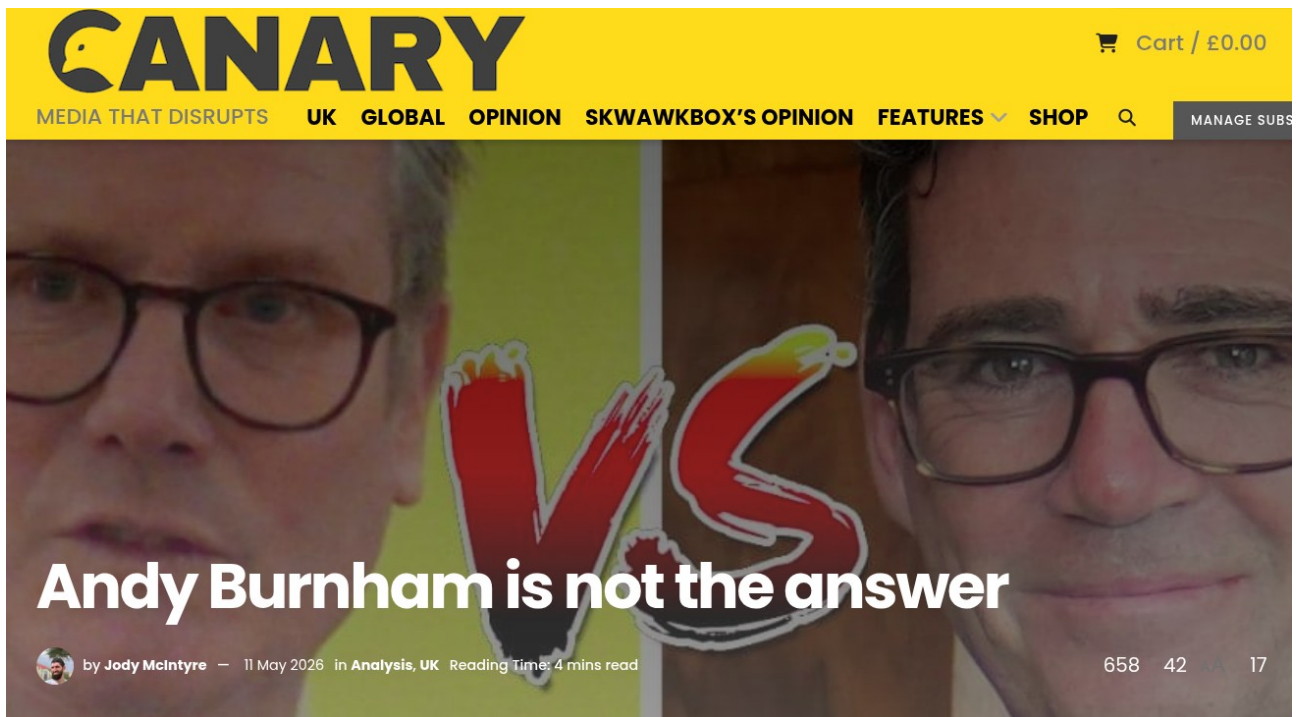




With Keir Starmer in meltdown mode, Andy Burnham is being presented as Labour's saviour. Last time he stood for leader, in 2015, Burnham promised that his first trip overseas would be to the Israeli settler-state. This would be his third attempt at securing the top job at Labour, but does Burnham really represent a change from the failings of Starmer, or simply more of the same?

Burnham's Friends of Israel

Whilst serving in the last Labour administration, Andy Burnham's principal adviser was Jennifer Gerber. In 2010, Gerber was appointed director of the lobby group Labour Friends of Israel, which she went on to lead for the next decade.

In 2016, then Shadow Home Secretary Andy Burnham was one of the Labour MPs who "flocked" to support Labour Friends of Israel under Gerber's leadership. He was joined by then Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry; Jess Phillips, now sitting on a wafer-thin majority in Birmingham Yardley; and Dan Jarvis, amongst others.

Gerber previously led Progress, a Labour Party pressure group reportedly founded by Epstein-associate Peter Mandelson. The group received millions from David Sainsbury, a major backer of the infamous Labour Together think tank, and were also funded by pharmaceutical company Pfizer.

In 2021, Progress merged with Policy Network, another Peter Mandelson operation, and changed their name to Progressive Britain. The group is currently led by Adam Langleben, a former national secretary of the Jewish Labour Movement.

When Jennifer Gerber stepped down from Labour Friends of Israel in 2020, she praised Keir Starmer for “[committing to] fully rooting out the ... Israel obsession in the party.” In his first meeting with LFI as party leader, Starmer pledged to travel to Israel with the group.

At the time, Keir Starmer thanked LFI for “the crucial role they play in the Labour Party”. Now, Andy Burnham, a parliamentary supporter of LFI who voted for Tony Blair’s invasion of Iraq, seeks to depose him.

Past leadership bids

Burnham has tried to become Labour leader twice before. In 2015, his leadership bid was supported by Dan Jarvis, another parliamentary supporter of Labour Friends of Israel. Jarvis has previously been funded by Martin Taylor, a major backer of Morgan McSweeney’s Labour Together, who also gave £95,000 to Keir Starmer’s 2020 leadership bid.

Andy Burnham’s 2015 leadership campaign received over £130,000 in private donations. One of his funders was Michael Sternberg, who has also financed Labour’s current Courts Minister, Sarah Sackman. Sackman, a key supporter of David Lammy’s proposals to restrict jury trials, previously worked as a judicial clerk at the Israeli Supreme Court.

Sternberg also gave £5000 to Labour’s current Middle East Secretary, Hamish Falconer. Falconer received another £5000 from Labour Together Limited, and £13,900 from Mike Craven, a former press officer to Tony Blair and current Labour Together board member.

Falconer also received £4600 from a group called “SME 4 Labour”. In the run up to the 2024 general election, with a view to helping Keir Starmer secure a parliamentary majority, SME 4 Labour held a fundraising dinner in London with Jeffrey Epstein’s “best pal” Peter Mandelson.

For the 2024 election, SME 4 Labour had identified Scotland as a “crucial” target. Labour’s parliamentary candidate (and now MP) for Rutherglen Michael Shanks received £4000 from Sternberg. Shanks was also one of several Scottish Labour MPs who received £10,000 from Labour Together to fund their electoral campaigns.

Another funder of Burnham’s 2015 leadership campaign was Howard Borrington. For 22 years, ending with his retirement in 2024, Borrington was Director of UK Government Affairs at arms firm MBDA, the self-declared “world leader in missiles and missile systems”. Before that, he spent almost 16 years at BAE Systems.

Burnham won’t mop up the bloodbath

In 2010, Burnham stood against Ed Miliband and lost. In 2015, Burnham promised that, if he won, he “would involve Jeremy [Corbyn] in my team from the outset.” As recently as February, he was publicly backing Keir Starmer. Burnham will say anything to get into power.

After the bloodbath of last week's council, Scottish, and Welsh elections, it is clear that Keir Starmer has lost any mandate to rule, but do not expect any stronger moral fibre from Andy Burnham.