

The “taxpayer”

I strongly object to the common practice of referring to national assets as being owned by “the taxpayer”, and to public expenditure being made by “the taxpayer”.

National assets are owned by the nation. They are technically owned by the government and its agencies, of course, but only on behalf of, and in trust for, the nation as a whole.

Similarly government payments are not made by the taxpayer. The only thing the taxpayer pays is taxes! Government payments are made by the government on behalf of, and preferably for the benefit of, the nation.

To ascribe national assets to the taxpayer, and national expenditure to the taxpayer, is not only inaccurate by also intentionally divisive and deeply offensive. It supports the Tory assault on the non-existent non-taxpayer, who is implicitly some kind of freeloader or scrounger. So why do the non-Tory press, and even many Labour politicians, fall into the trap of using the term so freely?

For who is this “taxpayer” supposed to be? The VAT payer? The car tax payer? The IHT payer? Probably not: the tacit assumption seems to be that we are talking of the income tax payer, thereby subliminally supporting the Tory mind-set that paying out for the rest of the population (the young, the old, the sick, the incapacitated etc.) is an undesirable burden on the hard-working taxpayer. Indeed that insidious outlook is now so pervasive that some pacifists find it reasonable to ask for the right to withhold that proportion of “their” tax which is spent on defence. What nonsense!

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