

If the government is serious about collecting tax it ne...

Published: January 13, 2026, 2:05 am

I have to admit that I have form with Ed Troup, the executive chair of HMRC. As [the Guardian has noted](#) this morning, it was me who drew attention to [his 1999 article](#) in which he described tax as [legalised extortion](#) just before he appeared before Margaret Hodge at the Public Accounts Committee in 2013. Margaret noticed. He had an uncomfortable day.

Today is another such day. The Guardian has noted that the law firm in which he was a partner before joining the Treasury and then HMRC was an adviser to Ian Cameron's investment fund and corresponded with Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca for them.

I stress there is nothing to say that Ed Troup had anything to do with this. And nor is there any suggestion of illegality. But that has never been the point. This has always [been about attitudes](#), connections, what they reveal, and what needs to be done as a consequence.

Rather like David Cameron could have said that much as he respected his father he would not have done what he did, and this issue would have moved on so could Ed Troup have said in 2013 that he regretted his 1999 article and we would have accepted, with good grace, that a man can change his mind and act in accordance with his new understanding. He was given that opportunity. [He did not take it](#). I presume that was because he stood by his 1999 views.

I said in 2013, and I repeat now, that if that is his opinion then he is not suited to the job he holds. That requires a person who believes that tax is rightfully owed, and not just for legal reasons but because the state has a proper claim on a part of a person's income as a result of the role it plays in society from which the individual benefits in partnership with government. Without a person having that understanding I do not see how anyone can do the job Troup does in the way that society would want him to fulfil that task.

In that case I think Ed Troup, who I have met, is the wrong person for this job. As I also think many within the upper echelon of HMRC management are also unsuited for the

task given to them, which is why HMRC is in such a mess, has too few resources, cannot collect the tax owing to it (hence the tax gap) and has far too close a relationship with big business.

If the government is serious about collecting tax it needs people at HMRC who believe in tax, what it does, how it can do it, and collecting it as a result. That's not what we've got. It's time for a change.