

A Dictionary of Taxation, Second Edition

SIMON JAMES

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Book review by IRENA KLEMENČIĆ

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Fourteen years after the first edition of *A Dictionary of Taxation*, a new edition has been published, containing over 200 new or substantially revised entries. Simon James has collected definitions and terms on legal, accounting and economic aspects of tax and tax systems, as well as those of social science. The entries are not limited only to British, American or European legal systems and they include terms from around the world. The entries are sorted alphabetically and many of them contain references to further reading, listing books and articles that are of great value to researchers and analysts.

The dictionary is written in plain English in a user-friendly manner, not limiting its audience to professionals and researchers into legal systems. As mentioned in the Preface, taxes have existed since the beginning of civilization, they affect all members of the society and play a significant role in all economies. It is therefore important for any member of society to be able to comprehend the rules they are forced to obey. Hence, this dictionary can help them in better understanding of the sometimes complex terms used in taxation and tax systems, as the definitions are simple and understandable. Although the explanations are sometimes too vague and simple to be useful for researchers, the additional references make this book valuable for their work too. For many entries James has provided historical references as well as some references to theoretical explanations.

Many translators from non-English speaking countries will appreciate the extensive list of abbreviations and the names of institutions from around the world. Other valuable contributions are quotation from court judgements (e.g. on employment or emolument) and quotations from famous speeches (e.g. on mobile phones).

Although it deals with a topic widely perceived as “serious”, the user of the dictionary can encounter some quite witty entries. For example, the author warns the readers not to boast to the neighbours about the tax they evaded, otherwise they might be reported to the tax authorities by “well wishers” or “honest taxpayers” who tend to send anonymous letters. Also, one would never consider Jaffa cakes to be the source of tax dispute. The UK tax laws make the difference between cakes and biscuits by proscribing different tax rates for each category, making this problem a complex fiscal matter. James refers to some terms in popular culture – the entry taxman refers to a song by George Harrison dealing with taxation.

Many terms refer to the psychology and the behaviour of taxpayers. The spite effect describes the response of taxpayers to tax liabilities – even if it’s costly for them, they will work less in order to pay less tax. The entry on excise contains a 1,755 description as “hateful tax levied on commodities” while the bomb crater effect describes the decrease in an individual’s willingness to comply with the tax system following an audit by the tax authorities, expecting that they will not be audited in the forthcoming period.

To conclude, *A Dictionary of Taxation* is a valuable book in any translator's or researcher's library and a useful tool for anyone dealing with taxation, accountancy and public finance.