

Labour's tax vacuum

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I have been thinking some more about Keir Starmer's performance in the ITV leaders' debate last night, and have been noting reaction to it, both in the media and amongst those I have already spoken to this morning.

Starmer made two massive mistakes last night. Firstly, he failed to notice Rishi Sunak's bogus claim that Labour would put up taxes for the average household by £2,000, and took far too long to realise that the allegation was being made. Sunak had made this bogus claim eleven times before Starmer even appeared to appreciate the need to react. The consequence was that, like it or not, Sunak succeeded in putting Labour tax policy into the election debate.

Sunak then built on that success by challenging Starmer on whether Labour would protect pensioners from tax on their old age pension. It was absurd that he seemed unprepared for this question, or to be quite unable to respond. All he had to say was that Labour would increase personal allowances for pensioners in the event that this risk arose and the attack would have been neutered. But we all know that the spectre of Rachel Reeves hangs over him and so he lost that major point.

The consequence is that Labour will now be open to attack after attack on tax. I welcome that. This is necessary and appropriate. For a party that wants power they appear to have no meaningful tax policy for any sort. But it is ludicrous that Starmer gave ground to someone as useless as Sunak on such an issue. My concerns about Labour's suitability for office have only grown as a result.