

[They just don't get it](#) [1]

Written by [Preston Byrne](#) [2] | Tuesday 2 August 2011



I arrived home last night to find a copy of the Westminster Reporter-- a "free" taxpayer-funded publication produced by Westminster Council-- under my front door. Usually I take these sorts of things and throw them away, but sometimes Hayek, Mises, or Pennington can be a bit much after a long day at the office, and a little light reading is welcome relief. So I plunked down on the couch and decided to have a read.

Predictably, the magazine was not exactly high literature, and was mostly an effort by the Council to justify its own existence. It was mildly successful in this regard. Take, for example, this: "a new police car is to patrol Little Venice and Maida Vale". Fair enough. Or this: "a Night Warden has been patrolling Edgware Road to reduce noise, litter, and anti-social behaviour". Not a bad idea, if a touch Sisyphean-- and that job is perhaps better suited to a policeman but hey, they get points for effort. Or, pushing the envelope a little, this: the Council is planting a few dozen trees near the Marylebone Road "(to) help reduce pollution in the immediate area". A dubious claim, but trees are our friends, right? I suppose I could get behind that.

In fact, that's pretty much the whole magazine: a saccharine exposition of public expenditure in the City of Westminster, presented in a social-democratic, U-Rated film sort of way, rather like watching the Lion King in black and white without the sound on, designed so that its reader feels nothing and, in particular, finds nothing objectionable.

Unfortunately for the Reporter, its editor probably didn't count on it being read by a die-hard libertarian with a knack for criticism, so when the Council tried to show off a bit, it was bound to get itself into trouble. One such example from the most recent edition is when the Council bragged about a new £113,000 gym facility which had been opened up in Paddington that, it said, had a staggering "[eleven](#)" [3] pieces of free-to-use equipment" (£10,272.72 per machine), including "running machines (within twenty minutes' walking distance of Hyde Park), recumbent bikes (in a city with a free bicycle hire scheme), tai-chi balance discs (£14.95 on [Amazon.com](#)" [4]) and a multi-stretch station" (an activity that everyone I have ever known, anywhere in the world, does perfectly well all by themselves).

And what's more, all of this is out of doors-- that's right, running machines and stationary bicycles bolted firmly to the ground, outdoors, in one of the wettest and coldest countries on Earth.

Worse than its fiscal indiscretions, however, the Council has proven incapable of making spending decisions that are well-grounded in philosophy-- in plain English, "they just don't get it". This summer's Reporter triumphantly announced that Westminster would soon be home to the UK's first [Parkour](#)" [5] /

freerunning course, to open at Westminster Academy; no doubt government-funded and very expensive, the course will "feature obstacles for people of all abilities and ages and will showcase a... free flow area where practitioners can combine a range of moves to test their skills", but only, of course, if they get a [competency certificate first](#) [6].

This is, put plainly, stupid: the whole point of freerunning is to take the oppressive and compartmentalized urban milieu, made of walls, automobile thoroughfares and fences, and to transcend it through creative expression; it is non-competitive and totally unregulated, and in this way, thoroughly anarchical in character. Put it in a box, and you kill the sport; though maybe this isn't entirely surprising, given that we now know [what Westminster thinks about anarchists](#) [7].

Thus this very short survey of welfare-state silliness draws to a close. This is usually the point where, in my short writings for the ASI, I tend to borrow a line from some long-dead economist and relate it to some greater truth about life. The truth about government expenditure, however, is so mundane, so pathetic, so straightforward, that a reference to theory seems scarcely necessary.

That truth is this: at all times, someone, somewhere, in government is taking your money and spending it in the worst possible way. And this is a state of affairs to which we all must strenuously object.

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