

## Rayner quits

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Angela Rayner has quit Labour, brought low by her failure to pay the right stamp duty on the purchase price of her flat in Hove.

Some will say this is massively damaging for Labour, but compared to failure to end the two-child benefit cap, mismanaging the economy and supporting Israel whilst it commits genocide in Gaza, it seems that this is a political sideshow.

That said, questions arise.

First, how did The Telegraph get this data? This information is not in the public domain. So, who leaked it, and why?

Second, why didn't anyone in Number 10 work out that she owed stamp duty the moment the story broke? Was there really no one there who thought of doing so? Couldn't they have saved considerable embarrassment as a result? Starmer, Streeter and Phillipson have all made themselves look stupid in the last few days because of their failure to do some basic checks, including on the HMRC website.

Third, how and why did Rayner think she got this right without properly checking, which it now becomes clear she did not? Isn't that sufficient to justify her departure in itself? Is someone who does not check their facts suited to high office, come what may?

Fourth, there is a massive issue here for HM Revenue & Customs. It has effectively closed all its interactive engagement with people in communities. It provides almost no support that people need to address their obligations when facing difficult tax decisions that they have to decide upon in real time, and which they are now legally required to get right without tax authority support. Isn't this, in itself, a significant issue that needs to be addressed if the right amount of tax is to be paid in the right place at the right time?

Fifth, where does Starmer go now? If Rayner has quit, how can she stay as Labour leader? Will Starmer face a massive Labour membership revolt if a new deputy leader has to be chosen? This might be the most challenging aspect of all this for him.

And last, why didn't Rayner use her common sense? Did she really think her third home was going to be her main residence? How? For her, the chance of a return to the front bench looks to be very limited indeed.

This is a total mess arising from a lack of judgement that Rayner made for herself and Labour. It's hard to find sympathy for her, however complex the tax system is. If she had been prudent, exercised common sense, and applied a precautionary principle to her actions, all this could have been avoided.

But that said, who did leak the data?