



ZÃ¶e Bread shows us that â??Manchesterismâ?? is neoliberalism

## Description

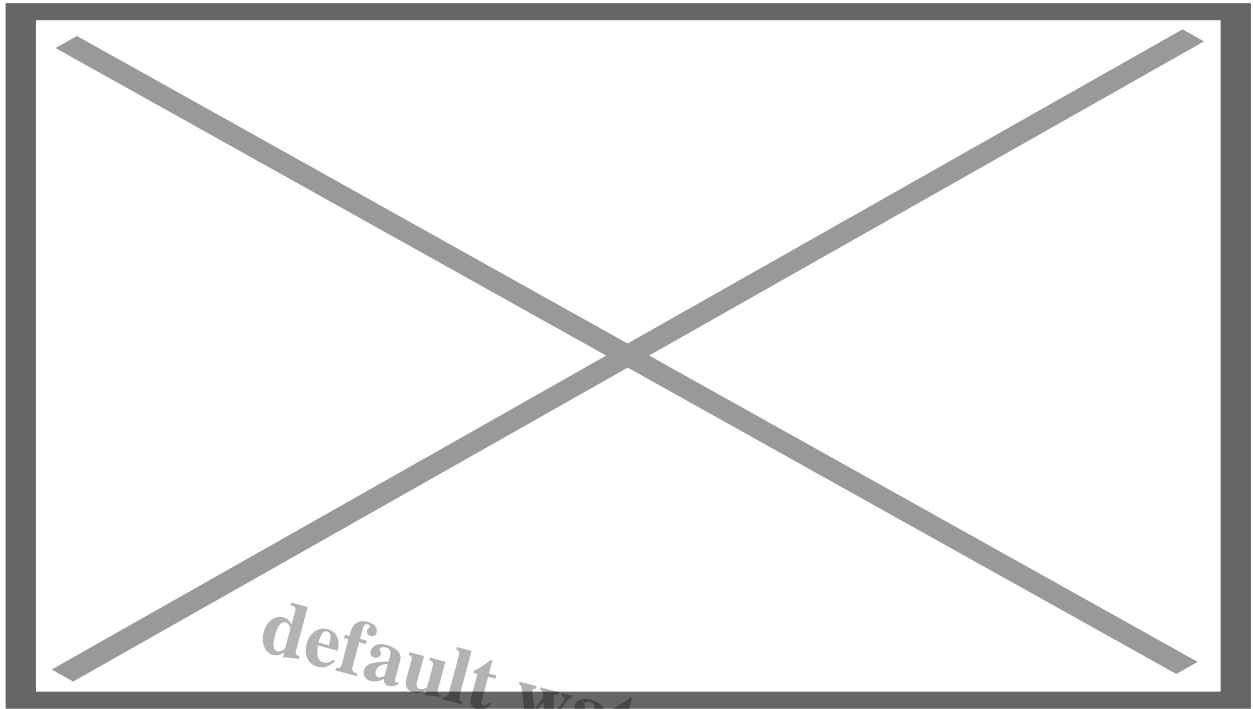
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ZÃ¶e Bread wearing a sliced white bread mask and a red slogan tshirt saying, 'I'm the council now'

[Andy Burnham](#)'s busy soundtracking campaign videos with Elbow and Oasis, and declaring himself a??the end of neoliberalism.â?• But one intrepid investigator, ZÃ¶e Bread, suggests otherwise.

## ZoÃ« Bread is Manchesterâ??s favourite

ZoÃ« Bread is a [TikTok superstar](#) sleuth with 1.5 million-followers and an impressive citizen journalist. Sheâ??s renowned for her engaging video investigations and antics, filmed wearing a bread mask. (See the [Millâ??s profile](#) )



ZÃ¼e Bread á?? via the BBC

Sheá??s spent the last year or so methodically dismantling Manchester City Council (MCC)á??s credibility, one Freedom of Information request or dogged phone call at a time. Her persistent investigation even forced [MCC to refund](#) a load of parking ticket fines issued despite á?? [confusing](#) á?? parking payment signs.

Since a parking fine on Collier Street sent her down that rabbit hole, ZÃ¼e Bread has gone from fighting misleading road signs to investigating the financing of Manchesterá??s biggest developments. Online, people even hail her as the only journalist Manchester has left. (This humble reporter begs to differ.)

In particular, sheá??s turned her lens on the architecture of Burnhamá??s á??Manchesterismá??. What she uncovered looks less like á??the end of neoliberalismá?• and more like plain old neoliberalism, only with better PR.

## All eyes on Andy Burnham

Last week, Burnham released his [official campaign video](#) for the Makerfield by-election.

In it, he wanders the red brick streets of Ashton-in-Makerfield, invoking the damage done by Thatcherá??s government to places like this. He positions himself and his Northern-tinged philosophy as the antidote: á??Manchesterism is the end of neoliberalism.á?•

This was, by any measure, a polished piece of political communication. Oasis on the soundtrack. Elbow. The á??only maná?• who knows exactly which emotional buttons to press in a post-industrial constituency that Labour needs to hold against Reform.

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The problem â?? and ZoÃ« Bread is not the first to notice this, but she may be the most effective at explaining it â?? is that the record doesnâ??t match the rhetoric.

â??Manchesterism is the end of neoliberalismâ?•

â?? Lewis Goodall (@lewis\_goodall) [May 18, 2026](#)

For a deep, measured look at Burnhamâ??s actual record and insight into his inner circle, Iâ??d recommend *Mill* editor Joshi Hermannâ??s recent [piece on Burnhamism](#)

## What does â??Manchesterismâ?? really stand for?

ZoÃ« Breadâ??s investigation into property development company Renaker and its bossâ?? links with Burnham is a stellar case in point. Bread picks apart the housing reality beneath Burnhamâ??s mayoral tenure.

Those investigations repeat the faÃ§ade of â??Burnhamismâ??, â??Manchesterismâ?? or whatever you call itâ??. This is familiar history for ZÃ«e Bread, and important now â?? for us all.

Yes, Burnham brought the â??Beeâ?? bus network back under local control in Greater Manchester. But it was actually set in motion before he took office, despite him claiming credit, â?? [Boris Bike](#) -like. Really, the [Thatcherite wholesaling](#) of public buses should never have occurred.

Yes, Burnham stood up, vocally at least, for the North during Covid. But he also oversaw Â£400,000 in Covid-era Arts Council funding funnelled to his pal [Sacha Lord](#) for negligible public benefit.

Bread-related, heâ??s also allowed tax-exile developers to build skyscrapers with [zero affordable housing](#)

## The great housing heist

The GMCAâ??s housing investment loans fund, it turns out, isnâ??t creating much affordable housing. Thatâ??s despite the fundâ??s [stated intention](#) to do so. This is precisely the problem.

The GMCA creates loopholes for developers to make millions with little or no benefit to most taxpayers lending them that money. Mainly to [one company](#) Renaker.

The *Mill* reported earlier this year that one prominent developer, Daren Whitaker, funded virtually all of his developments with nearly Â£700 million in loans from the GMCAâ??s housing fund. Meanwhile, he took [Â£40 million in private dividends](#) from projects backed by those loans over two years.

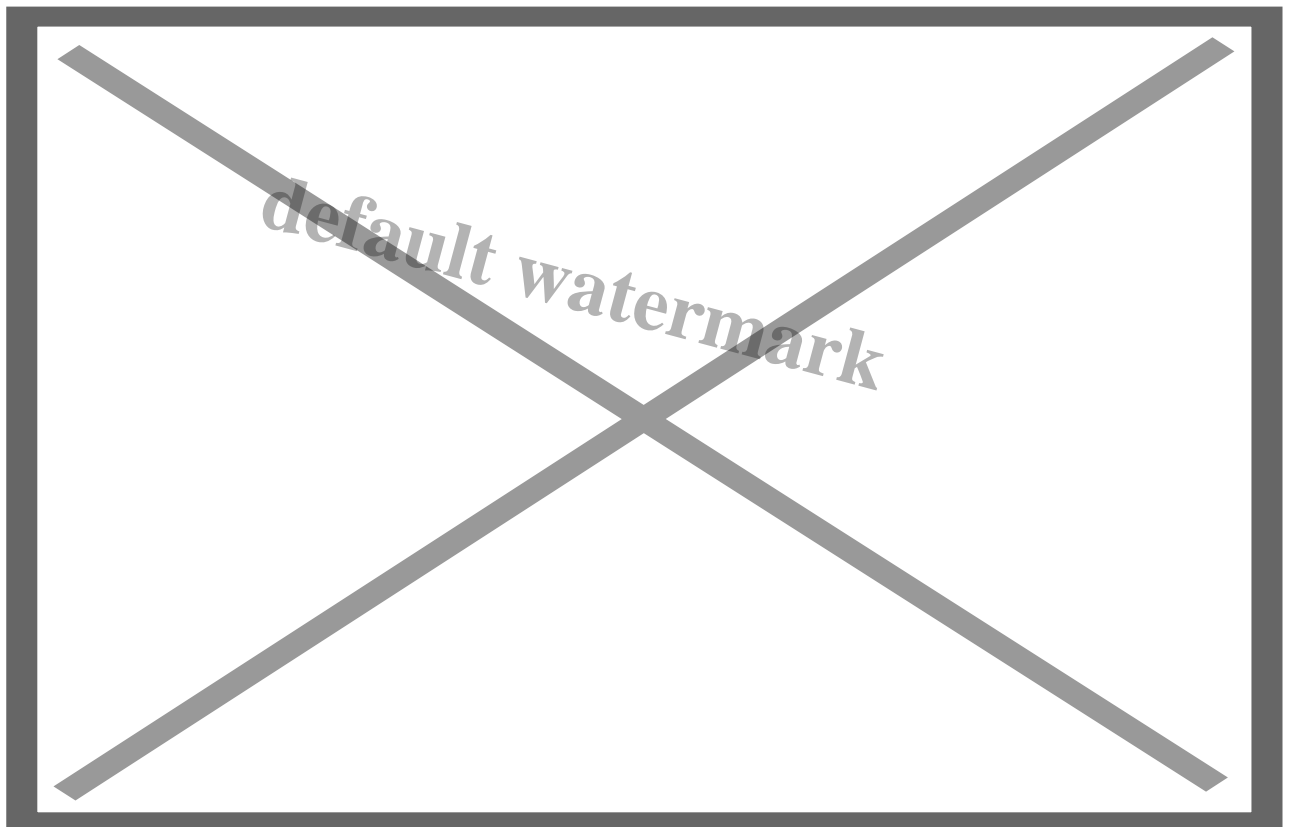
Whitaker became one of the [UKâ??s wealthiest men off of taxpayersâ?? money](#). Then, as [ZÃ«e Bread reported](#) he liquidated one of many companies, took out over Â£345 million in loans and moved to [tax exile in Monaco](#) (briefly).

Renaker made [no affordable housing](#) and Burnham chairs the GMCA fund. The GMCA's planning committee [eventually rejected](#) one of Whitaker's schemes, unanimously, with one councillor stating bluntly:

We should not be seeing fancy yoga rooms. We should be seeing affordable housing.

The theory doing the rounds online, the [Mill noted](#) with some delight, was simply:

ZoÃ« Bread strikes again.



*The Renaker-made 'Manc-hattan' via [MEVA](#)*

## Manchesterism and its contradictions

Into this context drop countless write-ups of Burnham's Manchesterism vision. Much of the UK's left and centre-spectrum, from [Novara](#) to the [New Statesman](#), is seemingly embracing Burnhamism. But why?

Burnham says he would still obey Rachel Reeves's fiscal rules. That means accepting the same Treasury constraints that have blocked serious public investment for decades. Can you really challenge neoliberalism while simultaneously reassuring bond markets, protecting fiscal rules, and refusing to confront financiers?

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Burnham's own [description of Manchesterism](#) is as "neither Blue Labour nor soft left, Blairite nor Brownite, but a form of consensual, business-friendly socialism".

[Market socialism](#) is perfectly viable, but those two words sit uncomfortably next to each other here. Does Burnham really mean taxpayer-funded socialism for Renaker types but market misery for the rest of us?

We're hearing calls for [change](#), yet again, less than two years after that vacuous [any-and-all message](#) got us into this very mess. That, and [For Us](#). But for who, exactly?

Daren Whitaker? Sacha Lord? Labour Together cronies like [Josh Simons](#)? Few are pausing to ask whether Burnham's mayoral record actually bears out the egalitarian framings.

## Manchesterism is just neoliberalism

Few interrogate the substance of Manchesterism at any meaningful depth. They're treating the phrase as a coherent [brand](#), rather than just political branding.

The developer dividend scandals [ZoA's](#) [Brexit](#) are not peripheral to Manchesterism. They are a core feature of it. Public investment funds flowing [into the hands](#), with luxury towers rising where affordable housing was promised, is not a glitch. It's the [perennial](#) [neoliberalism all over](#).

Manchesterism is the archetypal neoliberal model, as GMTU tenant organiser and author Isaac Rose writes in *The Rentier City: Manchester and the Making of the Neoliberal Metropolis*. Rose stresses the role of Renaker-style [public-private partnerships](#) over decades in Labour-controlled Manchester city centre.

Burnham barely even provides a more rhetorically progressive version of these tired arrangements. They've defined British and *especially* Mancunian urban governance for forty years. The public provides the risk capital; the private sector captures the returns.

## Why does this matter beyond Makerfield?

The Makerfield by-election is not simply Labour internal drama, though that's considerable too. Burnham is running on an explicitly [anti-Starmer](#) platform, hoping to soon [become prime minister](#).

Starmer's allies describe the vote as [unnecessary](#), while many others declare it the [most consequential](#) of our history. Across the spectrum they're right: it's very consequential.

What's needed, in such consequential times, is asking *qui bono*: who exactly benefits from the economic model being sold as liberation from neoliberalism? Really, it looks like more of the same.

ZoA's Bread doesn't have a press pass. But she has 1.5 million people watching her read out GMCA loan fund documents in a car park. That, right now, seems the most important public service.

*Featured image via the BBC*

By [Cameron Baillie](#)

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