# Led By Donkeys reveal plan to seize Michelle Mone’s yacht in protest against pandemic profiteering



At the recent Charleston literary festival, Ben Stewart and Oliver Knowles, members of the activist group Led By Donkeys, captivated the audience with an account of their audacious act of renaming Michelle Mone's luxurious yacht, Lady M, to “Pandemic Profiteer”. This creative protest was born from a desire to address the morally questionable profits made during the COVID-19 crisis, particularly those linked to government contracts awarded to Mone's company, PPE Medpro. Initially, Led By Donkeys had envisaged a more dramatic coup: seizing the yacht and sailing it back to the UK to turn it over to His Majesty’s Treasury, a gesture rich in symbolism and public defiance.

The narrative shared by Stewart and Knowles was not merely entertaining; it underscored a broader critique of pandemic profiteering. Mone, a Conservative peer, later faced scrutiny for her financial ties to the PPE contracts, initially denying any wrongdoing before ultimately admitting to a personal profit of £28.8 million. Much of this profit has been locked in a trust for her and her children. Her husband, Doug Barrowman, infamously remarked that benefiting from such circumstances is what happens when one is in a privileged position. This statement reflects a troubling ethos that many have come to associate with enterprise amid crisis.

The unfolding scandal has not merely remained a matter of financial impropriety but has also attracted significant legal weight. The National Crime Agency has frozen £75 million worth of Mone’s assets while pursuing an investigation, yet Mone maintains that she and her husband are scapegoats in a broader narrative about pandemic spending. This tension between accountability and deflection serves only to fuel public outrage, particularly among those who view her actions as emblematic of a larger rot in political and corporate ethics.

Led By Donkeys’ activism provides a stark reminder that public sentiment still craves accountability. Their installations, infused with poignant social commentary, resonate in a culture increasingly aware of the systemic inequalities exposed during the pandemic. For example, their action in 2024 in which children's outfits were laid out on Bournemouth beach to represent lives lost in Gaza, highlighted the devastating impact of conflict and the need for public engagement in discussions on justice. The mixing of these themes—of pandemic profiteering and global conflict—presents a complex narrative wherein personal misdeeds cannot be understood in isolation from wider socio-political contexts.

Stewart and Knowles received a standing ovation at the end of their talk, a heartfelt display of approval that suggests their message strikes a chord with a public weary of injustice. The applause was not merely an endorsement of their actions but a collective affirmation of the desire for change. In a time when the lines between moral outrage and political engagement are increasingly blurred, their work serves as both a call to action and a source of hope—reminding us that as communities, we must confront the emotional toll of misdeeds with resilience and creativity.

Such acts of protest are vital, as they remind society that it can collectively reject the status quo and declare what is permissible in the realm of ethics and accountability. Mone's case will likely remain a complex and ongoing saga, but the resonance of activist responses like those of Led By Donkeys suggests that public commitment to justice is far from diminished—it is evolving into a powerful form of expression and resistance.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/26/led-by-donkeys-wanted-to-confiscate-michelle-mones-yacht-but-settled-for-renaming-it-it-was-still-a-coup), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/26/led-by-donkeys-wanted-to-confiscate-michelle-mones-yacht-but-settled-for-renaming-it-it-was-still-a-coup)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/26/led-by-donkeys-wanted-to-confiscate-michelle-mones-yacht-but-settled-for-renaming-it-it-was-still-a-coup), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/98d3cdf0-f2bc-4038-9d6e-1e2b5c75f38a), [[4]](https://news.sky.com/story/baroness-mone-admits-she-stands-to-benefit-from-ppe-contract-13032463)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-67736860), [[6]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4nnq8q5depo), [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/dec/17/how-the-michelle-mone-scandal-unfolded-200m-of-ppe-contracts-denials-and-a-government-lawsuit)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/26/led-by-donkeys-wanted-to-confiscate-michelle-mones-yacht-but-settled-for-renaming-it-it-was-still-a-coup), [[6]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4nnq8q5depo), [[4]](https://news.sky.com/story/baroness-mone-admits-she-stands-to-benefit-from-ppe-contract-13032463)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/26/led-by-donkeys-wanted-to-confiscate-michelle-mones-yacht-but-settled-for-renaming-it-it-was-still-a-coup), [[4]](https://news.sky.com/story/baroness-mone-admits-she-stands-to-benefit-from-ppe-contract-13032463)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/26/led-by-donkeys-wanted-to-confiscate-michelle-mones-yacht-but-settled-for-renaming-it-it-was-still-a-coup> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/26/led-by-donkeys-wanted-to-confiscate-michelle-mones-yacht-but-settled-for-renaming-it-it-was-still-a-coup> - In May 2025, Led By Donkeys activists Ben Stewart and Oliver Knowles recounted their 2023 act of renaming Michelle Mone's yacht, Lady M, to 'Pandemic Profiteer'. Initially, they planned to seize the yacht and sail it to the UK to deliver it to His Majesty’s Treasury, symbolising a stand against profiteering during a national emergency. Despite Mone's initial denials, she later admitted to profiting from the government's Covid VIP lane, with £28.8 million held in a trust benefiting her and her children. The article highlights the activists' role in challenging such profiteering and the broader implications of Mone's actions.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/98d3cdf0-f2bc-4038-9d6e-1e2b5c75f38a> - In June 2024, a 46-year-old man was arrested in Barnet, north London, in connection with £200 million worth of UK government contracts awarded to PPE Medpro during the Covid-19 pandemic. The National Crime Agency detained him on suspicion of conspiracy to commit fraud and attempting to pervert the course of justice. PPE Medpro, owned by a consortium led by Doug Barrowman, husband of Conservative peer Baroness Michelle Mone, faced controversy over the suitability of the equipment supplied. Mone admitted to benefiting from the contracts, with £28.8 million held in a trust for her and her children. Both Mone and Barrowman have denied any wrongdoing. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/98d3cdf0-f2bc-4038-9d6e-1e2b5c75f38a?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://news.sky.com/story/baroness-mone-admits-she-stands-to-benefit-from-ppe-contract-13032463> - In December 2023, Baroness Michelle Mone admitted she stood to benefit from profits of about £60 million made by PPE Medpro from its government contracts. She had lobbied ministers to award contracts to the company. Mone acknowledged her involvement, stating she had made an 'error' in denying her links to the firm. Despite this, she claimed she and her husband, Doug Barrowman, were being made 'scapegoats' in a wider scandal about UK government spending during the pandemic. Both Mone and Barrowman have denied any wrongdoing. ([news.sky.com](https://news.sky.com/story/baroness-mone-admits-she-stands-to-benefit-from-ppe-contract-13032463?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-67736860> - In December 2023, Baroness Michelle Mone admitted she stood to benefit from profits of about £60 million made by PPE Medpro from its government contracts. She had lobbied ministers ... award contracts to the company. Mone acknowledged her involvement, stating she had made an 'error' in denying her links to the firm. Despite this, she claimed she and her husband, Doug Barrowman, were being made 'scapegoats' in a wider scandal about UK government spending during the pandemic. Both Mone and Barrowman ... denied any wrongdoing. ([bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-67736860?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4nnq8q5depo> - In June 2024, a 46-year-old man was arrested in Barnet, north London ... in connection with £200 million worth of UK government contracts awarded ... . The National Crime Agency detained him on suspicion of conspiracy to commit ... . PPE Medpro, owned by a consortium led by ... husband of Conservative peer Baroness Michelle M ... , faced controversy over the suitability of the equipment supplied. Mone admitted to benefiting from the contracts, with £28.8 million held in a trust for her and her children. Both Mone and Barrowman ... denied any wrongdoing. ([bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4nnq8q5depo?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/dec/17/how-the-michelle-mone-scandal-unfolded-200m-of-ppe-contracts-denials-and-a-government-lawsuit> - In December 2023, The Guardian detailed the unfolding of the Michelle Mone scandal, highlighting £200 million worth of PPE contracts awarded to PPE Medpro, a company linked to Mone and her husband, Doug Barrowman. Despite initial denials, Mone admitted to recommending the company to the government through its VIP fast-track lane. The Department of Health sued PPE Medpro for breach of contract, alleging ... million worth of medical gowns supplied were not fit for purpose. The National Crime Agency also investigated suspected criminal offences in the procurement of PPE contracts ... . ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/dec/17/how-the-michelle-mone-scandal-unfolded-200m-of-ppe-contracts-denials-and-a-government-lawsuit?utm_source=openai))