



Burnham hits back at Blair's complete disregard for dismal living standards in the UK

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andy burnham

Andy Burnham has finally hit back at Tony Blair's thinly veiled criticism of his potential leadership of the Labour Party.

Blair previously published a rambling article via his eponymous think tank, the Tony Blair Institute, detailing his belief in the so-called ["radical centre"](#). From what we can tell, that means private-sector deregulation, centering AI above all, slashing welfare and wages, and sucking up to Trump. Really radical, that lot.

The section of Blair's essay which reads as an attack on Burnham [is this](#)

the alternative which thinks the answer is moving even further left on taxes, spending and welfare, spun with a rehash of the far-left critique about nothing good coming out of the last 40 years of "neo-liberalism", which presumably includes the last Labour government.

Likewise, Blair also criticised a nascent impulse in what's left of the supposedly left-wing Labour party to, you know, put out left-wing policies:

It is one thing when in opposition to indulge this perennial delusion that when we lose seats to the right the country is really signalling it wants Labour to move left; it is dangerous to do it in government.

Would we at the *Canary* necessarily characterise Burnham as all that left-wing? Probably not. However, heâ??s a damn sight further left than Blair, for sure.

Burnham: â??life has got harderâ??

Now, however, Burnham has [come out with his rebuttal](#) to Blairâ??s perceived criticisms. In an article for the *Times* on 28 May, the Manchester mayor wrote of reading Blairâ??s essay:

I kept waiting for the main topic of conversation on doorsteps in Makerfield to make an appearance. And it never did. The fall in the living standards of millions, and the reality that life has got harder for most year on year since the financial crash in 2008, is, I believe, the gaping omission in his analysis.

In fact, Blair [called for policies](#) which will make peopleâ??s living standards even worse. Namely, the ex-Labour leader called to slash the minimum wage, workerâ??s rights, and benefits. Likewise, he also advocated for the deregulation of both the housing and technology sectors, claiming that:

We need a transformative programme for public services and deregulation. The planning system in Britain is an abomination. The government has taken significant steps, but well short of a truly radical reform.

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However, this call for deregulation was an â??inâ?? for Burnham, [who wrote that:](#)

Lest we forget: the principal cause of the 2008 crash was a failure of regulation. So how can a new wave of deregulation plausibly be the answer to the problems we have experienced since? This is the real â??retroâ?? thinking, I suggest; the kind of thinking that would doom us to repeat past mistakes and, if weâ??re not careful, prevent us from protecting children by failing to regulate social media, artificial intelligence and big tech.

Regulation for growth

Instead, the new leadership hopeful called for us to â??build a higher-growth economyâ?? precisely in order to achieve â??regional equality and social justiceâ?. Of course, exactly how that commitment to social justice lines up with his support for [anti-trans](#) and [anti-immigrant](#) stances is anyoneâ??s guess.

Continuing in the â??regulation for growthâ?? vein, the Manchester Mayor argued:

In Greater Manchester, we have laid a new path to [a higher-growth economy]. We call it Good Growth. In the past decade, we achieved the highest annual average growth anywhere in the UK â?? 3.1 per cent â?? and, at the same time, as the Centre for Cities recently found, the biggest reduction in inner-city deprivation. This has not come about by leaving things to the market but by being very interventionist and intentional about it.

It's certainly correct that Manchester is [doing a good deal better](#) for itself than many comparable cities. Part of that is down to the city's control over its transportation system – including nearly half a billion pounds of dividends from its international airport, owned in part by the council.

As Burnham is wont to do, [he turned to Manchester's buses](#) as an example:

We are proud to be the first place anywhere to reverse one of the biggest Thatcher legacies: bus deregulation. A system that charged single fares of more than £4 when I arrived in 2017 is now capped at £2. [â?] Tony is right to say that we need welfare reform and that the numbers of young people on benefits is too high, but how can you fix that if people can't afford to travel to training, jobs and opportunity?

The non-radical center

Burnham finished off by writing that:

We need a huge transfer of power from central government and personnel to combined and local authorities to create more agency at the ground level, to empower our community and voluntary sectors and make Good Growth a reality everywhere. This means big changes to British public procurement, using full social value weighting, to give local entities the best chance of winning contracts and recycling maximum value back into communities.

Devolved political power, a regulated private sector, and an empowered communities? Sure, sounds great, we're all for it. However, as we've seen in recent weeks, Burnham's other policies and actions haven't quite lived up to his leftist hype. Just as a quick roundup, Burnham:

- [Supports Mahmood's racist immigration changes](#)
- [Is silent on wealth taxes.](#)
- [Won't back proportional representation this parliament](#)
- [Ditched trans rights to panic-grab Reform votes](#)
- [Wouldn't work to renationalise Thames Water](#)

As the *Canary's* [Willem Moore summarised](#) – Burnham might not be right-wing enough for Blair, but that's hardly saying much. Meanwhile, he's still not managing to put out a substantive left-wing policy either.

This might not be Blair's – radical centre – [whatever the hell that means](#) – but by God does it look like the centre all the same.

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By [Alex/Rose Cocker](#)

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