

[On communists and tax freedom](#) [1]

Written by [Preston Byrne](#) [2] | Wednesday 30 May 2012



On my way into work yesterday morning, I stumbled across a passage of Thomas Paine's *American Crisis* with which I identified. "Universal Empire," Paine wrote, "is the prerogative of a writer. His concerns are with all mankind, and though he cannot command their obedience, he can assign them their duty."

A sensible observation, for the nature of political speech - written or otherwise - has much more in common with decree than it does with mere suggestion, and this is precisely why it can be so hostile sometimes. Polemic is almost exclusively made with the express intention that someone, anyone, should obey it; that it is the mind of the hearer which governs whether the statement is enforced, rather than the will of the utterer, does not change the intent of the thing (rarely, if ever, have I heard a politician suggest that it would be perfectly reasonable for anyone to oppose the particular policies he or she champions).

And while our democratic society gives us the freedom to decline, the power of such speech ? indeed, all speech ? is still latent, bubbling just beneath the surface waiting for convenient facts to arise. Whether a particular group of people find a particular statement reasonable is likely to be based in their particular circumstances, and a suggestion which a large number of people happen to find reasonable is rather more likely to become policy than one which a large number of people find unreasonable. See the [Great Pasty Reversal](#) [3] for evidence of a recent iteration.

This annoying problem of consent is why libertarians are so often frustrated with politicians: where the core of anything which can legitimately describe itself as a liberal belief is non-coercion, such an idea can only be translated into policy through legitimate democratic means. It is therefore necessary to wait for circumstances to turn in one's favour, for people to drink your particular flavour of Kool-Aid, before one can hope for political change.

Without wishing to portray myself as a socio-political Nouriel Roubini (anyone with a good reading list or financial adviser could have deduced the same), I and others like me now believe that the time when liberal principles can do the most good for our country is now: a year and a half ago, I [wrote](#) [4] that European democracy could destroy itself through the over-provision for social welfare, at the time thinking that this would likely take place through the election of extreme right- and left-wing elements such as occurred in the late Weimar Republic.

I also [suggested](#) [5] that it would very shortly become clear that Western governments would find themselves in a position where they could not meet their obligations, throwing the legitimacy of that same

welfare-state model into question. Both of these have now come to pass with Greece, and there is a high degree of likelihood that similar consequences will come to pass elsewhere, in a very real and immediate way.

This is where Tax Freedom Day, which took place yesterday, comes in. Tax Freedom Day is an enormously useful ? and remarkably effective ? rhetorical tool to show how government makes life in difficult times just that little bit more difficult. It illustrates in real terms the central liberal criticisms of government: it is too large, too out of touch, too inefficient, too unfair. As a rhetorical tool it aims to convince, not to intimidate. It is meant to invite discussion, not threats and vitriol. Unless, of course, you're a reader of the Morning Star, in which case any opinion - no matter how crude - is fair game.

Yesterday the [Morning Star](#) ^[6], a broadly Communist rag which once served as a party organ of the Communist Party of Great Britain, rode swiftly and alone into battle to spearhead an underwhelming assault from the far left on Tax Freedom Day, straining to remind us that we really do owe the state for everything from the food on our tables to the roofs over our heads to, indeed, our very lives.

After wasting the first 200 words of the article dwelling on a somewhat improbable semantic interpretation of the term "Tax Freedom", an unnamed editor of the paper admonished us that "the tax you pay isn't subsidising vacationing tax collectors' Cuba Libres and frozen daiquiris on the beach in Barbados. [what?] It's funding your roads [privatised in France]... street lights [massively energy-inefficient, the bane of amateur astronomy]... old people's lunch clubs [a nice thing to do but query whether you really need a government for that] ... ambulances [privatised in the United States]... (and) crisis teams. [again, what? Robert Downey Jr. ?]"

Because of tax's ubiquity, the paper argued, no-one escapes the requirement to pay homage: "if you are an average person [I try not to be], you were born using its revenues [wrong - private], are taken care of throughout your life using tax-financed resources [also wrong, so far] and you are likely to be buried or cremated using municipal facilities" [planning for it to be wrong: Viking longboat, Nova Scotia, huge party. Everyone's invited].

What's more, the Star adds, paying taxes is not just practical, but super-fun, too. "We actually enjoy working collectively," the paper writes, arrogating to itself the responsibility of speaking for all its readers, "to provide the things we all need" -- no mention on whether the computer servers hosting their website were provided gratis by fellow comrades-in-arms. They continue: "That's what human society is all about. Working together, living together, and playing together."

Yet despite this the Morning Star spent little time, one measly paragraph, those two sentences reproduced above, informing us how much the average leftist enjoyed paying taxes, enjoyed spending the taxes of others, and no space at all on why they do not voluntarily give up fully all of their income to the state. I suspect it is because there is that pesky word in English which is used, not wrongly, in all cases where there is a complete surrender of freedom to ruler from the ruled. We return again to Paine, who wrote that "Britain, with an army to enforce her tyranny, has declared that she has a right (not only to tax) but to 'bind us in all cases whatsoever', and if being bound in that manner is not slavery, then there is not such a thing as slavery upon this earth."

Yet, improbably, the Morning Star drove on. "To the Adam Smith Institute," they wrote, "we send this message... if you don't like it, all you free-market, anarchistic, individualist, solipsistic entrepreneurs, why don't you all bugger off into a corner... (while) we'll get on with building a decent society that cares for everyone in need and hopefully get rid of parasites, exploiters, and, most especially, the Adam Smith Institute."

We all know the history of Communism, and its record when it comes to dealing with dissent; so, with this, I offer no more. What the article says about the state of current thinking in the British far left is another question ? the answer to which I shall leave entirely up to you.

[While we're on the topic of the Morning Star, [this letter to the editor](#)^[7] is a classic ? ed.]

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