Funding the Future

Burnham v Badenoch: a third rate pairing with not a clu...

Published: November 13, 2026, 7:30 am

Sometimes, I do not get the chance to watch everything that I would want, but one of the roles that Jacqueline has taken on within the Funding the Future operation is to draw to my attention things that she thinks are important, but which I have missed.

It was her suggestion that I should watch the exchange between Andy Burnham and Kemi Badenoch at Prime Minister's Questions this week, because she thought it so telling. I have to agree with her.

Andy Burnham’s missing ten-year plan was on the table. I now gather by inference, rather than as a consequence of direct answers, that something on this may come out next month, but what was staggering about Burnham’s performance, most especially in comparison to that of Kemi Badenoch, was how poor he was at the Despatch Box.

It was only a couple of months ago that he made his first appearance there again, after a long break. At first, he appeared in command, but all that confidence has now gone. To put it bluntly, Kemi Badenoch is walking rings around him.

To my amazement, she is now very confident at PMQs. She’s direct, witty, and more than able to rise to the occasion, even if I very rarely agree with anything that she says.

In contrast, Burnham looks out of his depth, lost as to what to say, and his jokes come rarely, or are predictable and poorly delivered. To be frank, he simply does not look up to the job.

Worse, he spends most of his time asking Kemi Badenoch what she would do. He seems to have forgotten that this is Prime Minister’s Questions, not questions to the Leader of the Opposition about what she would do if she had his job so he can then borrow her ideas. But that is what it now seems to be.

I am left with the inevitable conclusion that Burnham got the job he desperately wanted but has no clue how to do it. He quite literally seems to be asking for advice from somebody who has no more experience than he does of leading, governing, or understanding what this country is, so desperate is he.

As for that ten-year plan, I know where I am going with mine. The next two videos in the series are now recorded, and a fourth is written, but it seems he has almost no clue as to what he is doing. Even now, there are no hints being offered, apart from the fact that he will commit to a national care service, which would appear to be little more than a lapel badge, and not something of substance.

It was only just over two months ago that I thought of the concept of my new book, *How to Govern*. The text has now been supplied. Most of the 30 or so infographics for the book have now been delivered as well. And what Andy Burnham is proving, every time that I see him, is just how badly this country needs a new politics of the sort I describe in that book, led by people who actually do understand what political conviction means, what the instruments available to a government to use might be, and how they can combine these two in a way to deliver well-being, which is something that Andy Burnham will never achieve if he carries on as he is at present.

There are moments when I believe that we need a revolution in government in the UK to deal with the crises that we face, and that is precisely what I thought when watching Prime Minister’s Questions from this week. If it came to occupying Downing Street, I would have no more confidence in Badenoch than Burnham. After all, she is mean-spirited, has a taste for performative cruelty, most especially when it comes to benefits, and was part of the disastrous Johnson, Sunak and Truss litany of failure. But, most especially, neither of them has a clue about economics or the role government plays in it, but they are apparently what we have to choose between. I despair.

It’s time for a change, and the sooner we get it, the better.

When this book is done, I have a horrible feeling that I will be starting work on its follow-up. I think I am going to need to.