

Starving the beast

Published: January 13, 2026, 3:41 am

As the [New York Times](#) has reported:

The Internal Revenue Service will begin laying off roughly 6,000 employees on Thursday as part of the Trump administration's push to downsize the federal work force, three people familiar with the agency's plans said.

Of all the cuts that Trump and Musk are delivering, this is the one I always expected.

I am, in fact, surprised the cuts are so modest. After all, the Republicans hate the IRS. It imposes tax. They hate tax. It follows that they hate the organisation that requires that they pay, and the staff who enforce that obligation. I am surprised that, so far, they are only planning to cut six per cent of IRS staff. I suspect this will not be the end of the story.

Long ago, when I was first working on tax justice, and John Christensen and I were just about the only people in the world to be doing so, an adviser to Gordon Brown, who had urged on him the merger of the old Inland Revenue and HM Customs & Excise to form HM Revenue & Customs with the deliberate intention of cutting staff, told me that the aim was to 'starve the beast of resources'. The same person strongly advocated 15% corporation tax rates and wanted me to believe he was not a stooge for big business. I never believed him about the second point. I believed him when he said he wanted to starve the beast because this thinking was entirely consistent with his belief that the state must be constrained and that the best way to do that was by cutting its capacity to raise taxes.

I have little doubt that Trump and Musk want to 'starve the beast'. It's a road to ruin. We could have avoided austerity and all that followed from it if we had collected the tax owing in the UK.