week of my time to producing videos?

The cynic might suggest that this is all a giant exercise in massaging my ego, and such comments turn up from trolls almost every day, somewhere, pretty much without fail. If that, however, was true, I would have given up long ago. No one seeking to stay in touch with their sanity would voluntarily post extensively on social media in a way that is bound to attract the hatred and venom of right-wing trolls, just for the sake of their ego. I most certainly do not. Instead, when I started out on this process, I had a three-fold objective.

The first was to point out the harm that I thought that tax havens caused in this world.

The second was to explain that this harm was not accidental but was the deliberate and predictable consequence of the chosen behaviour of those who created and used tax havens, or secrecy jurisdictions, as I prefer to call them.

Thirdly, I wanted to propose ideas for both mitigating and even eliminating those harms.

To put it another way, I identified a problem, I noted its cause, and I proposed a solution.

That has remained my motivation in all my social media postings ever since.

I am not in any way suggesting that I was the sole contributor to the transformation of international regulation that has significantly reduced the secrecy that all the users of tax havens could avail themselves of when I began my blog. But given the enormous amount of attention that this blog got during that period, when I, and others like John Christensen, then of the Tax Justice Network, ran this campaign, what happened on my blog did, I think it fair to say, make a substantial difference to the way in which the

offshore world operated.

I [renamed tax havens as secrecy jurisdictions](#) to deliberately highlight that they were abusive, not places of sanctuary.

The [Isle of Man government had its income cut in almost half](#) as a consequence of my exposure of the massive subsidy that it received from the UK government as a result of overpayments of VAT to it.

The attempts by the governments of Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man to avoid EU regulation were exposed with all my arguments being proved to be correct by subsequent events when they were forced to change their laws in ways that I had predicted. Those places were, as a consequence, forced to begin automatic information exchange of data to countries like the UK regarding the income of those persons making use of their facilities.

<https://www.taxresearch.org.uk/Blog/2011/05/18/jersey-will-fail-the-eu-code-of-conduct-rules-again/>

My [work on country-by-country reporting](#), consistently published and promoted on that blog, was eventually adopted by David Cameron in 2013 when he was UK Prime Minister, and it then became OECD policy for large company corporate tax reporting from 2015. As a consequence, it has become a legal requirement in more than 70 countries around the world, largely shattering the secret use of tax haven entities by those corporations, at least with regard to disclosure to their tax authorities.

I mention all these points because, firstly, they show that persistently writing a blog can make a difference.

Secondly, they demonstrate the solution focus of what I try to do. I am not interested in producing a blog or a YouTube video or anything else that simply lists complaints. That, of course, may be true of some posts when read in isolation, but reading any part of my work in isolation would be a mistake. There is a continuous narrative to it. No complaint has ever not been matched by suggestion as to how things might be done better throughout the entire history of my social media usage.

That being said, the way in which this blog and this YouTube channel have operated has changed over time. New themes, all of them related to the way in which the well-being of people on average and lower incomes around the world can be improved, have developed. That consistency of focus is something that I suspect will always remain within my work.

So, from 2014 onwards, Scottish matters became an issue.

Commentary on the Green New Deal, with which I've been associated since its inception in 2008, has been a long-running theme, which has occasionally

cross-fertilised with tax justice concerns.

Issues around modern monetary theory came to the fore after 2010, although I made little or no explicit reference to that idea until about 2015 because I had previously been unaware of it.

I have consistently sought to explain how any government might equitably fund its programs, whether by the use of properly progressive taxation, or socially desirable forms of borrowing that I more correctly identify as savings mechanisms or the straightforward use of government-created money.

Proposals on this theme gave rise to my association with Jeremy Corbyn during his campaign to become leader of the Labour Party in 2015, although I was never a member of that party.

And, throughout this period, a narrative on the continuing failure of political parties of all claimed perspectives has been maintained since almost none appear to have an adequate grasp of the nature of the macroeconomic policies that they should adopt if they are truly to serve the people of the UK or other places and countries.

Most of the ideas I note are also readily translatable to those places.

So why do this? Well, long before 2006, I thought that a better world was possible. I always believed that the way in which I could contribute to this was by creating the ideas that might make it happen. So, for example, whilst John Christensen was very ably leading the campaign of the Tax Justice Network from 2003 onwards, my role was more focused on creating the ideas that underpinned the narrative that it promoted.

Similarly, I've been responsible for quite large parts of the written output of the Green New Deal Group.

And since 2011, I've written a number of books, with more now potentially on their way.

Without exception, the aim has been to facilitate the process of change.

What I always knew was that promoting change would make me unpopular.

It is safe to say that this has been the case. At one time, I upset many of the right-wing think tanks in the USA. I still do upset many of those think tanks in the UK.

There are websites that appear to be dedicated to providing counterarguments to what I propose. and always their argument is the same, albeit in three parts.

It is firstly that I am not competent because it is claimed that I do not understand the theories that support the worldviews of my opponents.

They're wrong about that. I did not become a professor by accident, and I was not a chartered accountant for more than 40 years without developing a considerable understanding of the way that the world really works whilst still making sure that I had a pretty good theoretical understanding of what is claimed about it.

Secondly, they claim, as the big four firms of accountants once did with my proposal for country-by-country reporting, that what I suggest is not technically possible. Those firms were proved wrong, and all of them have since made a great deal of money out of what I proposed, which is more than I ever have.

Those still making such claims are also wrong. I only suggest what is possible, and usually at minimum disruption. I see no point in doing anything else.

And thirdly, then they tend to offer abuse because they realise that their other claims are meaningless.

Why do they do all that? Because what they know is that if my ideas succeeded the hierarchies of power that underpin their ability to capture an excessive proportion of the world's wealth for their own benefit would be challenged. And they do not want that to happen.

They would rather that others suffer poverty, ill health, early death, insecurity, lack of education, prejudice and discrimination than they give up part of their excessive wealth to prevent that happening. My bias is to the poor. Of course, I threaten those with wealth.

That said, I want to make clear that nothing about this is personal. There is not a single person with wealth who I would wish to harm as a consequence of what I propose. And I genuinely think that not a single one of them would be. More than that, I think that all of them would have ample left over to live to excess, despite what I propose.

But I do believe that millions, if not billions, of people could be better off in this world if only its resources were shared more equitably, both now and between generations and with due regard being given to the generations to come. It is because that belief is at the core of my being that I continue to use social media in the way that I do.

This world could be a better place. If my blogging, tweeting and videos can help achieve that, as I know that in some small way they already have, then that is the reward that I seek. And until that happens, or until I can no longer get access to a keyboard or microphone, then it is my plan to carry on. Too many people are suffering for me to think that I could possibly give up.

Please join me on this journey if you would. And if you think it is relevant, please share this if you can.