

BBC News

From Director, News

The Rt Hon John Prescott MP,
House of Commons,
London SW1A 0AA

October 22nd, 2009

Dear Mr Prescott,

Thank you for your recent letter of 10 October about the Taxpayers' Alliance, received earlier this week, drawing attention to The Guardian's article of 9 October.

A BBC article on the TPA last year (see http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7241315.stm) made similar points, noting "Many of the Taxpayers' Alliance's biggest donors also give money to the Conservatives". When the reporter questioned whether that made it a proxy for the Conservative Party", Matthew Elliot, the TPA's founder and Chief Executive, replied: "In no way are we a Tory Party front group. We attack both parties. We don't actually think any political party in the UK is now representing those people who actually want to see lower taxes and less government spending".

We have looked again at the TPA's published list of supporters, and agree that there is a significant overlap with those who give money to the Conservatives. However, there are others who don't, including several UKIP supporters. Reading the policy material on the TPA site suggests that it would not, for example, support the retention of the 50% tax rate (something George Osborne committed to in his conference speech) and would want to see cuts in the amount the Government spends on health, contrary to David Cameron's pledge to real-terms increases in NHS spending. The TPA does have staffers who previously worked for Conservative MPs or at Conservative Central Office, but something similar could have been said for others at think tanks and lobbying organisations interested in a broadly Labour leaning perspective in the nineties, when Labour was in opposition.

So, while it is clear to me that the TPA is a conservative (small "c") organisation, I do not think it would be accurate or fair to describe it on air, as you suggest, as "a group with close links to the Conservative Party". I do accept that the TPA's publications and policies come from a distinctive political position, and think we should try to avoid our output giving the impression that it is an impartial body. I'll be discussing



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with senior colleagues how we might do that in the same way that we discuss all the wider editorial issues that I have to deal with as Director of News.

Thank you for writing and giving me the opportunity to address your concerns.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Boaden.

Helen Boaden
Director, BBC News



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