

[The Lifeboat Test](#) [1]

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I'd like to propose a little test that we can use to judge the merit of any proposal for the spending of taxes, something I'm calling "The Lifeboat Test". As we all know there are some things that have to be done both collectively and with the powers of compulsion (at least in paying for them) that the State has available. There's also another set of things which do indeed need to be done collectively, but there is no real reason why we need the compulsion of taxation to pay for them. For as PJ O'Rourke pointed out, taxation is in the end extracted by the business end of a gun (don't pay it and they send you to jail: escape and they'll try to shoot you).

I'm using lifeboats as my test for they are indeed something that must be collectively provided but as is also apparent (this might puzzle some non-Brits: The Royal National Lifeboat Institution runs all lifeboats in the UK and it is entirely a private charitable institution. Other than the usual charitable tax concessions it receives no subsidy from taxes at all) that they can be provided both excellently and voluntarily. What I propose is that if something is more important than the lifeboats, we can consider whether tax money (that extracted by the gun, remember) might be used to pay for it. If it's less important then we can reject the idea of funding from taxation out of hand.

Gordon Brown is apparently considering the funding of political parties [from taxation](#) [3] (that which is extracted at the barrel of that gun, remember):

Mr Brown also sent a clear signal that he was prepared to consider a big increase in state funding for political parties.

So let us now apply our new test. The suggestion is that, by force, money should be removed from our pockets to pay for politicians to apply for their own jobs. Is paying for politicians to posture and preen in front of us more important than the lifeboats? No? I think not as well.

Good, State funding of political parties fails the lifeboat test and can therefore safely be rejected out of hand.

To enliven a Monday morning, what State spending (paid for by the taxes the government already forcibly removes from us at gunpoint) also fails the lifeboat test?

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[1] <http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/tax-and-economy/the-lifeboat-test>

[2] <http://www.adamsmith.org/taxonomy/term/5778>

[3] <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/12/02/ndonor102.xml>

[4] http://disqus.com/?ref_noscript

[5] <http://disqus.com>