

Starmer, Burnham, the Hapless Horserace

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This podcast was recorded on Friday for the Echo Chamber podcast, now run by Tony Groves, in Dublin. We were discussing UK themes on this occasion, all of which remain wholly relevant now.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=40fZ4gLwpRI?si=0ZVWUeZB814o9YTR>

There is no transcript. This is an AI-generated summary of the discussion:

The discussion begins with Labour's disastrous local election results and the growing sense that Britain's two-party political system is breaking down. Labour and the Conservatives both suffered severe losses, whilst Reform advanced strongly and the Greens also made significant gains. The immediate Westminster obsession is therefore the "horse race" over who might replace Keir Starmer, with Andy Burnham's possible return to Parliament dominating speculation.

The argument, however, is that this fixation on personalities misses the real issue. Britain does not simply have a leadership problem; it has a systemic economic and political failure rooted in neoliberalism. Swapping Starmer for another managerial centrist without changing the underlying economic model will solve nothing.

Andy Burnham is presented not as a transformative figure, but as a continuity candidate tied to the same broad neoliberal framework that has dominated Labour politics for decades. His record, from support for Iraq to NHS privatisation policies, offers little evidence of the economic imagination now required. Even if he were to become Labour leader, he would inherit a rapidly worsening economic crisis shaped by geopolitical instability, supply chain breakdowns, energy shocks and the fragility created by "just-in-time" neoliberal economics.

A recurring theme throughout is that neoliberalism has hollowed out not only public services and living standards, but also industrial resilience, democratic legitimacy and even military capability. The obsession with efficiency, outsourcing and financial metrics has produced societies that appear wealthy on paper whilst failing to deliver housing, security or economic stability in practice.

The alternative proposed is a new economic “recipe”. That includes taxing wealth more effectively, reforming capital gains tax and national insurance, bringing the Bank of England back under democratic control, reducing the power of bond markets and the City of London, and expanding direct public savings systems through institutions such as National Savings and Investments. The aim is not austerity, but creating the financial capacity for a Green New Deal and long-term public investment.

The wider political conclusion is that the old neoliberal consensus is collapsing across the UK and Ireland alike. The rise of independence movements in Scotland, Wales and Ireland reflects growing dissatisfaction with Westminster politics and with an economic system that increasingly serves wealth rather than people. What is required now is not simply a new leader, but a fundamentally different political and economic vision.