

Farage forces by-election as financial scandals engulf Reform UK

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Nigel Farage, leader of far-right Reform UK, stood down as an MP this week in his seat in Clacton, announcing he will stand in the resulting by-election. He is seeking to face down a mounting series of financial scandals surrounding his leadership of Reform UK, by claiming to subject himself to the “verdict” of the electorate.

Farage calculates that having won the seat with a majority of 8,405 in 2024, he will strengthen his hand against his political opponents. But there are already clear indications that his manoeuvre could backfire badly.

Farage and Reform UK face a concerted attack, ranging from pro-Brexit sections of the ruling class and their media outlets that were previously supportive of his role in shifting politics to the right, to nominally liberal media outlets such as the *Guardian*, the traditional opponents of Reform UK.

Farage is under investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, Daniel Greenberg, over his alleged failure to declare a £5 million gift from cryptocurrency billionaire Christopher Harborne. Farage said he didn’t because it was a personal gift received before his election and was used in part to fund private security. Separate investigations concern whether financial support connected to his longtime associate George Cottrell—a convicted fraudster—should also have been declared.

It was revealed this week that the Metropolitan Police are separately investigating possible offences relating to the alleged “evasion of restrictions on donations” to the party by Fiona Cottrell, George Cottrell’s mother. Police are investigating whether false information was provided regarding donation of at least £500,000, including the amount or the donor’s identity.

Multi-millionaire Farage declared that he is under assault by the political elite, announcing, “This will be a people versus the establishment by-election,” that would offer the chance to “stick two fingers up to the entire establishment.” He claims he has done nothing wrong and that Britain needs “successful people from all walks of life” in business and government.

But within hours, Labour, the Conservatives, the Liberal

Democrats, the Greens, and competitor far-right group Restore Britain said they would not contest the seat.

The only candidate, apart from a few unknown independents—to announce they are challenging is Count Biface, the alter ego of comedy scriptwriter Jon Harvey, who wears a cape and a plastic bin on his head in the guise of an “intergalactic space warrior”. The satirical protest candidate has previously gathered a small number of votes standing against Tory leaders Boris Johnson (2019), Rishi Sunak (2024) and against Labourite Andy Burnham in the recent Makerfield by-election. But amid growing anger toward Farage’s financial arrangements, there is speculation that tactical voting by supporters of the parties who are boycotting could result in Farage’s defeat.

While Farage remains favourite in Reform’s safest seat, a poll Friday found that in a run-off between the two, 33 percent of British adults would prefer Count Biface to win, while only 21 percent back Farage.

Farage was sufficiently concerned to respond that Biface’s standing was part of a left-wing conspiracy by the “Uniparty” elite against him. He noted that Clacton has “78,000 registered, legitimate voters. And the Labour and Conservative parties are treating them with such contempt, they don’t even want to contest the by-election. So effectively, they’ve got behind a guy... Jon Harvey... He is a writer for BBC left-wing comedies. And he’s the representative of the Uniparty.”

Parliament’s investigation into Farage’s and Reform’s funding will continue regardless, as Commons rules cover cases where a member quits mid-investigation. Farage could still face censure whether he is re-elected or not, and far worse if the allegations are taken to court.

The corruption scandals extend beyond Farage. His deputy Richard Tice faces questions over party finances, while Robert Jenrick, the former Conservative minister who defected to Reform, faces a police investigation over a £37,500 donation from his Tory leadership campaign.

More striking than the allegations of financial skulduggery, long an open secret, is the sudden coordination

and ferocity of their pursuit.

Three media outlets have driven the story.

The pro-Labour *Guardian* broke the original Harborne story in April 2026. Sky News reported in May that the £5 million gift was linked to Farage's purchase of a £1.4 million house. The *Sunday Times* then revealed the Cottrell story that precipitated Farage's resignation. The *Guardian* reported on July 7 that bankers had flagged the £5 million gift to the National Crime Agency as potentially involving laundered money.

A certain shift against Reform in ruling circles is clear. Barely a year ago, the *Times* ran a fawning interview presenting Farage as prime minister-in-waiting. This was part of the establishment's grooming of far-right forces, used to whip Labour further to the right and prepare for a possible Reform government, possibly in coalition with the Conservatives. The *Financial Times* ran its own puff piece on March 13, headlined, "The irrepressible Nigel Farage".

Behind the present campaign against Farage lie concerns that Reform UK—a fragile coalition of politically untested, right-wing forces—is not yet ready to govern. Dominant sections of the ruling class have concluded that Labour under Andy Burnham is better able to impose their interests while placating and policing social and political opposition in the working class.

Outgoing Prime Minister Keir Starmer was the favoured candidate in ruling circles going into the 2024 general elections, pledging that Labour would govern as the "party of NATO" and impose deep welfare cuts to pay for NATO's war against Russia. But amid a collapse of his own and Labour's polling—Reform had a 10-point lead for most of the last year—Starmer was unable to deliver on his unpopular pledges. Burnham is being installed to lead a government that will, under conditions of deepening economic and geopolitical crisis.

A Burnham spokesperson dismissed Farage's by-election move as "a gimmick designed to distract from serious allegations about Farage's funders." Burnham himself marked the news that Binface would stand against Farage by posting a photo of the pair shaking hands at the Makerfield count, where Burnham had won with a crushing majority over Reform.

Labour's polling has improved amidst a slew of favourable media coverage portraying the government as finally getting its act together. Two polls this week showed Reform's lead on Labour down to four points, while the Tories, who have appropriated much of Reform's anti-immigrant and law-and-order programme, are also gaining. A "Reform insider" told *Politico* that "[Farage] had to recalibrate. He is facing Restore on the right, Burnham taking left-wing voters and [Tory leader] Kemi [Badenoch]

taking the ones in the middle he would have hoped to have. He needed to do something."

As Burnham prepares to enter Downing Street by July 20, Farage's move means he can "own the news agenda in July and August" in a bid to restore his standing. However, the *Financial Times* captured the establishment's cold assessment. Farage's "stunt has already fallen flat," it wrote. Should he be re-elected, the investigation "can resume and might yet be expanded to include other undeclared assistance."

It nevertheless concluded with the warning that "unless the Labour government can renew itself, it is still far too early to write off Farage." The ruling class is putting its contenders through their paces. This is a contest over which party can best intensify the assault on jobs, wages, welfare and democratic rights, as Britain is dragged ever more openly to war.

None of this manoeuvring in ruling class circles would be possible were it not for the systematic disarming of any independent movement of the working class, for well over a decade, by those posturing as the "left".

Starmer was not brought down from below, by the working class, but by a militarist cabal that determines the political agenda of whoever occupies Downing Street. As the WWS explained in its perspective on the resignation of Starmer, "what sealed Starmer's fate was not his unpopularity, but a calculation by the ruling class that he could no longer be relied on to realise its strategic aims..."

"As in every country, the key role in facilitating the manoeuvres of the ruling class is played by the official 'left,' which keeps the struggles of the working class in check. In the UK, the Corbynites and the trade union bureaucracy, which suppressed and betrayed the major strikes which erupted against the Tory government, have sought to block the development of a working class, socialist opposition to Starmer's Labour."

The way forward lies not in choosing between rival instruments of the ruling class, nor through the tender ministrations of a Labour "left"—backed by the trade union bureaucracy—that has spent a decade disarming a leftward movement of the working class. It demands a decisive political break from Labour through the independent mobilisation of the working class and the fight for a socialist alternative to militarism and austerity.



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