

The tax justice movement really does need to get its de...

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As the [Guardian reported](#) yesterday:

The UK's offshore financial centres must fall in behind plans to stop "dirty money" by publishing registers of corporate ownership, leading political campaigners have said, as Labour pledged not to cave in to lobbying designed to weaken the proposals.

Labour's Dame Margaret Hodge and the Conservative MP Andrew Mitchell hit out at "dither and delay", ahead of this week's summit between UK government officials and overseas territories, such as the British Virgin Islands (BVI) and Cayman Islands, in London.

For many years, my campaigning around tax haven issues, including those of the type that the Guardian has noted, was the bread-and-butter topic that drove the content of this blog. As is obvious, that is no longer the case. I moved on from the issues in question, not least because those who campaign on them never seemed to quite grasp exactly what it is that they should be asking for, which fact is inherent in the current campaign.

Tax justice campaigns have reduced their demands to what they call the ABC of tax transparency. The A stands for automatic information exchange of data from tax havens to the places where the people who use those places really reside, [which is something on which I did a great deal of work](#) and which, by and large, has been delivered as a result of work done by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development in which I was engaged up to 2015. There is no doubt that the systems could be improved, but the vital breakthroughs have been made.

The same was true of the C in this list, which was country-by-country reporting, [which I created in 2003](#) and which is now a legal requirement for corporation tax reporting by multinational companies in more than 70 jurisdictions around the world, meaning that the tax authorities of those companies do now know in which jurisdictions they record both their income and profits, making it much easier to identify those that try to undertake tax abuse through tax havens.

The B is still the problem, and I remain frustrated that tax justice campaigners still appear to have no idea what they are asking for. It would, of course, be good to know who owns limited companies, including in the UK, which is becoming ever harder to do. However, knowing who owns a company tells you very little about it if you have no idea what it actually does, and this campaign never made any sense unless it was conducted in parallel with one that demanded that the accounts of all private limited companies be placed on public registers wherever they might trade around the world. For reasons that completely baffle me, tax justice campaigners appear to have seen no connection between these two issues, largely because it seems that they know very little about financial data, or how to use it.

When the whole tax justice movement began to be taken over by people who had little understanding of what the issues of concern were, but a lot about pursuing slogans, I realised it was time to move on. The fact that the Guardian is still reporting this matter in a way that shows that these campaigners still have little comprehension of the fact that what they're asking for will not deliver the information that they need is sufficient to suggest that I was wise to do so.

I wish them well, but I wish they would create demands that make sense.