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Al Sharpton, Emma Thompson, Russell Brand: Tax Protesters, Sort Of

You have to hand it to [Emma Thompson](#) and her actor husband [Greg Wise](#) for cleverly launching a tax boycott. They earn plenty of income, but won't pay taxes until the British government cracks down on ~~wealthy~~ wealthier people shielding their riches. The pair want the culprits in the [HSBC tax evasion scandal](#) in prison, and hope a [mass tax boycott](#) will get upper crust tax cheats.

More tax evasion isn't a solution to tax evasion, according to some Brits. But Ms. Thompson and Mr. Wise seem prepared to go to prison if they have to. Actor [Russell Brand also wants to skip paying taxes](#), and we applauds their bravery. In a post on his Twitter page, he writes, "Yes Emma Thomson [sic] and Greg Wise! In unity! Let's stop paying our taxes and mortgages." Brand took a page from his anti-democracy book 'Revolution,' urging Brits to stop paying *all* their bills, including mortgage payments and taxes.



Curiously, [Emma Thompson](#) is close to Prince Charles, and has said that dancing with him is better than sex. What does this have to do with Al Sharpton? Maybe nothing, except that Mr. Sharpton has tax problems of his own. Moreover, as with Emma Thompson's proximity to Prince Charles, Rev. Sharpton has close [ties to White House, despite his tax debts](#).

Perhaps Rev. Sharpton's lack of tax payments may have more to do with mismanagement than with principles, but who knows? After all, when the New York Times reported that [Sharpton and his for-profit business owe more than \\$4.5 million in unpaid taxes](#). At a press conference, [Sharpton disputed the New York Times report](#), and said it was over his support of President Obama.

Although Rev. Sharpton has lead his share of protests, it isn't clear that any of them have been about taxes. Yet his relationship with taxes has been strained for years. In [tell it to the Reverend Al](#), the New York Post counted \$4.5 million of tax liens. In that sense, a tax protest might do nicely.

CNN lists [Al Sharpton fast facts](#), noting that the Reverend was born October 3, 1954 in Brooklyn, and was ordained as a Pentecostal minister in 1964. In 1969, he was named youth director for [Operation Breadbasket](#) by Jesse Jackson. In 1972, he was named youth director of [Shirley Chisholm's](#) presidential campaign.

But by 1989, Sharpton faced 67 felony counts of tax evasion, larceny and fraud. He was acquitted, but plead guilty to the misdemeanor charge of failure to file state income tax for 1986. In 1991, he

[founded the National Action Network](#) to expose racial profiling and police brutality. In 1992, he ran in New York's primary for the U.S. Senate, a race he lost in 1994. In 1997, he ran second in New York's mayoral primary.

In 1999, he organized a massive demonstration after Amadou Diallo was killed by police. In 2001, he got 90 days in jail for trespassing on U.S. Navy property during a protest of military training activities. On April 22, 2003, he announced a run for president, later supporting John Kerry. On May 13, 2004, he was ordered to repay \$100,000 by the Federal Election Commission.

On November 2, 2005, he spoke at the [funeral of Rosa Parks](#). On September 20, 2007, he led thousands through Jena, Louisiana, for the 'Jena Six,' teens charged with beating a white classmate. On October 8, 2008, he was convicted of disorderly conduct from a May 2008 protest. On April 23, 2009, he was fined \$285,000 by the Federal Election Commission for receiving hundreds of thousands of dollars in private funds.

Protests, yes, but not about taxes exactly. That's where an alliance with Emma Thompson might make sense. Mr. Sharpton knows how to protest, and tax boycotts have occurred throughout history. Lady Godiva's naked ride was about taxes, though a naked ride may not be a good idea for Rev. Sharpton. How about demolishing your house to avoid property taxes? Residents of Alberobello, Italy reportedly did so in the 1600s to avoid paying.

England had hearth taxes, so people blocked or destroyed their chimneys. Some say the hearth tax is where England got its pub culture, since folks left their homes in search of a hot meal. British taxmen turned to something easier to count than hearths in 1696: the window tax. So people bricked up their windows. Charles Dickens [wrote](#) about the unpopular tax, and it was repealed in 1851.

The latest tax protests don't seem focused or even effective. Rev. Sharpton might be able to change that.

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