

The Left at each others' throats. Disdain for the 'failed Tories' in Reform. But can resurgent Kemi take advantage?



By **LORD ASHCROFT**

FORMER TORY PARTY VICE CHAIRMAN

THAT went well, then. Labour's message to the voters of Gorton and Denton was that only they could stop Reform. The Greens, and the voters, proved them wrong.

One notable point about Thursday's result is that between them, the three Left-wing parties – the Greens, Labour and the Lib Dems – scored the same vote share as they did at the general election.

This will be of no comfort to Sir Keir Starmer, but it will encourage those who hope that voters who don't want to see Reform in office will find a way to keep them out.

My polling finds voters on the Left overwhelmingly saying they are prepared to vote tactically to stop the Right – in principle. But this relies on two big assumptions.

One is that people will always know which is the smart tactical choice in their constituency, with

‘Voters want change, a party that really excites them’

each party claiming that only they can stop the common enemy.

The second, much bigger, problem is that in many seats it relies on supporters of other parties being prepared to turn out and vote for an unpopular Labour government that they never liked.

By the next election, these people will have spent four or five years complaining about Labour's stance on Gaza, their (as they see it) pandering to the Right on migration, winter fuel cuts, student debt and the absence of any kind of progressive zeal.

These voters want change. The idea that they will vote for more of the same – rather than a party that excites them and has real momentum – grows ever more fanciful.

More likely, it seems to me, is that the parties of the Left will increasingly turn their fire upon each other. Far from uniting against the Right, the Greens – together with the SNP and Plaid

Cymru – will see themselves as the rebel alliance against Labour's Death Star, with Starmer in the role of a down-at-heel Darth Vader.

With local council, Scottish Parliament and Welsh Senedd elections in a few weeks, the idea that the smaller parties represent a wasted vote is out of the window.

Outside the Left-wing universe, voters complain about the broken promises not to raise taxes, to take the sleaze out of politics and put the grown-ups back in charge – not to mention winter fuel, the failure

to grip illegal migration, two-tier justice, the cost of living, burdens on business and the PM's apparent inability to stick to a decision.

Yet, a few weeks ago, Starmer came within an ace of losing his job for appointing Peter Mandelson as an ambassador. I found voters willing to give him the benefit of the doubt over this debacle but not on how he is running the country.

‘For me, it's not the decision that would make me think, “Oh God, you should go”,’ one woman told us. ‘There's lots of other things

he's done that make me think that, but that's not one of them.’

The situation amounts to another metaphor for the state of our politics: a preoccupation with process and personality over the things that affect people's daily lives.

Starmer survives for the time being. But now he's lost his chief of staff and other confidantes, those who understand the byzantine machinations of the Labour Party say he is at the mercy of the ‘soft Left’ (not to be confused, presumably, with the crunchy

Left, the salted caramel Left and the smooth hazelnut praline Left). The Green threat could also push the party in a more resolutely Leftward direction. If so, it might test to destruction the idea that it would be better to have a government that believed in unpalatable things than one that didn't know what it believed.

Reform will also be reflecting on the by-election. Doubling their vote share since the general election was impressive, though I suspect they will be disappointed.

Recent weeks have highlighted two challenges for the party: lack of governing experience and the perception that they are ‘a bit like the Conservatives, in a bad way’.

The unveiling of Nigel Farage's senior team illustrated the issue. Some were not sure the line-up of familiar faces from the Johnson-Truss-Sunak years was the change they were looking for. ‘It wasn't the

‘The Green threat could push Labour Leftward’

original plan, was it, to be a load of failed Tories?’ one observed.

But the exodus is also an ongoing headache for the Conservatives, signalling the defectors saw little prospect of imminent recovery. Though creeping slowly up, the numbers saying the Tories have changed since their electoral defenestration remain low.

Here there is a contrast with Kemi Badenoch herself, who continues to gain recognition with her feisty performances in the Commons and elsewhere. With her most dangerous internal opponent gone, she has begun to rally disheartened Tories and pique the interest of the broader public.

Voters think she has earned the right to a hearing. The question is what she is able to do with it.

● **LORD Ashcroft** is a businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. See [LordAshcroftPolls.com](https://www.lordashcroftpolls.com). X/ Facebook @LordAshcroft

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By **Gabriel Millard-Clothier**
POLITICAL REPORTER

Three-homes Rayner set to pick up thousands with speaking gig at estate agents' conference

ANGELA Rayner is set to earn a five-figure sum as the keynote speaker at an estate agents' conference – just months after she was forced to quit the Cabinet over her property dealings.

The former Deputy Prime Minister is booked to speak at the £200-a-head Propertymark One event in June.

Ms Rayner is still waiting for the result of an HMRC inquiry into the tax row that led to her resignation last year, over claims that she failed to pay the £40,000 stamp duty on her £800,000 flat in Hove, East Sussex.

She quit as Deputy Prime Minister and Housing Secretary last

September, although allies have since claimed that she will be cleared by HMRC for making an 'inadvertent error'.

Last night, Conservative Party chairman Kevin Hollinrake told The Mail on Sunday: 'Only in the world of champagne socialism could someone resign in disgrace as Housing Secretary over not paying their property taxes and then pop up weeks later earning

thousands for a star turn at a property conference.'

According to the advance publicity for Ms Rayner's speech, she will tell estate agents about 'navigating scrutiny, the challenges of leadership and decision-making in complex environments and building trust across divides'.

The conference, at the Excel Centre in east London – along with an 'after party' at £75 a head –

claims to be 'not just an event – it's an experience'.

A Labour source joked that if Ms Rayner attends the after-party, she can show how to make her Venom cocktail, which includes a bottle of vodka, a bottle of Southern Comfort, ten bottles of blue WKD and a litre of orange juice.

Ms Rayner did not respond to a request for comment.

Burnham 'to cut a deal with Polanski' as mayor tops poll to replace PM

By **Glen Owen, Dan Hodges** and **Brendan Carlin**

ANDY Burnham would forge an alliance with the Green Party and rip up the first-past-the-post electoral system if he succeeds Sir Keir Starmer as Prime Minister, supporters of the Manchester mayor have said.

Labour's devastating defeat in Thursday's Gorton and Denton by-election has left his leadership rivals circling ominously, with Mr Burnham the favourite among both Labour voters and the wider electorate – even though he is not an MP.

Sir Keir's refusal to allow Mr Burnham to stand as his candidate in the by-election is blamed by many of his MPs for the defeat.

But Mr Burnham's supporters are confident that morale has

'Mayor may take nuclear option and resign'

fallen so far in the party since he was blocked that he would be allowed to stand the next time a suitable seat becomes available.

The claims come as polling data shared exclusively with The Mail on Sunday shows 44 per cent of voters think the Prime Minister should resign after losing the by-election, with just 34 per cent saying that he should stay.

The research, by polling expert and former Conservative deputy chairman Lord Ashcroft, rates Mr Burnham as the 'best Prime Minister' among the Labour leadership contenders, on 27 per cent, ahead of Ed Miliband on 8 per cent, and Angela Rayner and Wes Streeting both on 6 per cent.

It also indicates that a coalition between Labour, the Liberal Democrats and Zack Polanski's Greens

SIR KEIR ON THE ROPES AFTER BY-ELECTION

SHOULD STARMER RESIGN AS PM AFTER LOSING BY-ELECTION?

Yes	44%
No	34%

SHOULD STARMER RESIGN AFTER EXPECTED LOSSES IN MAY'S COUNCIL ELECTIONS?

Yes	51%
No	28%

WHO WOULD MAKE THE BEST PRIME MINISTER?

Andy Burnham	27%
Ed Miliband	8%
Angela Rayner	6%
Wes Streeting	6%



BEST PRIME MINISTER – LABOUR VOTERS

Andy Burnham	38%
Angela Rayner	13%
Ed Miliband	10%
Wes Streeting	6%

WHO WILL BE PRIME MINISTER AFTER THE NEXT ELECTION?

Nigel Farage	29%
Keir Starmer	10%
Kemi Badenoch	7%

STATE OF THE PARTIES

Reform UK	22%
Conservative	20%
Green	19%
Labour	17%
Lib Dems	11%

COALITION VOTING INTENTIONS

Lab/Lib/Green	43%
Tory/Reform	33%



KEYNOTE SPEAKER: Angela Rayner will address estate agents

would beat a Tory/Reform UK coalition by 43 per cent to 33 per cent.

It is understood that Mr Burnham is trying to persuade Marie Rimmer, the veteran Labour MP for St Helens South and Whiston, to stand aside to let him return to the Commons.

One supportive MP said: 'It is not a done deal yet, but we are hopeful. The implied offer is she would be able to end her career in the Lords if she does the decent thing.'

But if Labour's ruling National Executive Committee did try to block Mr Burnham again – using the same pretext that the party does not want to have to fight a by-election for the Manchester mayorality, which could be won by Reform – he is said to be consider-

ing the 'nuclear option' of resigning as mayor anyway.

Mr Burnham is on record as saying that replacing the UK's traditional first-past-the-post electoral system with proportional representation (PR) could 'build a more collaborative, long-culture within Westminster'.

It is also a long-cherished aim of the Green Party which, despite its success in last week's by-election, would struggle to win power in the existing system. Last night, one

Labour MP and Burnham supporter said 'a deal on PR' could be a key part of the new alliance. He also said Mr Burnham was 'ideally placed' to clinch such a deal with the Greens.

However, the idea would be fiercely opposed by many Labour MPs who fear it would mean their party would never again win a clear Commons majority.

Separately, there are claims that former Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner has privately told

Mr Burnham that she would not put herself forward for the leadership role if he was a candidate.

However, she is said to be ready to do so to stop Health Secretary Wes Streeting getting the job if a contest began before Mr Burnham could return to the Commons.

Most Labour MPs believe that Sir Keir will not face a leadership challenge until after the May local elections.

Last night, Mr Burnham said the claims about him were 'made up'.

But a Green Party spokesman welcomed his support for PR, adding: 'It is the best thing for representative democracy, even if Labour are coming to it now to protect themselves against annihilation in the 2029 General Election.'

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