



Burnham hands cruel ex-DWP Minister the keys to No. 10

## Description

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Andy Burnham and James Purnell

Andy Burnham is already making moves on Downing Street, starting with appointing a chief of staff. The newly elected Makerfield MP has essentially handed the keys of no 10 to James Purnell.

## Friend of Israel and right-wing lobbyist

As the [Canary has already reported](#) Purnell was the chairperson of the lobby group, [Labour Friends of Israel \(LFI\)](#) He was also, until recently, the chief executive of lobby group [Flint Global](#), which counts BP, Amazon, Jaguar Land Rover and Uber among its clients. Flint has also previously advised [Thames Water](#).

As [Ranjan Balakumaran said](#):

This appointment exposes the absolute hypocrisy behind Burnham's carefully managed rhetoric on devolution and public control. Before he even steps foot inside Number Ten, we must demand a full, unvarnished list of all James Purnell's corporate conflicts of interest—because right now, devolution and reindustrialization is the bait, and corporate capture is the switch.

The most bizarre thing Purnell ever got caught up in while in politics was a scandal involving a doctored press photo.

In 2007, it emerged that [Purnell was pasted into a photocall](#) at a local hospital after arriving late. The hospital said they did so with his consent. The MP originally corroborated this story. However, when it became clear it was a fake he denied it. On air with [Look North West](#) he was confronted with the

hospital's statement that he consented. He brushed it off as a misunderstanding.

## Architect of cruel DWP cuts

Purnell was also Secretary of State for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) under Gordon Brown. During his two years there, he was the architect of Labour's discriminatory 'contributory principle' on benefits, which massively screwed over those who couldn't work or contribute.

Purnell voted repeatedly for tougher rules around benefits. He championed the welfare reform bill of 2009, which made benefits harder to claim and tied welfare to work.

He also voted for and was involved with the introduction of Employment Support Allowance to replace Incapacity Benefit. This led to the introduction of the cruel Work Capability Assessment. As a result, there were stricter criteria for those too sick to work.

In 2011, [Purnell told Newsnight](#) that he wanted to cut 'little freebies' such as the Winter Fuel Allowance and free bus passes for pensioners. He argued they should be means-tested. He also said these should be included only in the state pension.

Cruelly, he also attempted to put interest rates of up to 26.8% premium on crisis loans, which, of course, had always been interest-free. This eventually had to be blocked by Brown.

He also supported conditionality and sanctions, which placed restrictions on benefit claimants and punished them for ridiculous reasons.

In a welfare reform debate in 2008, [Purnell said](#)

We want virtually everyone claiming benefits to be preparing for, or looking for, work. It is a fair deal - more support, in return for higher expectations.

As [Benefits and Work reports](#), Purnell's previous work could indicate the direction that Burnham's DWP would go. In the same welfare debate, Purnell showed his support for the Gregg report. The report was in favour of sanctions for claimants.

He said:

The Gregg report found that conditionality backed with a regime of sanctions improves outcomes.

## DWP's Purnell is an expert at media spin

This bodes badly for the current DWP reforms, which are still ongoing and seemingly won't be scrapped if, and when, Burnham gets in. If he still believes that everyone on benefits should be looking for work, then he'll heavily support the Milburn review. The review has also already been supported

by Burnham.

Whilst the chief of staff doesn't have a vote on policies, he would play a part in which policies get the most government attention. He could also influence how much pressure would be put on ministers to ensure policies get delivered.

Not only was Purnell in charge of the DWP's cruelty, but he was also, of course, responsible for a lot of the media narrative which turned the public against disabled benefit claimants.

In 2008 David Freud, an investment banker employed as an advisor by Purnell [told The Daily Telegraph](#) that only a third of those on disabled unemployment benefits actually needed it. He also said it was a "ludicrous" that medical checks for incapacity benefit were carried out by the claimant's GP.

Purnell said:

The system we have at the moment sends 2.64 million people into a form of economic house arrest and encourages them to stay at home and watch daytime TV. We're doing nothing for these people

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## DWP sides with Freud

Freud's report on benefits played an influential part in welfare reform and the DWP supported him despite telling the *BBC* that the number claiming incapacity benefits was at its lowest since 2000.

### [A spokesperson said](#)

We agree with David Freud that many more people could and should be supported to move off benefits and into work

Unsurprisingly, the DWP data at the time did not support Freud's claim. As a result, Purnell distanced himself from these claims. Though the department still enacted many of Freud's recommendations.

After 14 years of the Tories, everyone hoped for some respite from the government killing disabled people. But [Starmers has been even worse in just two years](#) That's because the media hate campaign that Labour started in the 2000s has worked. So they don't have to also work to turn the public against disabled people.

It's clear from the people Burnham is surrounding himself with that disabled people will still be in danger *if and when* he becomes prime minister.

*Featured image via the Canary*

By [Rachel Charlton-Dailey](#)

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