

# Head of Google in Europe grilled by UK lawmakers

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In this image made from video, Google Vice President Tom Hutchinson, left, and President of Google Europe, Middle East and Africa, Matt Brittin, give evidence to the British government Commons Public Accounts Committee in London, Thursday Feb. 11, 2016. The executives are appearing before the government committee following controversial agreements over tax payments by the internet giant. (Image from video / PA via AP)

A British parliamentary committee has grilled Google's president of European operations, questioning in blunt terms whether the Internet giant had paid its fair share of taxes.

The hearing Thursday comes amid public anger over a tax settlement the company made with U.K. authorities. Meg Hillier, who chairs the Public Accounts Committee, captured the mood when she accused Google's Matt Brittin of having "tin ears" to the complaints about the 130 million pound (\$186 million) deal for back taxes in Britain.

Brittin insisted he did understand public anger, and said Google had paid taxes at 20 percent like other companies.

But he invoked Hillier's fury when he said he didn't know his own pay package.

"You don't know what you get paid? ... Out there, taxpayers, our constituents, are very angry, they live in a different world clearly to the world you live in, if you can't even tell us what you are paid," Hillier countered.

She said it was a "PR disaster" for Google to announce its tax deal just as British people were doing their tax returns and "sweating over a little bit of bank interest and getting it in on time."

The session tapped into a public zeitgeist of fury over multinational corporations that operate in Britain but have tax bases elsewhere. Britain is revising its international tax rules.



In this image made from video, Google Vice President Tom Hutchinson, gives evidence to the British government Commons Public Accounts Committee in London, Thursday Feb. 11, 2016. Google executives are appearing before the British government committee following controversial agreements over tax payments by the internet giant. (Image from video / PA via AP)

It's also a reflection of the explosion of tech companies. Brittin said Google's workforce in Britain had grown from 160 to more than 4,000 over the 10-year period covered by the settlement. Some 5,000-plus are employed in Ireland.

He insisted the figure came at the end of a tax audit that took six years to complete and that no "deal" had been struck with Treasury chief George Osborne, who had described the settlement as a "victory" for the government.

The announcement, Brittin said, had occurred because the settlement would soon be made public in the company's accounts. He defended the

company in an op-ed piece for the Telegraph newspaper and insisted there was no "sweetheart deal" with the government.

"We agree that the international tax system needs reform. We have long been in favor of simpler, clearer rules, because it is important not only to pay the right amount of tax, but to be seen to be paying the right amount," he said, writing in the Daily Telegraph on Wednesday. "But changes to the tax system are not Google's call. Reform must come from governments, not from the companies who are subject to their rules."

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