

Claiming an unethical action is legally permitted has a...

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For many years I spent a great deal of time dealing with the activities of those who used tax havens, whether they be the so-called professional advisers located in these places, or their clients. Without exception these people always had an excuse for their actions. Those actions were always within the letter of the law, they claimed. I responded in a variety of ways.

First, I pointed out that they had complied with what they thought the law to be. Others might well think differently about it. When the law had very rarely been tested who could be sure that their claim was justified?

Secondly, they were not acting ethically. They were seeking lowest common denominator justification for their actions, with there still being uncertainty as to whether compliance had really been achieved.

Third, this legal justification for action ignored ethics. Legal compliance is not the same as having moral justification for a cause of action.

And, fourth, legal compliance in places like a tax haven, where the legislative process has been captured by those intent on undermining the legal system of other jurisdictions was hardly indication of innocent intent.

In other words, legal compliance and ethics, or simple sound judgement, or risk averse behaviour, were very often completely unaligned with each other.

Why mention this now? Because what is, in my opinion, the Labour leadership's morally indefensible behaviour on donations has been defended on the basis that the rules of disclosure have been complied with.

Except we know Starmer was late in disclosures.

And now we know Rachel Reeves and Angela Rayner were guilty of what look like more serious errors of judgement when it comes to their compliance with the rules, when both would appear to have been decidedly opaque in their declarations.

Looking as though you are relying on the 'legal compliance' defence favoured by tax haven users to justify your actions is really not wise.

And what is very clear that sound judgement and ethics were not considered when donations for clothing were accepted.

I always did (and do) condemn those who used tax havens and methods of these sort to excuse their actions. I make no exceptions for Labour leaders using the same types of excuses.