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Under Starmer or Burnham, the future of UK politics looks bleak

Burnham may bring fresh momentum, but the same party splits and elite agenda will grind him down, too

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By **Graham Hryce**, an Australian journalist and former media lawyer, whose work has been published in *The Australian*, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Age*, the *Sunday Mail*, the *Spectator* and *Quadrant*.



Earlier this week Andy Burnham, the popular former mayor of Manchester, forced Prime Minister Keir Starmer to resign as leader of the Labour Party in a meticulously planned and well executed bloodless political coup.

As a result, Burnham is now poised to become, in a few weeks, Britain's seventh prime minister in less than a decade.

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Andy Burnham, Labour MP for Makerfield, the Houses of Parliament on June 22, 2026 in London, England © Dan Kitwood / Getty Images

Burnham has been stalking Starmer for months. In January he sought endorsement as Labour's candidate in the Gorton and Denton by-election – winning a seat in the Commons being a necessary prerequisite to challenging Starmer's leadership. Starmer, however, personally intervened to ensure that Burnham did not become the Labour candidate – and Labour subsequently lost the formerly safe Labour seat to the Greens.

Starmer's popularity had been plummeting for more than a year – becoming the most unpopular prime minister ever – and the Mandelson scandal, together with Labour's disastrous results in the May local and regional elections, made it clear that Labour was doomed to electoral oblivion under Starmer's leadership.

Burnham and his supporters then engineered another by-election in Makerfield, that Burnham won by a colossal 20-percent margin last week – defeating Reform comprehensively in a northern white working-class seat that, in the ordinary course of events, it should have won easily.

The size of Burnham's victory in Makerfield made it inevitable that Starmer would resign, and that Burnham would be anointed prime minister without the need for a leadership contest. So it transpired this week – with Starmer's few remaining supporters in cabinet and parliament finally deserting him over the weekend.

On Monday, standing at a lectern outside 10 Downing Street just like his six inept and failed predecessors, Starmer delivered a brief, emotional, and self-delusional speech, resigning as Labour leader.

Starmer listed his alleged achievements – reforming the Labour Party and winning the 2024 election; making the economy stronger; reducing illegal boat crossings; supporting Ukraine; reducing NHS waiting lists; and *“restoring Britain's reputation internationally.”*

Notwithstanding these ‘successes’, the Labour Party had asked the question whether he was



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“best placed to lead us into the next general election” and had answered it in the negative.

Starmer concluded by saying that he accepted the party’s decision *“with good grace”* and said, as all deposed and failed leaders inevitably do, that he now looked forward to being *“the best husband”* and *“the best dad”* he can.

Starmer will remain prime minister until the Labour Party elects a new leader on 9 July. Immediately after Starmer’s resignation speech, Wes Streeting announced that he would not be a candidate for the leadership, and that he was backing Burnham to become prime minister – eliminating the need for a contest.

Burnham’s swift and bloodless ascent to the prime ministership came about as a result of Starmer’s terminal unpopularity, and because Burnham was able to infuse the moribund Labour Party with a measure of hope and optimism – something that the maladroit and uncharismatic Starmer had always been incapable of doing.

Two crucial questions now arise as Burnham is preparing to move into 10 Downing Street.

Will the new leader be able to come up with a policy program acceptable to the Labour Party, and is he capable of reviving the party’s ailing electoral prospects and reversing the inertia and leadership churn that has characterized British politics for the past decade?



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may all agree that Starmer had to go – but they agree on little else. And Burnham’s inconsistent and contradictory stances these issues in the past suggest that he lacks the necessary authority

Despite the epidemic of Panglossian optimism that has infected the Labour Party since Burnham’s Makerfield victory, in my view, both of these questions must be answered firmly in the negative.

When Burnham becomes prime minister he will become leader of a party that is deeply divided over key policy issues – including net zero, immigration, transgender rights, defense spending and welfare payments. It was divisions within Labour on these issues that crippled the Starmer government from day one, and they have not gone away. Labour MPs



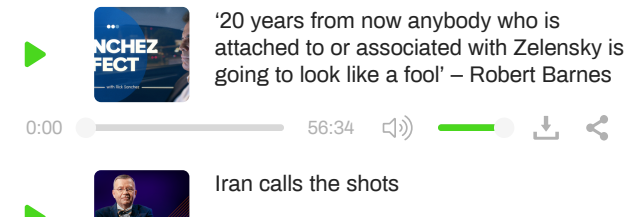
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to impose a coherent policy direction on the party. Deep-seated divisions within Labour have already emerged this week, as candidates for cabinet positions in the Burnham government have begun pressing their claims.

Burnham's victory over Starmer has been welcomed by the left wing of the Labour Party, and Angela Rayner, John McDonnell, and Jeremy Corbyn have enthusiastically endorsed the prime minister in waiting. So, too, has Ed Miliband, the secretary of state for energy security and net zero, who it is rumored has been promised the job of chancellor of the exchequer as a reward for having duplicitously undermined Starmer's leadership.

Miliband, however, is committed to net zero, and right-wing Labour figures – one of whom recently described him as a *"net zero lunatic"* – who believe, as does Tony Blair, that Labour must ditch its commitment to net zero if it is to have any hope of winning the next election, are strongly opposed to Miliband being made chancellor.

Such policy disputes will, of course, only intensify once Burnham becomes prime minister, appoints his cabinet, and cannot escape making important policy decisions.

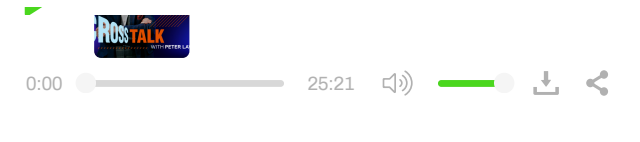
Burnham has been a political chameleon throughout his lengthy and checkered political career, and policy development has never really interested him. In fact – given his extensive history of policy backflips – it is almost impossible to discern what Burnham's view really is on any important policy issue.

During his Makerfield campaign Burnham avoided policy issues, and his victory speech consisted of a series of vague aspirational clichés. These political platitudes may temporarily inspire hope and optimism in an ailing and desperate party – that has squandered its large majority in the Commons in just two years – but they do not, by any stretch of the political imagination, constitute a viable policy program.

And if Burnham becomes a captive of Labour's left wing – as seems likely – it will be impossible for him to formulate such a program, let alone impose it on a party that remains riddled with intractable



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ideological divisions.

Assuming, for the purposes of argument, that Burnham does manage to formulate a policy program that the party accepts. Is there any realistic prospect that Burnham may be able to implement it, solve the acute economic and social problems that have plagued Britain for decades, and reverse the chronic instability and leadership churn that have characterized UK politics for the past ten years?

The answer to that question must also be no – and not just because of Burnham's obvious limitations as a politician, and the divisions within the Labour Party – but because the basic framework of contemporary British politics makes radical political change impossible.

Globalization has, over the past 20 years, fundamentally restructured the basic framework of British politics so as to render it immune to change whilst, at the same time, making politics itself inherently and chronically unstable. Leadership churn is the primary manifestation of this instability.

The fact is that since New Labour's election win in 1997, power in Britain has been transferred to the global elites and the institutions that they control, including the judiciary, the public service, and the raft of quangos that have proliferated over the past thirty years. In reality contemporary prime ministers have very little power to effect change.

The UK Labour Party was long ago captured by the global economic elites that rule Britain and remains committed to elite policies like net zero, mass immigration, and various woke ideologies.



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Labour is, therefore, incapable of effectively solving the cost-of-living crisis, curbing mass immigration, or dealing with any of the other problems produced by globalization – because to do so would entail abandoning elite policies, and, more importantly, radically redistributing wealth away from the elites towards those groups that have been left behind by globalization.

No political party in Britain today, least of all Labour, is even willing to contemplate such an economic

program, let alone implement it.

What then does the future hold for Andy Burnham and UK politics generally?

Burnham's popularity will probably commence to wane after he takes office as, just like his predecessors, it becomes clear that he is unable to solve the very same problems that they were unable to solve. In 12 months' time, Burnham may well find himself in a similar position to Starmer earlier this year – deeply unpopular with the electorate, seeking to hold together a ramshackle and divided government, and trying to ward off yet another leadership coup.

In his victory speech at Makerfield Burnham said that he was *"Labour's last chance,"* and that is undoubtedly the case. It follows that, when Burnham proves to be a failure as prime minister, voters will desert Labour in droves and it will become yet another party with little or no prospect of winning government.

The result in Makerfield was a disaster for Reform, and may herald the end of any realistic hope that the party has of winning government. Reform has shown itself incapable of making the transition from being a right-wing fringe party to a party capable of governing – although it will remain a significant force in British politics.

The extreme right-wing Restore Party received 7% of the vote in Makerfield and seems destined to remain a disruptive fringe party.

Makerfield was a complete disaster for the Conservatives – they received only 997 votes and lost their deposit. There is nothing to suggest that the party's downward slide towards political irrelevancy will not continue apace.

The Greens and the Liberal Democrats will continue to win seats in the urban southeast but will remain fringe parties.

None of this augurs well for UK politics in the future – and whatever Burnham's and Labour's collective fate may be, it is absolutely clear that British politics can only become even more unstable in the future than it has been for the past decade.

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OPINION

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L

Linguist 6/24/2026 at 7:36 AM

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The UK's future IS bleak!!

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T

Trevor Morgan 6/24/2026 at 6:41 AM

0

Reinstate Emily Thornberry from her deposed role as Shadow Foreign Secretary, position held prior to the last election.....gain some credibility Andy Burnham.

[Reply](#)

C

Christian van Neuves 6/24/2026 at 6:17 AM

1

Britain would not be better under the right sector either!!!

[Reply](#)

D

David Stael 6/24/2026 at 6:09 AM

2

uk is very funny, stupid replaces stupid and they expect everything to change. You cannot cure stupid and the uk is very stupid.

[Reply](#)

i

ioani uys 6/24/2026 at 5:52 AM

1

No 2 meme, who will be no 3? Remember, he/she must be good on the stage. Try a few classes with Zelensky... those where the money flows up to your nose...

[Reply](#)

b **b trash** 6/24/2026 at 2:29 AM

2

In name of democracy, direction remains the same. Colony of usa

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j **jay bill** 6/24/2026 at 2:14 AM

1

The CHRISTIAN CULTURE that made England GREAT IS Finished, it's gone & buried NOW England reap's the result of a Nation full of evil & SIN..... England is NOW ROME 2.0 FALLING, & DECLINING RAPIDLY & «peacefully..».. invaded by the BARBARIAN Muslim HOARD'S, & other Third world economic, CULTURAL & SOCIAL destroyer's, please enjoy the SINFUL HELL you are now living in.....

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j **jay bill** 6/24/2026 at 2:08 AM

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The CHRISTIAN CULTURE that made England GREAT it gone & buried NOW England reap's the result of a Nation full of evil & SIN.....

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j **jay bill** 6/24/2026 at 2:04 AM

0

Had Boris Johnson been active in negotiating trade agreements etc today maybe different but he did nothing [Well HE Told joooo SIN-LENSKY TO KEEP KILLING UKRAINIAN'S] so its been disaster after disaster for the UK due to total incompetence.

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s **steven Johnson** 6/24/2026 at 1:49 AM

0

They can bring back Benjamin Disraeli for all that it matters but nothing will change. The UK is on a fast slide to third world status and there is no stopping it. Nigel Farage cant do anything about this decline because its too late. Had Boris Johnson been active in negotiating trade agreements etc today maybe different but he did nothing so its been disaster after disaster for the UK due to total incompetence.

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T **Trevor Morgan** 6/24/2026 at 1:04 AM

0

Have an Election, and get Nigel Farage to ruin (misspelt run) the country.

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T **Tom Max** 6/23/2026 at 9:50 PM

1

I do not listen what idiots have to say but it is hard to avoid to listen something when you turn TV on. Starmer was almost crying during his resignation speech, he mentioned about his children who bring him joy, he loves them and he is proud of them. But he did not mention children he helped to kill in Russia, their mothers, fathers.

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