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A History of Taxation Worldwide

From Antiquity to the Present Day

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To endorse the state, or to resist it?

"Everything is taxed, except the air we breathe," said the Marquise du Deffand. This book, the first ever of its kind, tells the story of taxation throughout the world, from Egypt under the pharaohs to present day tax havens, including imperial China, France under Louis XIV, and the USA in the age of prohibition. Serious accounts are leavened by anecdotes, making for fascinating and entertaining reading on a subject that is part of our everyday lives. Did you know, for instance, that in order to Westernize Russia, Peter the Great wanted to force his male subjects to be clean-shaven by imposing a tax on beards? And did you know that France's guinguettes (riverside cafés) plied their trade outside city limits in order to avoid taxation? Even more surprising is the fact that the members of the pop group ABBA wore eccentric outfits because, according to Swedish law, sales tax on clothes was lower if they could not be worn in everyday life.

This is neither a tax manual nor a taxpayer's guide. It is a clear and entertaining approach to taxation: why it exists and why we resist it. In fact, it is a new way of looking at how the State comes into being.

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