

Starmer needs a reshuffle, but he also needs to split t...

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It has been very hard to avoid discussion of Rachel Reeves on social media today. Her very obviously distressed state during the course of Prime Minister's questions has given rise to a great deal of comment.

Not only did it look as if she had been crying for a long time before arriving in the House of Commons, but she continued to cry whilst sitting next to Keir Starmer as he sought, almost entirely in vain, to defend his own position, and that of Rachel Reeves, from attack by Kemi Badenoch, who for once could hardly miss an open goal.

On one level, I have very little sympathy for Rachel Reeves. It was her intention to impose misery and absolute poverty on hundreds of thousands of people in the UK who have disabilities simply so that she could balance her budget. She picked on the most vulnerable when she could have either chosen to run a bigger deficit or to raise taxes in a multitude of ways. She chose not to upset the wealthy, but to pick on those who she thought would not argue back. Her own party's MPs chose to reject her plan, and she should accept that fact.

At another level, Rachel Reeves is a human being who is clearly out of her depth, and so very obviously distressed that it is impossible to imagine that she can currently undertake the tasks expected of a Chancellor of the Exchequer. Any compassionate employer would be putting her on immediate leave to give her time to recover from the stress that she is suffering. This, however, is inconsistent with the demands of modern politics, so I suspect it will not happen.

Instead, the reality is that I rather strongly suspect that Keir Starmer will be undertaking a reshuffle of his team remarkably soon.

Rachel Reeves' credibility has gone.

So, too has that of Liz Kendall.

Yvette Cooper's rash demand that Palestine Action be sanctioned as a terrorist group

now looks to be backfiring, with even the letters page of The Times declaring that this is wholly inappropriate.

Wes Streeting is very obviously nowhere near delivering what is required by the NHS.

And, meanwhile, David Lammy always looks like a Foreign Secretary who is struggling to create spaces that are as long as possible between his words as he attempts to find whatever meaningless phrase he can put forward as an excuse for the UK's inaction on the international stage when faced with crisis like the genocide in Israel.

To be blunt, Starmer's top team has failed him, but if he selected them, and they have all proved to be duds, he should come to the obvious conclusion that the problem is not just with them, but also with him.

I very much doubt that Starmer is planning to walk away from the role of Prime Minister, whether that would be the right thing to do or not. I do, however, suspect that he will have no choice but to address the problem that is now Rachel Reeves. If she is really as distressed as it would appear she was today in the House of Commons, it would take the most remarkable turnaround for her to function in office any time soon.

Having observed her for several months, that she was going to reach this point has long been apparent. She has looked increasingly stressed, tired, and out of her depth for months. Whatever happened today was not a momentary reaction, but the clear indication of a profound level of fatigue made apparent by stress that she is unable to manage.

If Starmer had any compassion, and that is open to question, he would now be reshuffling.

If he cared for Rachel Reeves, he would, for the time being, appoint her to a post without portfolio to provide her with the opportunity for a return in due course. Such opportunities always exist in government.

He would also look very hard at who might be able to do this job when they currently refuse to stand out from the crowd. The current Treasury ministerial team appears to lack any real talent in this regard, although I am quite sure that Darren Jones and Torsten Bell would both believe that they are ideally suited to the role.

There also appears to be no one else in the ministerial portfolio who has anything like the necessary economic understanding to take the job on, and Starmer is hardly likely to ask Rachel Reeves' predecessor, John McDonnell, to consider coming back.

Maybe he should look to the back benches, but even then, no one is shining out as having the necessary depth of knowledge.

So, I put forward another suggestion. I suggest that Starmer should not just reshuffle,

but he should now break up the Treasury.

Its power is too great.

The demands it makes on the Chancellor are too big. The breadth of its scope requires too many skills to be possessed by anybody holding that office.

Anyway, the focus needs to be on government delivery, and not on finance, requiring a downgrading of its role.

This is the opportunity to split it into three new ministries. One would be a Ministry of Finance, which would manage the government's overall budget.

The second would be a Ministry of Taxation, which would take responsibility for HM Revenue & Customs, tax policy, and its integration into the rest of the government's goals, given that taxation is about a great deal more than revenue raising.

The third would be a Department for Economic Development, which does not mean growth, but does mean that the department would be responsible for delivering improvements in the economic well-being of the ordinary people of this country, however they might be generated, including by the promotion of economic redistribution, if that is necessary.

Split the job up in this way, and candidates for office might be found. Leave the post as it is, and failure would now appear to be hardwired within it.

Will Starmer have the courage to do anything like this? I don't know, but I do think you should.

Taking further action

If you want to write a letter to your MP on the issues raised in this blog post, there is a ChatGPT prompt to assist you in doing so, with full instructions, [here](#).