

## [Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 127. Question Time: Communists in Austria, the collapse of First Republic, and the political power of Ben and Jerry's

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Welcome to The Restless Politics Question Time with me, Roy Stuart.

And me, Alistair Campbell.

Very good. Alistair, Communist in Austria. I think you've been thinking a bit about Austria recently, haven't you? I don't know if you've been following, but the Communist Party has been making grounds in Austria recently. Is this something you've seen in other countries? Or is it a one-off? Any thoughts about the Communist Party or Austria in general?

Well, this is interesting. It's a party called KPU, KAPU+, the Communist Party in Austria. And there was a state elections in Salzburg last Sunday, and they came fourth, which doesn't sound you know, so what kind of thing. But they got 11.7% of the vote. And the other big story from it was that the far-right FP ER made the second largest gains. And I just think it was interesting that we generally think of Austria as being a pretty right-wing country. And the Communist did do well. Have I noticed it anywhere else? Not to that extent. No, I haven't, but it's quite interesting.

So they came fourth. The far-right came second with 25%. And they are making pretty steady gains at the moment. Now, it also means you could, they're just about strong enough, if they want to do, to make a coalition, which I think that would be interesting, far-right and Communist in coalition. So that's still sort of working its way through. But I did think that was quite an important election.

Very good. So here's another question from Yale University.

Manix, who's a professor at Jackson School at Yale University, was the result of the 2016 Brexit referendum an accident generated by an unlucky pile on of crises? Or was Brexit likely to happen within a generation anyway? Given the status quo ante, the UK as an EU member state gradually sidelined by the eurozone, is untenable and the alternative deeper integration and eventual euro membership unacceptable. So just as a spoiler, Manix teaches a whole course on the European Union. Well, why does he know the answer then? Does he know the answer? Well, I think his instinct is that Britain probably was in quite an uncomfortable position, having not joined the eurozone and with more pressures for deep integration, that its position on the margins would have put it ultimately in having to choose between more integration or some kind of Brexit. What do you feel about that? I've just read a book by an economist called Russell Jones. It's called *The Tyranny of Nostalgia*.

And it's an analysis of the economic policy of every government since Ted Heath.

Right. And I did enjoy reading it. I'm not sure you'd enjoy it that much because he's quite nice about the Blair Brown government. And he's absolutely scathing about the Cameron Osborne government in two respects. No, several respects actually. One is he felt that Osborne, this is something that we've discussed with Osborne in a leading episode that we'll be putting out in a few weeks. He felt that Osborne was really driven by politics, not economics, and politicized the treasury to a great degree. He felt austerity was a very, very political choice and it didn't secure the recovery. And that's one of the reasons we're in a mess now. And the third thing is he thinks Brexit has been an unmitigated disaster. And he thinks it was, as I do, something done to resolve political problems inside the Conservative Party rather than a genuine national need. So I still, I'm afraid, I'm of the view that the referendum did not have to happen. I know that David Cameron profoundly disagrees with that. I actually think that George Osborne agrees with

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that and he tried to persuade Cameron not to have it. Look, where we would be if we hadn't had the referendum, none of us know that would the Tory party still be arguing about Europe? Yes, it probably would, but it is anyway. Would the country be economically stronger? I think it would. So listen, there were complicated factors behind the referendum. But the biggest answer to the question, why did we have the referendum, is because David Cameron decided to have it. Yeah, I do think though that Monarch's point about the medium term is an interesting one. Many, many of my constituents in Cumbria, including people who voted remain, had a vision that where Britain was with the European Union was fine, but they didn't want it to get any deeper. One of the things I'd hear again and again is, if we can just have an agreement that where we are with the EU is fine and we stop there, and we don't go any further towards things that made people uncomfortable, which could be the Euro, could be the European army discussions, etc. But of course, I think Monarch's point is that Europe is a dynamic enterprise. It doesn't stay still, and it's an enterprise which was driven by a desire for ever closer union.

That may not be fully realistic anymore, because I think Europe has come through Brexit surprisingly strongly. I mean, it held together over Brexit, held together over COVID, held together over Ukraine. Support for the EU in the European countries has broadly risen since Brexit rather than fallen. Yeah, and in many ways, Europe's performed much better than people anticipated in those three crises. But it's got some pretty significant challenges. I mean, one of them is what's happening with Poland and justice at the moment, how they're going to deal with Viktor Orban. And above all, maybe we should discuss this at a later stage, the French presidency,

because it really matters if the pen becomes President de France, because the President de France really defines foreign policy and the EU in a way that Giorgio Maloney doesn't in Italy. Yeah, and especially with Schultz, perhaps not being as assertive in those fields as Merkel was. I watched a brilliant documentary on Merkel over the weekend, by the way. I think it's just called Merkel, and it was on Netflix. I can't remember what it was on, but it was absolutely superb. A lot of it about her early life. Now, here's one from Tom Rory. Yeah, in light of the latest cultural battleground in the US over Bud Light, teaming up with a trans-social media influencer, could you see brands in the UK involving themselves in marketing campaigns around political issues? Do you know about this story?

Well, tell us a bit about it. Go on, tell us about it.

Well, basically, Bud Light teamed up with a well-known trans-social media influencer for a marketing campaign. And there's been a pretty big backlash against it, up to and including, according to my daughter Grace, who's in America at the moment, people kind of, you know, going around taking Bud bottles off and smashing them and not drinking them. They've seen a big drop in sales. Their riles have seen a rise in sales. So it just shows that it can cut both ways because I have noticed more brand activism around the place. I was at a sport industry awards dinner the other night, which I've been going to for years and years and years and years. I used to be a judge on it. It's a huge thing. It's like 2000 people inside that big conference centre in the Central Battersea Park. All the kind of great and the good of the sports industry there. There's always a charity. And the charity this year was their own, a sport together fund. And the fund was asking all these people with quite a lot of money in the room to fund organisations which support refugees. And I noticed on the same day this amazing, I don't know what I'd call it really,

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but it was from Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream, Safe Roots for Refugees, wherever we come from. We all have a right to feel safe. And I've read the whole thing. I'll send it to you. You should read it because it's actually one of the best briefing notes about the refugee issue I have actually ever read. It's the sort of thing you'd expect from a political party or an NGO or I don't know. So that's Ben and Jerry's. Can I come on that and then bring you back because you were going to talk I think also about Body Shop. But just for listeners, it's a fascinating story. Those particular brands, Body Shop, which have been very much against anti-animal testing. But Ben and Jerry's, I mean, they launched this amazing ice cream in 2018 called the Pecan Resist, which was an ice cream

against Trump. They've done a lot on asylum seekers in Sweden. They closed all their operations in Israel, Palestine. Yeah, they called it sanctions. They've got a new brand though, haven't they? I think they're... Yep, they did defund the police. They pushed for the impeachment of Trump. So they're on the far edge of brand activism. And there's a reason for that. It works very well for those brands, partly because millennials very, very much in all the surveys, well over half, feel that they're going to go with a brand more that has a strong activist narrative.

And it allows you to get an enormous amount of free advertising and publicity because you're picked up by the major news outlets who then spread you around. But it can, as you say, also backfire. If you don't have it in your DNA from the beginning and you suddenly try to do it, the classic example was Pepsi Refresh, which tried to rebrand itself for the 25 million Community Investment Fund and found themselves losing \$350 million in a year and Diet Coke, shooting ahead of them in the rankings. Well, and Disney are involved in this sort of massive row with Ron DeSantis, the Florida governor at the moment, because they were getting involved in the Gay Rights Campaign. Your friend Airbnb Rory, just after Trump signed an order to close down America's borders to refugees, Airbnb aired an ad during the Super Bowl, which is not cheap. It was called We Accept, and the ad was just a montage of people of different nationalities, along with the words, we believe no matter who you are, where you're from, who you love, or who you worship, we all belong. The world is more beautiful the more you accept, which is kind of deliberately taking a kind of antithesis to something that Trump might say or do. And you mentioned the Body Shop. I did an event last week with the Body Shop, which was about this voter ID thing, the fact that we're forcing people to take voter ID and the unfairness in the fact that young people... Was it also pushing for votes at 16 instead of 18?

And for votes at 16, which I think you and I disagree agreeably about.

We do. And I think though, I also wonder whether it doesn't help appeal to a particular group that they want to bring into their shops. I mean, the ethical sustainable brands is this enormous exploding industry. My wife Shashana works in this because a lot of the craftspeople we work with in Afghanistan and Syrian refugees in Jordan and others are producing ethical sustainable products. And it's been growing 9, 10% a year. You know, ethical fashion is now a 7 trillion industry, ethical food 132 billion. But on the other hand, with inflation taking off with energy prices rising, there have been some real setbacks. Organic food had a big setback last year.

Patagonia is another one that's sort of had social and political activism sort of into what you call its DNA. And I saw one of their campaigns at the bottom, and this is where they're using social media and all the kind of algorithmic stuff.

Depending on where you live, you get a message at the bottom that says,

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not ask your MP, but it says, ask Bradford's MP to take action for warm homes, ask Bedford's MPs. So they're targeting you in your constituency, and they're giving you a link that you can directly start to lobby MPs. So I think it is, I think it's something that is that is picking up.

But the Budweiser, the Bud Light story will perhaps alarm some of them. But as you say, I think it's about whether you're, whether people feel that it, that it's authentic.

Museum recommendations. Angie Bolton, you recommend books to read, what museums would you recommend

to visit? What gallery or exhibitions stayed with you? Jack Braille Museum. The Jack Braille Museum in Brussels, I love. Tell us about that. What's that museum about? Jack Braille is my favorite musician of all time, a great Belgian singer. And there's a museum, quite a small museum, but you get his life, you get a lot of his music. And I think the other museum, which I strongly recommend people who ever, are ever driving down through France, the Charles de Gaulle Museum at Colombele des Eglises is beautifully done. Yeah, definitely worth a visit.

Well, so my two, I'll start also with the French Museum, the Musée Guimet in Paris, which is Asian art, the most extraordinary ground floor dedicated to particularly Khmer Cambodian Buddhas. And I was there just last week, and you can follow the development of images of the Buddha from Afghanistan, right the way through to Java and Indonesia, through India and China. It's, it's extraordinary. I also huge shout out to Vindalanda, which is a museum arranged around a Roman fort up on the Cumbria-Northumbrian border just below Hadron's

wall. The Burley family, over 75 years, their academics, traditionally at Newcastle University, worked with their students to excavate what was then a pretty obscure Roman fort and have discovered the most incredible things, including tablets with preserved Roman writing of people sending letters up and down the wall, inviting people to dinner parties, discussing oil and fish paste. And it's just beautifully done. There are whole walls of shoes, which you wouldn't have thought sounds very interesting. But when you've arranged probably 75 Roman leather shoes in a case,

it's just stunning. It's like going to fashion. And final one, I think, is the Victorian Albert Museum. The Victorian Albert Museum really would drive people towards, I drive them towards the Japanese gallery. I love the Japanese gallery in there. And you can read about samurai swords.

Okay. I drive them to Tristram Hunt's office, given he runs the place, just knock on Tristram's door and say, Alastair said, I could come and have a cup of tea and you'd give me a personal tour.

You can totally do that. And can I just a shout out for the conservative governments that usually accused of only favouring their own political friends, that it was under a conservative government, that the wonderful Tristram Hunt, who was then a Labour MP, became the director of the Victorian Albert Museum. And it was under a Labour government that free museum entry was introduced.

Very good. Very good. Which do you think was more significant for the many, not the few?

Now, my final one is the National Football Museum used to be impressed and now in Manchester, good to have these things in the north. And here, I'll make a pledge that when I die, if the National Football Museum wants the shirt that I wore when I played with Maradona, signed by Maradona and all the other players, they can have it. How about that?

Oh, that's very kind of you, Alastair. Isn't that beautiful?

I thought you were going to offer them your entire Bodleian Library archive for a moment,

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but that... No, no, no. That one we're still talking about.

Right, Alastair. We've got a few more questions to come, so let's just take a quick break.

Okay, well, here's one for you. Harrison, should we be paying more attention to what's happening in the United States with First Republic Bank and JP Morgan?

Yes, absolutely. So, again, for listeners, this is the second largest bank ever to fail in the United States. It went down after nearly \$100 billion had been sunk and trying to save it. This is a very sensitive issue to talk about. We were criticized for talking about bank failures on previous podcasts because obviously people in the banking industry are extremely conscious of the fact that on social media and on podcasts like this, if we are loose with our language, we can actually encourage bank runs. But the fundamental driver of all these failures, and remember, we've had Credit Suisse, we've had Silicon Valley Bank, and now we've had this bank is to do with rising interest rates and them being caught off balance by the drop in the value of the bonds that they had before, which were at lower interest rates. So, the question is, is this going to go further? And that, as everybody keeps saying with the email in, we need to be very cautious talking about, but it's certainly something that's worth having a conversation with your financial advisor about and thinking about because there are some systemic issues. And if interest rates remain high, and if there isn't a significant recovery in the European and American economies, there are things to be concerned about.

Yeah. And Joe Biden went out yesterday and did a fairly calming doorstep at Pista Camera at the White House. And just on Joe Biden, Roy, we've got a few questions as we go about

ageism. We're both being accused of ageism. Joe Butler, is ageism the last accepted stereotype? Personally, I think Joe Biden is a class act who's been a calm ship through rough waters.

It's exactly what the world needed. But what are the literal downsides to his age? What would a younger man do that he can't? James Woods, please would you consider whether you have a problem with ageism on your podcast? Last week, Alistair said, is he losing it? Well, he's into his 90s, referring to Murdoch. And you've both repeatedly questioned Biden money for president, often citing age alone as a concern. Now, before you answer that, Roy, we must put into the newsletter the clip of Joe Biden in the White House last week at a state banquet with the South Korean president, Yoon Suk Yeol. Did you see I sent it to you? No, I haven't seen it. What percentage of the stuff I sent you do you actually look at? I think I look at most of it. Okay. Well, if he's on a general WhatsApp group, you just think, oh, he's ranting and I'll ignore it.

Because this one was Joe Biden was explaining to the audience and the South Korean president was having explained to him through an interpreter, which I presume means he doesn't speak fluent English,

that he, Yoon Suk Yeol, is a massive Don McLean fan. And Joe Biden had in his hand a guitar signed by Don McLean. And the South Korean president sang American Pie and he sang it really, really, really well. Sadly, he stopped before the chorus here. I wanted Joe Biden to get involved in the chorus. And what he showed, though, is I think this thing about Biden, he's got real empathy. And if you do see it is there's such warmth coming through it. Right. I've plugged that. We'll put it in the notes. But what about Biden being too old? I mean, it is a serious problem. I mean, whatever you think about it, 67% of Americans in the CNN poll say that Biden does not have the stamina and sharpness to serve effectively as the president. And this has gone up 16 points

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since Biden started campaigning four years ago. If you watch him carefully, I mean, it is very politicized because, of course, the Republicans keep up this attack of sleepy Joe. But it's not difficult for them to find extraordinary examples of him tripping on steps, getting his words confused. Now, some of this has been part of his general issue all along, confusing the black and tans with the all blacks. But it is a job that requires the most astonishing mental acuity and endurance. People age in that job. And you sensed with Ronald Reagan

in his second term that it was an issue his age. And I think it was a real help to Kennedy and Obama that they were very young when they did those jobs. So now remember his major potential opponent, Trump is the same age. Slightly younger. But I think, you know, the same concerns should apply to him too. You may be aware that he is currently in our country. He is in Scotland.

He arrived yesterday. Yeah, Trump is up in Aberdeenshire looking at his golf course, and it was utterly hideous to have him back on our news screens. He came, his plane arrived, and he gets off the plane. He comes down, reporters shouts a question at him. He said, it's great to be home, great to be home. He said his mother came from Lewis. And then she said, my mother, she loved the Queen. And it's great that I got to know the Queen. She became a good friend of mine. It's a bit like your mother who loved the Queen too. You're a father from the Isles. Yeah, my mother, I wouldn't go around and say my mother became a friend of the Queen.

And then the reporter to his credit did point out that he hadn't been invited to Coronation, unlike other people we could mention Rory. Yeah, President Biden's wife, you're obviously referring to. You're determined not to comment on this. You're going to be seen on the TV.

It's just going to generate even more interest in your presence there. I think, what are you going to wear? Where are you going to wear?

I'm avoiding your questions as usual. I can't recall hearing anything about Kamala over the last three years. And the Lord which surrounded her election appears to have vanished. I'm sure there was a feeling at the time that her election to Vice President would surely be followed by her succession to President four years hence. What have I missed about her tenure? Has Kamala, in your opinion, had a good Vice Presidency so far? So for UK lessons, I mean, this will be very, very familiar to US lessons. But for UK lessons, the deal there is absolutely, when she became Vice President, people were incredibly excited.

Look like this was the first woman of color who was likely to become the next president. People felt at the time that President Biden was unlikely to run again. And the first woman, absolutely. Since then, she's had a pretty torrid time. Partly she was given some very, very difficult jobs by Biden, given immigration and border security and voter reform, which were almost impossible. Partly she's had some very high profile resignations from her team being accused of bullying. But her net popularity ratings now at 28% are lower than almost any Vice Presidents, lower than Cheney. Any thoughts on Kamala Harris?

It was interesting on the back of our leading interview with Hillary Clinton. We had lots of our listeners saying, oh, God, can't she run again? And also lots of people saying, wouldn't it be great if she could step in and run as Biden's running mate?

I think Kamala Harris has had a, you say, torrid. I don't think it's been torrid so much as just not being very noticed, not being very central to the picture. I mean, when, if you go through, I think we can overstate the importance of number twos in these situations. If you think

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of Trump and Pence, Pence didn't really have a sense, you didn't have a sense of Pence really until the end when he turned against Trump. Reagan and Dan Quayle, Dan Quayle was seen as a complete sort of numpty. But I think, I think that once Biden had decided he was going to run again, then she became less relevant to his presidency. But it was very interesting to me that in the video with which he announced his, his candidature second time around, she features a lot. I mean, like a lot. And I wonder whether that was to keep her calm, to sort of, I don't know whether she was just sort of, he was making her up a bit, or whether he actually thinks that on the road, she can bring him some benefit as a campaigner. But I think you'd have to say that she, I don't have a sense of what she's been trying to achieve as vice president. Now, when Biden was number two to Obama, he was the kind of, he was the wise old guy, he was there, he had big foreign policy experience. He was the guy that Obama would send off around the world when Hillary was busy somewhere else. And I think it was, there was a clear role there, which is why he emerged then to become the successor. I don't think she's really been clear about the role. It's an incredibly difficult role, isn't it? LBJ, famously, Linda Johnson took the role as Kennedy's vice president. And when somebody said, why on earth have you done that? I mean, at the time, he was famously in this book by Robert Caro, which anybody who's interested in the rest of his politics should read, it's called Master of the Senate, who's dominating US politics in the Senate and decided to be vice president. Thanks for plugging another book in the week that my book is published, Roy, thanks for that. I remember that in September. But what can I do? Can I, can I just remind people that the punchline though is how we J's asked, why does he become vice president? And he says, because he'd studied the historical records and one in three vice presidents go on to be president. And sure enough, Kennedy's then assassinated. You're not suggesting a plot. You're not joining the JFK conspiracy theories. Norman Mailer book about conspiracies to kill Kennedy. Yeah. Now, what about local elections? Andrew Sims, if the Tories lose a thousand or almost a thousand councillors this week, does that make an early general election more or less likely? JP Cherryton, inevitably, all parties will spin local election results. There'll be plenty of expectation management. Post made the fourth will parties alter their approach, or are they locked into the themes and tactics for a brutal long general election campaign? Well, local elections can be very, very damaging. I mean, one of the things that was the final undoing of Theresa May was catastrophic losses in the European and then local elections in, in May of 2019. And that really was the moment at which it became clear that she was going to have to go. So I think it's, I think never underestimate the impact because so many of the members of the local parties increase near local councillors. These parties are very small, and they're dominated by local councillors. And when the local councillors lose their seats and blame the central government for it, that creates a huge grassroots problem for party management. The expectations of the game is interesting because the, the elections that are being run this week are those that you're referring to. So they're coming from a very, the Conservatives are coming from a very, very low base on this one. And yet I saw Oliver Dowden being interviewed. And I suspect this is where the questions come from, because he said they expected to lose about 1000 seats. And as he said it, I thought, Oh, okay, that probably means

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they're expecting to lose about 500. And he's decided to say 1000. And then when it comes in about six or 700, they'll say, well, we did a lot better than people were expecting. And it's a game that during McKenna's Baker, when he was running the Tory party campaign machine, and he did a brilliant job one year by getting the entire media to focus only on Westminster and Wandsworth. And they did a lot better than expect. They went round saying, Oh, it's going to be disaster. We're losing Westminster, we're losing Wandsworth. That's where you need to be sending all the media. And of course, they won Westminster, they won Wandsworth. And people said, what an amazing win for the Tories where around the country that been decimated. So that's the game that's being played. I think the, I think the local elections are very, very difficult to call. Because, you know, we've talked about this a lot. I think the country is really fed up with the Conservatives. I think the country does want a change. But they're still, I think not hearing enough and seeing enough about what the change will be in the form of a Labour government. And it is hard in a local election campaign to sort of, you know, fight on local issues, but get judged on a national level. But this will be a very, very interesting week. And I think we're, my sense is the Tories are going to do badly. But I don't think it'll be 1000 losses. I think that's that is all part of Tory expectation management. Well, there's quite quite a good comments by Anthony Selden, who's just written this book on Boris Johnson, which I'm not plugging, because this week we should be concentrating above all on, but what can I do? But in an article in The Guardian, he does say about Starmer that he feels that this is a moment that really should be calling for strategic, but we're getting tactical, should be calling for the kind of major key, but we're getting the minor key. Now, because we've been accused of ageism, I want to wrap up the podcast with a question arranged around a 94 year old man making the news, 94 year old man who, you know,

comes from the left like you, but maybe who you don't always see eye to eye on.

What does Alistair think of Noam Chomsky's comments about spectator sports encouraging chauvinistic obedience? I see a lot of that within football to the point of toxicity. That's from Tio. There we are. Is it Chomsky who sees that in football or Tio?

Chomsky sees it, but Tio agrees with him. And Chomsky is 94, but going to English football matches. Yeah. Well, he's been commenting on spectator sports. Okay. Well, did you see this? This takes us neatly back to the first subject of the main podcast, the coronation. Did you see the clip I sent to you of Celtic fans in the game against Regis?

You did. I did see that. I did see that. I didn't want to see it because it's not comfortably sitting with my worldview. No. So there was a situation where, I don't know if I can really say what the Celtic fans were saying, but they were suggesting that the coronation was put into a part of the body where I believe the sun is unable to shine. And they were like all singing it. So what's that toxic chauvinism? I think it was a bit of sort of political fun.

I've noticed this year, obviously it's been an amazing year. Chauvinistic obedience, this is his word. That's what I think I'm sometimes suffering from on this podcast.

Do you think you're imposing your chauvinistic obedience on me?

What is, I don't know what chauvinistic obedience is. It's like,

you've got to read more Chomsky. They were being disobedient. The Celtic fans were being disobedient. I have noticed this year, not in the grounds, but away from the grounds,

I've noticed a bit more agro going on and a bit more kind of stuff going on. I wonder if there

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is a little bit of a return of some of the old violent ways of the past. I love football culture. I do love it. I was watching the Naples game the other day and sadly it didn't come off, but they had an aerial shot of the stadium. If Naples won their game on Sunday, they were going to win the title. They're going to win the title anyway because they're so far ahead. This aerial shot was showing all the people who were not at the game who were coming towards the stadium to celebrate what they thought was going to be this amazing win. I love that sort of stuff. I love the cultural side of it, but I hate it when it gets into nastiness and racism and xenophobia and homophobia and all the other stuff. I think it's got better in some ways, but I think away from the grounds, I've noticed a little bit of a return of it. Well, I think this goes back to Chomsky's fundamental idea as a thought control and he's concerned that putting people in large stadiums reinforces. What do you think he would think about as all having to swear allegiance? Would you see that as a form of thought control? I do think Chomsky's really much in favour of that. Now, I can't see the old name getting ready into the British monarchy. No, I don't really see that. Anyway, with a final tribute to Noam Chomsky with both his sort of, his extraordinary acuity on linguistic issues, his occasional... Don't plug his books, don't plug his books. Occasionally, I disagree with him profoundly. Occasionally, I think he's monstrously peculiar and naive, but certainly a formidable figure at 94 and Kissinger just coming up to his 100th birthday who we can discuss on another pod. Right, there we are. Thank you all very much. All the best. Bye-bye. Take care. Bye.