

# Proclamation of Disrespect

*How you can challenge Agents of the State who refuse to reform society*

Petitions to governments are ignored if they put at risk the privileges of those who benefit from the culture of greed that regulates modern societies. Agents of the state, while they may be sincere in wishing to serve their constituencies, are not free to amend the foundation rules. So petitions on government and private websites may enable people to let off steam, but they cannot result in the root-and-branch reforms that are needed to the state's financial system.

Support for the Cheating Index could lead to initiatives such as the publication of a Proclamation of Disrespect. The Proclamation would document an objectionable deed that fell into one of the categories of the Cheating Index. The Proclamation would focus attention on a social process that was generally regarded as normal, or which people were resigned to accepting as "a fact of life", but which assumes a new significance when its implications are highlighted by the Cheating Index.

The Proclamation should not be used as a tool to make scape-goats of individuals. Personal actions must be interpreted in their cultural context. When Britain's parliamentarians abused their right to expenses incurred in the course of their work, for example, anger and prosecutions were directed at individual MPs. No attention was given to the root cause: *the serious cases of fraud were driven by the quest for capital gains that could be captured from trading in taxpayer-funded residential property*. The incentives for those windfall gains were provided by Parliament, which sanctioned the private appropriation of socially-created land rents.

Issuing a Proclamation of Disrespect is an act that requires responsible preparation. Evidence must be collated to show how deeds were ultimately located in the perverse incentives provided by the laws of the land.

Publication of the Proclamation would tend to mortify those who are responsible for administering the state. The analysis would explain how people in power were co-opted into upholding a social process that cheated fellow citizens of their liberties.

Corporations that were named and shamed would not shrug off the complaints. They would tend to engage in debate about the forces that drove their actions. A recent example of this is public criticism of the tax-avoiding behaviour of corporations like Apple and Starbucks. They responded by discussing the tax environment which encouraged them to adopt "tax efficient" strategies. Missing from that debate was acknowledgement of the optimum fiscal policies that could not be avoided – public charges on the rents of the locations that they occupied. This is emphasised by Nobel laureate Milton Friedman in the video [Can we REALLY Scrap Taxes?](#) A Proclamation of Disrespect on the issue of tax avoidance would attract support on-line. In the end, individuals and corporations could join in the demand for structural reforms of the kind that would nurture ethical behaviour.

Resistance to change in the structure of power comes from front-line politicians. They work to preserve the *status quo*, even if that means disregarding their own laws. A recent example was provided by the London *Financial Times* (August 5, 2013). It sought disclosure of an email by Prime

Minister David Cameron, citing its lawful right under the Freedom of Information Act. Access was denied. Why? Because “we could not ‘describe...the nature of the information recorded in the document’”. That cynical abuse of power should not be tolerated. It warranted a powerful public reaction in support of the freedom of the press.

Proclamations that amplify the lessons of the Cheating Index would extend the public’s awareness of the depth of the social crisis and would strengthen the democratic will to drive change.