

# So whose side will Burnham be on? Working families – or those ‘shirkers who claim every benefit they can’

**A**RE YOU excited about our soon-to-be prime minister? The answer, I suspect, depends on whether you are a member of the Labour Party.

Among his fellow MPs, the elation at Andy Burnham's return to Westminster was plain to see. After a grim couple of years, it would be churlish to begrudge them a moment of cheer, especially since it might not last long.

To the Left, the Starmer-Burnham handover feels like a great reset – a circuit breaker, a new direction and a chance to do things differently, as the King of the North himself put it last week. Everyone else will believe the change when they see it.

That's not to say they don't see potential. In my latest survey, Burnham has an eight-point lead over Kemi Badenoch in the best

**‘Many voters know little or nothing about him’**

PM stakes, where last month Starmer trailed by a point.

Burnham also does better than Starmer when Nigel Farage is included in the question. The new Makerfield MP commands the same favourability score as Badenoch, but with fewer negatives (but also, more saying they feel neutral towards him – for now, at least). He has supplanted Farage in voters' predictions as the most likely PM after the next election.

Burnham is widely regarded as being more Left-wing than Keir Starmer, gladdening the hearts of those who yearn for what they call a ‘proper’ Labour government.

Polls published since Starmer's resignation have shown a small boost to Labour's standing, largely at the expense of other parties on the Left. I found potential Green voters twice as likely to have a positive view of Burnham as they

were of the incumbent (easy to forget, but he's still there). The changes are slight and may prove temporary, but with five or even six parties in the race, small shifts in support can have an outsize electoral impact.

Those familiar with Burnham believe he will do the job differently, be more decisive and better at explaining what he's up to. Some also expect a more honest approach. ‘I can see him not lying to me,’ said a previous Labour voter in Nottinghamshire. ‘Just laying it on the table and saying, “Look, this is what it is.” I wouldn't see that from Starmer.’

But many more know little or nothing about him. ‘I thought, “Who is this person?”’ said a woman reflecting on the news of

Burnham's likely accession. Many feel detached from the spectacle of a group of politicians yet again arranging a new leader for the country without its say-so.

Nor do they have any real idea what to expect. Some who had picked up on Burnham's plans for a new No10 North detected what one described as ‘a little bit of Trump energy’ in his apparent willingness to shake things up. But it remains to be seen how his scheme to rewire the state will improve people's lives.

If they don't, successive leaders will look, in the words of a voter in Plymouth (if refined MoS readers will forgive me), ‘like two cheeks of the same a\*\*\*’.

Some on the Left hail Burnham's gifts as a communicator. They

want a better articulation of the case for even more spending and borrowing. Others would rather see a leader who offers a credible way out of the fiscal doom loop of higher taxes and economic stagnation and is prepared to make tough decisions to make it possible.

As far as many are concerned, Starmer didn't fail just because he wasn't good at being prime minister. His government, they say, was going in the wrong direction – on tax, debt, policing, North Sea oil, net zero or (especially) welfare.

‘He was looking after the wrong people,’ another woman said of Starmer. ‘We work full-time, we've got two kids. Starmer doesn't care about us. He just wants to take from us and give to Sue down the road who's literally never worked

and claims every benefit going.’ Whose side will Burnham be on? The working family, or Sue down the road?

This is Burnham's first conundrum. He needs to win back the voters who despair at all this, but will have to get any reforms past his new friends in Parliament – the ones who blocked welfare reform, are uncomfortable with Shabana Mahmood's plans to tighten the asylum system and created the situation that prompted Work and Pensions Secretary Pat McFadden to complain: ‘Every meeting I have is: who can we tax in order to pay benefits to others?’

Burnham's second conundrum is how far to depart from the 2024 Labour manifesto. If change is on the way, how much of it has the country's consent? I found most voters want an election within a year, if not immediately, though few expect to get one. But if he

**‘How much change has the consent of the country?’**

enjoys any kind of honeymoon, he might wonder if he is looking at his one chance of winning another term, especially if Reform struggle to regain momentum.

If the Left bloc is consolidating, the Right looks to be fragmenting further. I found more than one in ten voters tempted by Rupert Lowe's Restore Britain. At the same time, the temptation for Farage to try to keep them on board by taking Reform further to the Right could open up space for Badenoch and the Conservatives.

Meanwhile, the new PM's success will not depend on whether the Labour Party looks different. It will depend, as always, on the voters and their quality of life.

● *Lord Ashcroft is a businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. His research is at [LordAshcroftPolls.com](http://LordAshcroftPolls.com). X/Facebook @LordAshcroft*



By **LORD ASHCROFT**

PHILANTHROPIST AND AUTHOR

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'...Then after our prayers for England's team and right through to Sam Miss Frobisher will be serving her home made parsnip wine in the vestry'

## Delivery firm sues BBC for £1.2m over documentary

THE BBC is being sued for £1.2million by delivery firm Evri over a Panorama documentary it claims caused it "serious financial loss", according to High Court documents.

Evri is suing the corporation for libel over a 15-minute segment of a 29-minute documentary titled Evri: Where's My Parcel?, which aired on December 15 last year.

In court documents seen by the Press Association setting out the company's claim, barristers for Evri said that the segment wrongly suggests it "deployed exploitative business practices" and misled Parliament by falsely stating it did not underpay its couriers.

Evri denies the claims in the segment, with its lawyers stating that it caused the loss of prospective contracts worth around £1.1 million as well as other sums, leading it to seek "special damages" of around £1.2 million.

The company is also seeking

# 59% want Burnham to call a snap election: poll

By **Glen Owen**

POLITICAL EDITOR

ANDY Burnham should call a general election after becoming prime minister to give him a mandate to govern, exclusive polling has found.

A clear majority of voters – 59 per cent – want Mr Burnham to go to the country within a year of entering No10 rather than wait until the end of the five-year term won by Sir Keir Starmer in 2024. Just 26 per cent want him to hang on until 2029.

The poll, conducted by former Conservative deputy chairman Lord Ashcroft and shared with The Mail on Sunday, comes as speculation swirls around Westminster that Mr Burnham will call a snap election to take advantage of his 'honeymoon' period after taking over from Sir Keir on July 20.

If he won, it would allow him to secure a mandate for the Leftist policies he hopes to introduce. A quick election would also take advantage of an apparent faltering in support for Nigel Farage's Reform UK.

His dilemma mirrors that faced by Gordon Brown when he took

### IS ANDY BURNHAM MORE LEFT WING THAN KEIR STARMER?

Yes	41%
No	21%

### SHOULD MR BURNHAM CALL A GENERAL ELECTION WITHIN THE NEXT YEAR?

Yes	59%
No	26%

### IS BURNHAM BOUND BY STARMER'S PROMISE NOT TO RAISE INCOME TAX, NATIONAL INSURANCE OR VAT?

Yes	54%
No	21%

### RACE TO NO10: VOTERS HAVE THEIR SAY

#### BEST PM

Burnham	38%
Badenoch	20%
Farage	17%

#### WHO IS MOST LIKELY TO BE PM AFTER THE NEXT ELECTION?

Burnham	33%
Farage	20%
Badenoch	6%



cent and Tory leader Kemi Badenoch on 6 per cent.

Mr Burnham's post-Makerfield honeymoon helps him to the top of the 'best PM' ratings, on 38 per cent, with Ms Badenoch on 20 per cent and Mr Farage on 17 per cent.

It is clear that voters expect high taxes from a Burnham government, with 41 per cent believing

**BURNHAM'S FIRST CONUNDRUM**  
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he is more Left wing than Sir Keir, and just 21 per cent disagreeing.

Writing in today's MoS, Lord Ashcroft says: 'If change is on the way, how much of it has the country's consent? I found most voters want an election within a year, if not immediately, though few expect to get one.'

'But if he enjoys any kind of honeymoon, he might wonder if he is looking at his one chance of winning another term, especially if Reform struggle to regain momentum.'

over from Tony Blair in 2007 – changing his mind about an election at the last moment, leading to 'Bottler Brown' headlines and questions over the legitimacy of his administration.

The point is emphasised in the

survey when voters are asked whether Mr Burnham should be bound by Sir Keir's manifesto promise not to raise income tax, National Insurance or VAT: 54 per cent say yes, while just 21 per cent of those polled think that

he should be allowed to do what he likes.

The poll found that Mr Burnham is thought to be the most likely party leader to be prime minister after the next election, on 33 per cent, with Mr Farage on 20 per