# Led By Donkeys highlight pandemic profiteering with bold yacht renaming at Charleston festival



At this year’s Charleston literary festival, members of the activist group Led By Donkeys, Ben Stewart and Oliver Knowles, recounted their audacious attempt to rename Michelle Mone’s luxury yacht, the Lady M, calling it the “Pandemic Profiteer.” This act was remarkable not for its creativity alone, but for highlighting the rampant opportunism displayed by the political elite amid national crises—a stark reminder of the priorities that leaders now seem to embody. Their daring escapade involved renting a modest boat under the guise of a picnic, only to confront the opulence of Mone's yacht, narrowly escaping capture while sending a clear message about the systemic failures exacerbated by the new government.

The sentiment surrounding this initiative reflects a growing public outrage towards those who have profited off the suffering of ordinary citizens. Mone’s admission, at the close of 2023, of benefiting from the government’s controversial Covid VIP lane crystallizes this discontent. Reports confirm she and her family reaped a staggering £28.8 million from PPE Medpro—a company linked to £200 million in contracts for ineffective PPE during the pandemic. Such revelations lay bare the moral bankruptcy of those at the top and raise serious questions about how the current administration continues to enable such exploitation under the guise of recovery.

The ramifications of the scandal are felt more vividly with insights from a recent BBC documentary titled "Rise and Fall," which reveals that Mone is currently on leave from the House of Lords and has had £75 million in assets frozen pending a National Crime Agency investigation. The seeming inaction from the new Labour government regarding such high-profile cases raises alarms about accountability and exposes the troubling ethical landscape in which political leaders comfortably reside. As the public grapples with these issues, the notion of integrity in leadership seems increasingly elusive.

The actions of Led By Donkeys resonate more powerfully against the backdrop of a government seemingly indifferent to the rampant misuse of public funds—prioritizing political affiliations over the urgent needs of society. By renaming the yacht, they crafted a striking reminder of the stark gap between governmental proclamations of constraints and the actual multi-million-pound contracts awarded to Tory affiliates. This act was not just protest; it was a clarion call against institutional negligence that permits such profiteering, showcasing the failures of the current political framework.

Furthermore, the group’s previous art installations, including their poignant tribute to child victims in Gaza, underline a broader commitment to provoking thought and action. These artistic expressions resonate deeply with the public's desire for accountability, emphasizing a collective indignation towards governance failures that allow for corruption and greed to thrive. Led By Donkeys has established itself as a formidable voice against a backdrop increasingly governed by apathy and self-interest.

As Stewart and Knowles received a standing ovation at the festival, it was a potent affirmation that their performance transcended entertainment—it encapsulated a collective yearning for accountability that the current Labour government continues to evade. This moment was not merely a celebration of creativity but a direct challenge to the leaders who have failed their constituents, reinforcing the idea that systemic failures must not be tolerated.

The ethos of Led By Donkeys compels us to interrogate the moral fabric of our leaders’ decisions, underlining the belief that profit from human suffering should never be condoned. Their actions serve not just as commentary on individual wrongdoing but as a clarion call for collective responsibility. In an era where the political elite comfortably reap rewards while ordinary people suffer, their message is a necessary challenge to the status quo.

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, Zoe Williams recounted Led By Donkeys' 2023 act of renaming Michelle Mone's yacht, Lady M, to 'Pandemic Profiteer'. The plan initially involved seizing the yacht and sailing it to the UK to deliver it to His Majesty’s Treasury. The article highlights Mone's delayed admission of profiting from the government's Covid VIP lane, with £28.8 million held in a trust benefiting her and her children. The piece underscores the collective sentiment against profiting from a national emergency and the broader implications of such actions.
3. <https://www.thenational.scot/news/23292475.michelle-mones-yacht-renamed-pandemic-profiteer-protest/> - In February 2023, Led By Donkeys renamed Michelle Mone's yacht to 'Pandemic Profiteer' as a protest against the government's allocation of PPE contracts during the pandemic. The group highlighted the contrast between the government's claims of financial constraints and the funds directed towards PPE contracts for Tory affiliates. The protest aimed to draw attention to the perceived misuse of public funds and the prioritisation of political connections over public welfare.
4. <https://www.itv.com/news/2023-12-17/michelle-mone-admits-she-stands-to-benefit-from-60-million-ppe-profits> - In December 2023, Michelle Mone admitted to benefiting from a £60 million profit from PPE Medpro, the company awarded over £200 million in government contracts during the pandemic. She acknowledged her involvement and expressed regret for previously denying her links to the firm. Mone stated that her initial denials were to protect her family from media scrutiny, emphasising that she did not intend to deceive the public.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/dec/17/michelle-mone-admits-she-lied-to-media-over-links-to-ppe-firm> - In December 2023, Michelle Mone admitted to lying about her connections to PPE Medpro, the company awarded significant government contracts for PPE during the pandemic. She expressed regret for her previous denials, stating she was protecting her family from press attention. Mone acknowledged that she stood to gain from profits of about £60 million from the company and had lobbied ministers to secure these contracts.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/dec/17/how-the-michelle-mone-scandal-unfolded-200m-of-ppe-contracts-denials-and-a-government-lawsuit> - This article outlines the timeline of the Michelle Mone scandal, detailing the awarding of £200 million in PPE contracts to PPE Medpro, the company's links to Mone and her husband Doug Barrowman, and the subsequent denials and legal actions. It highlights the government's 'VIP lane' for PPE procurement, the rejection of supplied gowns, and the National Crime Agency's investigation into suspected criminal offences related to the contracts.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/dec/17/who-is-michelle-mone-and-what-ppe-deals-was-she-involved-in> - This article provides an overview of Michelle Mone's involvement with PPE Medpro, the company awarded £200 million in government contracts during the pandemic. It details her initial denials of involvement, her admission of benefiting from the company's profits, and the subsequent investigations and legal actions. The piece also explores the broader implications of the scandal on government procurement processes and public trust.