

Dear D.,

Thank you for the letter you wrote me and that your teacher passed on to me along with the many other letters and greetings from your school friends.

You ask me, “But do you like taxes?”

I’m going to answer you starting from a personal experience of mine.

The son of a good friend of mine has a serious illness and he often has to go to hospital for complex treatment and cures, every other day in fact. There are often complications for some reason or other. It is hoped that he can have a transplant to replace the diseased organ with a healthy one. But, at any rate, with this treatment he can stay alive! Not in the same way as other people, of course. For example, he can’t have a job that keeps him busy all day every day, as people normally do. And so he can’t earn as much as he needs. But there is a law that means there are job selections reserved for people with severe disabilities and he has been selected so now he works like everyone else, but with working hours and special arrangements suited to his situation. In addition, the town where he lives reserves a number of flats at a low rent for people with disabilities, and he has had one assigned to him, again thanks to a selection process. Lastly, while he wasn’t working, he received a disability pension.

As you can imagine, his family helps him out, of course. But let’s face it: it isn’t enough, what we need are fully-equipped hospitals, doctors and nurses available every day to ensure all the necessary treatment and then the most urgent operations. And they need to be ready for difficult operations when necessary, not only in the city where he lives, but in all the Italian cities and abroad.

Now all this costs, and it costs a lot, so without the taxes paid by the citizens and without part of the taxes going to the health service and being well spent, this would be impossible. As it would be impossible to provide various types of help: from homes to work, or an income enabling people in conditions like this to live, as far as possible, like other people.

Is this an isolated case?

I wonder, just how many lives are saved every day in hospitals?

How many children go to school every day?

How many young people go to university every day?

How many fires are put out by fire-fighters every day?

How many streets are clean, lit up, controlled every day?

How many immigrants fleeing war or famine are saved by the Navy?

I could go on.

Actually, even I am surprised at how long a list we could make.

And mind you, these are not exceptional cases; this is the life of each of us, every day.

Of course I know that taxes can be too much and unevenly distributed, even unfair; governments can be corrupt and steal or be inefficient and not spend taxes well.

And this makes us really angry because taxes are a sacrifice for the public, who pay them out of their own pocket, taking money away from useful and necessary expenses for themselves and the family.

But this depends on the government, not the taxes!

Now if we “get rid of” incapable, corrupt and inefficient governments and we believe that they are incapable, corrupt and inefficient, we are doing the right thing. We have democracy and elections precisely for this reason: to change governments that we believe are behaving badly, and conversely, to confirm governments that we believe behave well. And citizens can offer themselves as candidates to support their ideas.

But if, missing the point, we “get rid of” taxes or, and it amounts to the same thing, we do not pay taxes, then we are tax evaders, we shoot ourselves in the foot; we damage only ourselves. We would no longer be able to guarantee hospitals, schools, universities, security and so on.

Naturally, you can argue that anyone can “go it alone”. But who can go it alone? Only the rich, perhaps. And the others? And then not all the things we have just mentioned: in some cases we cannot do them, and in others, we must not do them by ourselves.

If mum and dad have to go every day to the shops, the office or the factory, whether they are traders, lawyers, clerks or teachers, workers or entrepreneurs who have to earn what they need to support the family, they cannot keep the flower beds clean or control the traffic or else catch thieves, or judge in court. They don’t have time to do it, and they wouldn’t even know to go about it; they can’t do it and in some cases they “mustn’t” do it! Only the police can arrest, only judges can judge, only public employees can issue certificates. For these things, there are the local and national policemen, the judges, the officials. And all this depends on taxes and means that we have to pay the government a part of our wealth.

If you go on the Internet, on www.lebelletasse.com, on the at school with the ‘nice taxes’ page, you can find a short video on the “Taxes Game” made in 2014 in Milan, like where you live, in the Hall of City Council. At the end of it, a little girl interviewed by a journalist on the meaning of game she had just played said, “If it wasn’t for taxes, my city wouldn’t exist”.

So, in answer to your question whether I like taxes, I would answer: Yes! I like them because I don’t know how I could do without “my city.”

A big hug, dear D., and I’m sorry if I’ve gone on a little long,

Franco Fichera

But do you like taxes?