

Representatives from the big trans-national tax avoiders - Google, Amazon and Starbucks, had a grilling by MPs yesterday. But the rogues missed a trick. These companies' obligations to the British government begin and end with the value of the infrastructure that they enjoy in the UK. That's it. This is fully reflected in the land value element of the rents they pay on the properties they occupy, plus the UBR the companies themselves actually pay. I doubt if they own much, if any, property in the UK, so we are talking about town centre shops, sheds on fringe industrial estates and perhaps little offices in a posh address in SW1, rented from investment companies and the odd duke. If the UK government wants the money to which it is rightfully due, it should collect it from the companies' landlords through a tax on the rental value of land. It is a pity that the company lackeys did not point this out very firmly.

When confronted by MPs with the charge that the tax avoidance was immoral but not illegal, they should have retorted that the British tax system, like most others, is based on the systematic theft of private property, combined with a failure to collect a value which is created and sustained by public action, largely at the expense of taxpayers, and to which the government has a perfectly legitimate claim. That really is immoral.

Next for the MPs' grilling should be Chancellor George Osborne and his predecessors, and Treasury civil servants. They should be asked why they have not put a robust tax system in place, one based on sound moral principles. Caroline Lucas could usefully take the opportunity to point this out to her colleagues, over coffee, between now and the time her LVT bill comes up for discussion early next year.

There is a verbatim report of the farcical exchange [here](#) in the FT.