

What will Burnham do?

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Andy Burnham might arrive in Downing Street on Monday promising a fresh start, but what will his government actually do? A change of leader means little unless it produces a change in policy.

In this video, I set out the questions that should define a Burnham premiership.

For example, will he abandon restrictive fiscal rules, embrace modern monetary theory, tax wealth more fairly and pursue full employment? And will he restore democratic control over interest rates and put public wellbeing ahead of growth for growth's sake?

The questions extend far beyond economics, though. Britain needs council housing, stronger public services, a Green New Deal, investment in the National Grid and decisive action on failing utilities. It also needs properly funded healthcare, education, local government and social security.

Burnham would also have to confront difficult choices about migration, civil liberties, electoral reform, political donations, defence, Palestine and Britain's relationship with the United States.

A new prime minister should not be judged by presentation, personality or promises. He should be judged by the decisions he makes and the interests he chooses to serve.

So, what will he do? By his actions, we will know the man.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09y6LBv4JN0?si=c3gC9es5uDOU1FBY>

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=2gg6p-1b10c63-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&font=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=auto&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

There is no Debate Ammunition as such for this video, but the support materials I used to create it are available here.

This is the transcript:

We will have a new, bright, shiny, and smiley prime minister from Manchester on Monday. Andy Burnham has the backing of enough Labour MPs to guarantee that is the case. But what will he do? In truth, we have no more idea about his agenda than we did about Keir Starmer's, and that does not augur well.

So, here are some of the decisions he will need to make, and will do so by default if he does not address them. By his actions will we know the man.

Let's start with economic philosophy. He has to define this from the beginning because it's key to his premiership.

Is he going to understand and use MMT (modern monetary theory) thinking, or not?

Is he going to use fiscal rules, or not?

Is he going to make growth his goal, or not?

Is he going to put well-being and flourishing at the epicentre of his agenda instead, or not?

Is he going to tax wealth more, or not?

Is he going to have a policy of full employment, or not?

Is he going to leave the Bank of England independent, where it is causing harm, or not?

Is he going to take control of interest rates back into the Treasury, or not?

Is he going to have a genuinely integrated economic policy as a consequence, or not?

But what other issues should he be looking at? There's housing.

Is he going to build council houses, or not?

Is he going to build those houses where people are and not where the government wants them? As, for example, it is doing between Oxford and Cambridge at present, but that's not where most people are living.

Is he going to give councils the power to borrow to build, or not?

And is he going to end the right to buy, or not?

And let's look at energy and environment.

Is Andy Burnham going to do a Green New Deal? Rachel Reeves promised one way back in 2022 or 2023, but it hasn't happened. So is he going to do it, or not?

Is he going to build flood defences, or not?

And is he going to do nuclear power or not? Because that is contrary to the requirements of society, because it creates a threat, and not a long-term, stable energy supply.

In the same way, is he going to allow gas and oil to continue in the North Sea, or not? We know we cannot burn these, but that's not the question that most politicians seem to be concerned about.

Is he, in contrast, going to make every building a power station in this country? Adding solar panels, making sure it is insulated, using heat pumps, making them energy efficient. Is he going to do that, or not?

And when it comes to infrastructure, is he going to finish HS2 or expand it, or not?

And is he going to allow Heathrow to expand, or not?

Might he instead rebuild Manchester Oxford Road Station, which is one of the major bottlenecks on our rail system, or not?

And is he going to do something much closer to where I live, which is to rebuild Ely North Junction on our rail network, because that is so much of a bottleneck for rail traffic in East Anglia?

Is he, in the same way, going to rebuild much of the rest of the rail network, which is the best way we have of transforming our transport infrastructure? Is he, or is he not?

And when it comes to our utilities, is he going to take control of water, or not?

And is he going to control the way in which electricity is priced so that it favours consumers in the future, and not suppliers as it does now? Is he, in other words, going to stop the profit gouging at our expense, which currently characterises the way in

which we pay for our fuel, or is he not?

And is he going to invest heavily in the National Grid because that, at the moment, is the bottleneck that is preventing us greening our economy, or is he not going to do so?

And is he going to improve regulation of all our utilities in ways that make it clear that when they fail nationalisation should be mandatory because standards are not being met? Is that what he's going to do, or not?

Let's also talk about health, because health is critical and one of the biggest areas of spending for which he will be responsible.

Is he going to eliminate the cause of so much ill health in the UK by regulating ultra-processed food and excessive prescribing of drugs, many of which themselves lead to hospitalisation, or is he not?

And is he going to invest in support for those alienated by neoliberalism and deemed mentally unwell as a result, or not?

And to deal with an issue of which we've all become very aware of late, is he going to invest in midwives to let lives start well in the UK, or not? Because there is a massive problem in our maternity units at present.

And is he going to make hospice care an NHS provision to which we would then have a right, or not? Because this is critical in any debate on end-of-life care.

Let's talk about education. Is he going to permit education that meets the needs of children to find out who they are, or not?

Is he, in other words, going to be flexible about the national curriculum, or not?

And is he going to end the role of education as a supplier of preformed inputs for business use, or not, when the purpose of education is something very different indeed?

Is he going to end student loans and potentially cancel student debt, which is now such a drag on our economy, or not?

And is he going to free universities from the funding tyranny they now face, which threatens the existence of many of them, and which might have devastating consequences for the towns and cities that host them, or not?

In our communities, is he going to invest in those communities so that young people have places to go, things to do, and in alcohol-free environments, or not? Because that's critical to their development.

Is he going to support local government and enhance local decision-making? He says so, but how? Or is he going to duck the issue?

And is he going to reform council tax to deliver local tax justice, or not?

Is he going to control the spread of second homes, requiring planning permission for use as such, or even as holiday homes, and to charge for this right? This is critical to many of our rural communities, particularly on the coast and in national parks, but is he going to do it, or not?

And when it comes to justice, is he going to invest in rapid criminal justice, which we have not seen for years, or not?

And when it comes to social security, is he going to reverse many of the penal systems that we have so that those who have to rely upon a social safety net are not stigmatised for doing so, or not?

Then let's talk about migration. We need to reform migration policy. Is he going to do so, or not?

And is he going to confirm the rights of refugees in this country as required by international law, which we originally promoted, or not?

And let's talk about democracy. Is Andy Burnham going to do proportional representation, or not? Are we going to have a fair voting system, therefore, or not?

Is he going to end all political donations over £5,000, or not?

Are we going to have clean politics, therefore, or not?

Is he going to end laws that discourage voting, such as those requiring proof of identity, or not?

And is he going to allow free votes on independence in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland every decade, or not? Because that's what people there want, but is he going to ignore them?

So let's talk about civil liberties and our media.

Is he going to change the laws governing the media so it is not dominated by a particular worldview, as it is now, or not?

Is he going to give the BBC freedom without continual government interference by negotiating a perpetual license arrangement?

And is he going to end oppressive laws on the right to protest, or not?

And at the same time, is he going to end the use of anti-terrorism laws to control those who oppose government policy, or not? Because that is what is happening now.

And then let's turn to foreign policy, one of the biggest issues on any Prime Minister's agenda.

Is he going to want to take a proper defence review of the sort that I've discussed on this channel before, that looks at what we are defending, why, and how we can do that with what, or not?

Is he going to carry on, in other words, with a figure which is a percentage of GDP without any idea why we're spending it, or are we actually going to understand what defence is all about?

Is he going to stand up to Israel, or not?

Is he going to support those Palestinians who have suffered for so long, or not?

And is he going to stand up to the USA, or not? Because that might be one of the biggest and most defining questions that he has to answer of all.

These questions are critical. Every single one of them should be on Andy Burnham's agenda. He is going to be the Prime Minister after all. He has to tackle the big issues. He has to set the tone for government, and that's why I've spread these questions right across the government's agenda.

They have to be done right. He has to know the answers to these questions. He has to be able to talk about them. He has to deliver what is necessary, right from the core of economic policy, which can either liberate him to deliver what people in this country want or constrain him by using fiscal rules that deny the possibility of change, through to that last point of how are we going to deal with Donald Trump and the mess he will leave behind one day?

Everything in between is important too. What is his government going to be about? That's the question we don't know the answer to. We need Andy Burnham to step up to the mark and tell us what is he going to do?

That's what I think. What do you think? There's a poll down below. Let us have your comments. Let us know if you like this video. Please do share it. And if you'd like to make a donation to this channel's work, we'd be very grateful. There's a link down below.

Poll

[poll id="456"]