# Led By Donkeys rename Michelle Mone’s yacht ‘Pandemic Profiteer’ in bold protest against crisis profiteering



At the Charleston literary festival earlier this month, Ben Stewart and Oliver Knowles from the activist group Led By Donkeys recounted their audacious stunt of renaming Michelle Mone’s luxury yacht, the Lady M, to “Pandemic Profiteer.” This act was more than a whimsical protest; it symbolised a growing discontent over profiting from public crises. The duo initially conceived a bolder plan: to commandeer the yacht and return it to His Majesty’s Treasury, a striking gesture of accountability. “It had everything – audacity, symmetry, justice, spectacle, the lot,” remarked Stewart, highlighting the public sentiment some might have viewed as naive yet profoundly resonant.

Mone, a Conservative peer, has found herself embroiled in controversy regarding her involvement with PPE Medpro, a company that profited by more than £28 million from government contracts awarded during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite earlier denials of profiting from the government's “VIP lane,” Mone has since acknowledged her financial gains from the firm’s contracts, though she claims she and her husband, Doug Barrowman, are being scapegoated in a larger issue surrounding government spending during the pandemic.

The National Crime Agency has investigated the couple, with assets totalling £75 million reportedly frozen as part of this inquiry. It’s also worth noting that the government is contesting the quality of medical gowns supplied by PPE Medpro, which have been deemed unacceptable for use. While Mone’s political future hangs in the balance, the essential public discourse ignited by acts like Led By Donkeys defines the trajectory of accountability sought by the public. “Pandemic Profiteer” serves as a stark reminder that exploiting a national emergency should never be deemed acceptable.

Reflecting on their artwork, Knowles and Stewart emphasised the heart-rending undertones of their activism. Previous installations, such as laying 11,000 children’s outfits along Bournemouth beach to underscore the scale of loss in Gaza, illustrate the group’s commitment to using powerful imagery to evoke social consciousness. These acts of resistance don’t merely serve as commentary on contemporary issues but also create a communal barrier against despair; they assert that indifference is not an option, and that vigilance is necessary in confronting both misdeeds and tragedies.

As their talk concluded, the audience erupted into a standing ovation—a poignant indication that individuals are eager to stand against the injustices symbolised by figures like Mone. This spontaneous appreciation transcended typical admiration; it was a collective stand against perceived inequities in society. In a climate where the lines between political integrity and personal gain frequently blur, such acts of resistance compel the public to reconsider the distance between the privileged few and the collective wellbeing of society as a whole.

Whether or not Michelle Mone retains her place in the House of Lords or is forced to reimburse any funds, the message delivered by Led By Donkeys resonates. It reinforces the notion that individuals should be held accountable in a democracy, urging society to demand competence from its leaders and integrity from its business figures. It suggests that the fight against moral decay is collective, and it begins when society confronts its uncomfortable truths head-on.

## 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), [[4]](https://apnews.com/article/9261f4a40b80fd986f6d0135c412367b), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-67736860)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/98d3cdf0-f2bc-4038-9d6e-1e2b5c75f38a), [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/647f32ba-05d3-4906-b7b8-b41dca599921)
* 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.com/news/uk-politics-67736860)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## 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. The act aimed to send a clear message that profiting from such crises is unacceptable. The article also touches upon Mone's financial gains from government contracts and her subsequent leave from the House of Lords amid investigations.
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 and using her influence to secure them. The Department of Health sued PPE Medpro in 2022 for breach of contract, alleging that £122 million worth of medical gowns were inadequately packaged. Both Mone and Barrowman have denied any wrongdoing. The NCA began its investigation in May 2021, freezing assets worth approximately £75 million linked to Mone and Barrow ... .
4. <https://apnews.com/article/9261f4a40b80fd986f6d0135c412367b> - In December 2023, Michelle Mone, a member of Britain's House of Lords, acknowledged repeatedly lying about her connections to PPE Medpro, a company awarded significant government contracts for COVID-19 protective equipment. She regretted denying her involvement and threatening journalists who alleged ties to the firm. Her husband, Doug Barrowman, led the consortium that owns the company, and Mone benefited financially from the contracts. Despite acknowledging her error, Mone claimed she and her husband were scapegoats in a larger scandal involving government spending during the pandemic. PPE Medpro received over £200 million in contracts, but millions of supplied surgical gowns were deemed unusable, leading to government breach of contract actions and a National Crime Agency investigation. The U.K. government's VIP lanes for contracts, giving preferential treatment to recommendations from politicians, have been heavily criticized. Deputy Prime Minister Oliver Dowden defended these lanes, stating that any fraud would be pursued through civil and criminal investigations.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/647f32ba-05d3-4906-b7b8-b41dca599921> - In January 2024, an Isle of Man company linked to Doug Barrowman, Smartpay Limited, allegedly misled a client by concealing its offshore status to benefit from lax tax regulations on the island. Documents revealed that Smartpay presented itself as a UK entity but was actually registered in the Isle of Man, running a tax avoidance scheme to minimise taxable wages by issuing loans to workers. The recruitment agency Fuel Recruitment, which only works with UK-registered companies, believed it was dealing with the UK entity, unaware of the Isle of Man registration. The firm's activities aimed to sidestep HMRC scrutiny. Barrowman and his wife, Baroness Michelle Mone, face criminal investigation over controversial COVID-19 government contracts won by their company PPE Medpro. They deny any wrongdoing, as does PPE Medpro. The Knox Group of Companies asserts that Smartpay operated openly and settled all taxes, dismissing claims of misleading practices.
6. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-67736860> - In November 2023, Michelle Mone admitted she stood to benefit from profits of about £60 million made by PPE Medpro from its government contracts. She ... . PPE Medpro's bid to supply ... 'high-priority lane' after lobbying from Mone, ... . The health department sued PPE Medpro ... million worth of medical gowns supplied by ... . Mone and Barrowman ... . The NCA opened a probe in ... 'into suspected criminal offences committed in ... '. About £75 million of assets linked to Mone ... . Both Mone and Barrowman ... . PPE Medpro, Mone and ... .
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. The company was awarded two contracts in May and June 2020 to supply PPE. In October 2020, the government published the PPE Medpro contracts, revealing evident links with Mone and Barrowman’s Isle of Man financial services firm, Knox Group. In December 2020, it was revealed that PPE Medpro’s contracts were processed via the government’s 'VIP lane', which fast-tracked offers of PPE from companies introduced by people with connections to the government. Mone and Barrowman denied any involvement when approached by The Guardian. In November 2021, a Freedom of Information request revealed that Mone personally recommended the company to the government through its VIP fast-track lane. In March 2022, it was reported that the government had rejected the surgical gowns supplied by PPE Medpro, and the gowns had never been used in the NHS. In April 2022, the National Crime Agency executed search warrants at Mone and Barrowman’s homes in London and the Isle of Man, and PPE Medpro’s offices. The NCA began its investigation in May 2021, looking into 'suspected criminal offences committed in the procurement ... '. In November 2022, leaked documents produced by HSBC bank indicated that Barrowman was paid at least £65 million from PPE Medpro’s profits.