

Brown demands your money – and organs

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The Tories once warned us, "Be afraid, be very afraid." Unfortunately for them, they picked the wrong target. Tony Blair never did engender fear, even when his popularity was at its lowest ebb. But his successor surely does, or at least should. For there is a worrying informing principle embedded in many of Gordon Brown's policies – worrying because it involves wresting more and more control of their wealth and persons from individuals and transferring it to the state.

We know that the Prime Minister quails at the prospect of submitting himself to an electorate broader than the party in which he grew up. The office he finally received, he believed, is his by right, and the man repeatedly chosen by the electorate to hold it a usurper to be hounded from office. (Yes, I know: yours is not a presidential system, but tell that to the millions who voted Labour because they saw in Tony Blair a leader they trusted.)

Brown's attitude towards the relationship between the state and the individual is reflected not only in his refusal to allow voters to choose their prime minister, but also in his tax policies. There are two ways for a government to view the wealth

produced by the work and risk-taking of individuals.

The first, and the one common in most market-based economies, is that such wealth belongs to the individuals who earned it, and that the government can rightly ask them to contribute a portion of that wealth to the protection of the realm, the provision of the infrastructure that makes it possible for them to earn that wealth, and the funding of such services as enrich not only their recipients, but society as a whole – education being the most obvious example.

That is not how Brown sees it. To him, the output of hard-working individuals belongs to the state, and it is for him to decide how much to allow them to keep. That is why he has felt completely comfortable progressively reducing the portion of their earnings that workers, entrepreneurs, shareholders and others might retain to dispose of as they wished. No matter that every increase in the portion claimed by government has meant a decrease in the individual's freedom to deploy the results of his hard work in any lawful way he saw fit.

No matter a pledge not to increase taxes. The government knows better than those who



The Prime Minister believes that your earnings and body parts belong to the state, says
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earned the money how it should be used.

Even the Prime Minister's to-be-announced tax cuts do not represent a reversal of that attitude. The reductions are to be funded by running up the deficit. The borrowed money will, of course, have to be repaid, and by future taxpayers. So the tax cut is simply a transfer of the burden of taxation from current to future taxpayers. That might – only

might – make sense in times such as these, when efforts to stimulate the economy are clearly needed. But it is not a sign that the Government has decided that in the long run individuals should be allowed to keep more of their hard-earned money. The all-wise government has better uses for it.

Which quite naturally brings us to the question of organs. As with wealth, there are two theories about the ownership of your liver, heart, kidneys, retinas and other body parts. They are yours to dispose of as you wish, or to retain for use in the hereafter.

Or they belong to the government, are on temporary loan to you, and are to revert to the original owner when you no longer are in a position to make use of them. Less politely, when you are dead. And incapable of complaint. Oh yes, if you remember, you can opt out, at least until some bright do-gooder decides that even that option should be closed to you.

Leave aside the fact that such mining of organs is offensive to Jews, Muslims and perhaps other religions. Anyone who has witnessed orthodox and not-so-orthodox Israeli Jews attempting to gather up for burial every shred of the scattered bodily remains of victims of Arab

suicide bombers knows the intensity of their opposition to organ mining.

Leave aside also the fact that it would be possible to increase the supply of organs by allowing a market to be created, so that live donors would have an incentive to make some organs available, and others could plan to enrich their children and other heirs by donating at death.

If that sounds like a plan to make organs available only to the rich, think again. There would be nothing to prevent the government buying organs, and distributing them in any way it thought fair. But it would first have to concede that it did not already own the organs, that the individual did, and that the government had no intrinsic right to harvest the livers and other parts that some of its citizens had not realised they must formally and officially claim as their own lest the government snatch them.

There is more: Brown's push to create supra-national economic regulators puts more decisions in the hands of officials unaccountable to the individuals with whose lives and fortunes they are dealing. But that is a tale for another day.

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