

[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 162. Small boats, Zimbabwe since Mugabe, and Trump's anti-mafia indictment

Welcome to the Restless Politics with me, Alistair Campbell.

And me, Rory Stewart.

And Rory, you're in America, and we're going to talk about Trump.

I'm not in Zimbabwe, but we're going to talk about Zimbabwe, where some very important elections are coming up, and I fear all sorts of bad stuff could already be happening and is going to keep happening.

And then I think in the second half, we should maybe talk a bit about this business of how the government seems to think that every week has to be called something.

We've had Stop the Boats Week, which was a complete disaster for them, and now, apparently, this is NHS Week.

So they're clearly going for their very strong points, aren't they?

Stop the Boats and the NHS.

Well, it's slightly sort of mysterious that.

So we can get into that a little bit.

And maybe as we get to the end, I'd like to ask you whether you really, if you'd been in that position, you'd be majoring on the NHS when Labour's leading so heavily on that issue.

Yeah, exactly.

And then I think we should also talk a little bit about the far right in Europe.

I mentioned last week that the Alternative for Deutschland, the German far right party, I said on the podcast that they had sort of cleansed themselves of some of the worst elements.

I got quite a lot of German people say, no, they have not.

And I've been digging in a bit deeper, so I think there's quite a lot of interesting stuff to say about them.

But shall we kick off not far from where you are with what happened in Georgia last night?

Good.

Yes.

Well, let's start with Georgia.

So we talked last week about the federal indictments.

And this week, in fact, today, as we're recording, we've just had the indictments on a state level from the state of Georgia.

And paradoxically, you would have thought that indictments at a state level are less important than a federal level.

But in fact, in this case, it's the other way around, because as the president of the United States, if he became president again, Trump would control the federal justice department and he would theoretically be able to pardon himself from a federal offense.

But he can't control the state justice and he can't control himself from a state offense in the same way.

So if he is successfully indicted and they're trying to bring the cases through in the next six months, he will be in much, much more serious trouble with the state indictments than he was with the federal.

Thoughts from you?

Well, the other interesting thing about this is it will be televised.

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Georgian cases are televised.

And the other thing is he's been charged along with others.

We talked last week about how the guy at the federal case in Washington, Smith, had decided not to name the co-conspirators, whereas in this one, the indictment, which comes from Fulton County District Attorney Fanny Willis, who is said to be a very, very tough character and against whom Trump is already going out on the attack, she has included 18 other defendants. He's now facing 91 charges in four separate indictments.

Shall I summarize quickly the Georgia charges?

People remember the Stormy Daniels charges, which was paying hush money to a porn actress. From last week, you'll remember that he was charged with conspiracy.

In other words, the federal charge last week was that he knew that he'd lost the election and lied about it.

There are charges relating to his tax affairs, but this Georgia set of charges are effectively about lying to legislature and state officials.

That's deliberately telling the legislature and state officials that he had won the election, despite the fact he knew he hadn't.

Enrolling fake pro-Trump electors, this was a moment which some listeners will remember, which is that in the American system, the electoral college has to meet after a state is won by a president.

And in the case of Georgia, Biden won the state of Georgia, so the 16 electors declared for Biden.

But at the same time, Trump supporters organized a separate group of alternative and inverted commas, otherwise fake electors who declared for Trump.

And there are also charges on breaching voter machines on cover-up.

And at the center of it all, this famous call that Donald Trump made asking people to find another 12,000 votes.

These American cases always throw out some wonderful names.

And the key guy in that is Brad Raffensperger,

Georgia Secretary of State, who when you listen to the full tape of the call, handle himself pretty well, it's quite something to have the American president on your case telling you, threatening you, that what you're doing is breaking the law when you know that actually it's the other way around.

And I think the other thing that we should get used to is hearing the phrase RICO.

And RICO is the shorthand for the Racketeer Influence and Corrupt Organizations Act.

Now, this is a piece of legislation in Georgia that is normally used to target the mafia, gangs, and organized crime.

And it's interesting how the language of this one I think is much tougher than the one in Washington.

Throughout the whole thing, she speaks of a criminal organization, the members of the enterprise.

And remember, this is something that has gone through, because they have a very different legal system to ours.

This is something that Ed Jury has looked at the evidence and then has agreed with this, that this case has to be taken forward.

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And you've got all of the things that you talked about.

And I mentioned last week, I do think that particularly as this is going to be heard in Georgia, the way that Trump treated these state officials in Georgia, and there was particularly this woman called Ruby Freeman, who I think gave evidence and broke down in tears at the hearings on Capitol Hill. Trump is one of the best known people on the entire planet.

The judge wants to get this case up and running across December, January time, that you're getting the jury in place in December.

And the fact is, it's going to be very, very hard to find a jury that won't already have very, very strong opinions about this.

But I think if there is a key element to this,

it is this fact that so many people in Georgia, across the process in Georgia, from the Republicans running the place, like Raffensperger, to the person who was literally just a civil servant doing a job, write down to all the people who were kind of attacked along the way, with organized pylons and all the rest of it, then I think he's in big trouble on this one. Well, it's amazing the way Trump was behaving in those days.

So just a little insight into it.

He called him, called Raffensperger, on January the 2nd, and he brought a whole heavy group of people in on the call with him.

So brought Rudy Giuliani in on the call,

brought his Chief of Staff, Mark Meadows, on the call.

He, by the way, Mark Meadows has been indicted in this one, and that's the first time that somebody, as it were,

was one of the senior advisors to Trump in the White House.

He's now indicted.

It's amazing.

And Trump personally called, more junior official, December 23rd, the Chief Investigator for the Georgia Secretary of State's office, telling him to scrutinize the ballots again.

So Trump was clearly, really, furiously working the phones, right the way over Christmas into New Year, personally on the phone, bullying, berating, pushing, desperate to try to find those votes, find allegations of dishonesty, make sure that he could stay in the White House.

Interesting.

Apparently, he'd made 18 attempts to get Raffensperger on the phone, and Raffensperger had been avoiding every phone call, finally got pinned down, and Trump sort of lined up with this enormous group of half a dozen heavyweights with him on the phone.

Raffensperger clearly, you know, decided to record the telephone call, and then leaked it the following day after Trump had heard him say on Fox News that the election was legal and Trump was furious and saying the guy had no clue.

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He also did a very interesting tweet.
He said after Trump had tweeted his sort of version of events,
and Raffensperger put out a tweet saying,
this is not true, Mr. President, and you know it, the truth will out.
And again, the guy's a Republican.
Another great name, Ryan Germany.
He was the guy who was sitting alongside Raffensperger in Georgia.
And so when you listen to the whole thing,
you get the feeling that Trump realized he's not getting very far.
And so he suddenly turns and he starts to pick on this guy, Ryan,
and is hoping that maybe if he goes down the food chain a little bit,
he'll get more sort of leeway.
And in fact, the opposite happens.
Ryan Germany is almost monosyllabic in saying, no, we didn't know you haven't.
No, you're not.
Yes, that is wrong.
He's very, very kind of simple and straightforward Trump.
And you can you can sort of hear Trump getting more and more exasperated.
And then he gets threatening and basically says to them,
you two are breaking the law.
You're not certifying a true election.
That's criminal offense.
You should take this very seriously.
And Trump's personality, this unpleasantness of it comes through so well.
So you've raised Raffensperger.
One of the things he said is that he said Raffensperger has a brother,
Ron, who works for China.
And turns out Raffensperger, that Trump has just somehow Googled the fact
that there's a guy called Ron Raffensperger not related to him who works for Huawei.
Rory, you're not telling me you're not telling me that Donald Trump
does that thing that you do is on a call and is hitting Google.
Does Trump do that?
He does when he's not when he's not ordering his Big Macs.
So, I mean, look, I think this is something that is enormous.
And of course, it's as we recorded last week.
I mean, I think that there are two separate things going on.
There is the hope, obviously, from many, many people,
including the two of us, that ultimately these legal processes will cripple
Donald Trump going into the next election.
But it is having absolutely no impact on his popularity amongst his Republican base.
And in fact, the details of these charges indictments do matter because the Republican
base will be trying to trivialize all of these things and say this is
completely politically motivated, which is why I quite, you know, I think

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part of the thing that will really help is bringing out the color of this, the sort of flavor of the way that Trump behaves, almost more than the legal details, just the sense of the kind of thuggish approach that he was taking day in, day out.

I saw one of the local papers in Georgia, the front page, and I suspect you will hate it because he's at the center of it, quite a big picture of him.

But then he's surrounded by all these other people.

And I suspect he quite liked the fact that in the Washington indictment, he was very much totally the center of attention.

But this lady, Fanny Willis, is basically saying that she wants them all in there together. I suspect he will absolutely hate that.

And I wonder whether this use of RICO, which by the way is punishable by, I think it's a minimum of five years and a maximum of 20 years in prison, which really is, you know, we're talking heavy sentencing now.

And I wonder whether part of the thinking there is that some of these 19 might think, you know what, I'm not going to go down for this guy.

And they start to turn.

And, you know, when we talk to your friend Richard Engel about the Pregosian film, and I've been thinking a lot about what he said since is you don't understand Russia and Putin unless until you come to the realization that Putin runs it like a mafia organization. And when you hear Trump's phone calls, when you see the way he operates, when you see the sort of people he gathers to him, you know, it feels very similar threats, intimidation, the law doesn't matter.

What matters is what I say and how I say it and when I say it and to whom I say it.

Which seems to have been also core to his business career.

I mean, I think those sort of threatening things where he lawyers up and puts nine people on the call and calls people up is what he's sort of done for 40 years in business, isn't it? That's how he threatens the tenants in his buildings.

That's how he gets his permission through from local councils, try to get planning and stuff.

I mean, it's a horrifying vision.

But let's, I mean, you mentioned Zimbabwe and maybe we can move on to Zimbabwe because we've got an election now coming up in Zimbabwe on the 23rd of August.

And Zimbabwe has, of course, been through this incredibly tragic evolution.

So very, very quickly back. Zimbabwe was a Rhodesia and it was an apartheid racist state under white rule. And it declared UDI famously from, from its relations with Britain.

And at the end of the 1970s, independence came and it was a change which many, many people in Britain were very, very optimistic about. Robert Mugabe, who had been part of the armed resistance to white rule took over, but initially he seemed to be a very moderate figure who wanted stronger connections of the West. And Zimbabwe was a very prosperous country, one of the most prosperous countries in Africa, strong agricultural base, very educated population, and still has. I mean, Zimbabwe, you see many, many nurses, doctors, professionals in Britain come from Zimbabwe. But of course, Robert Mugabe's rule became more and more horrifying. And the

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first signs of this were a massacre in Matabeleland, which was called the Winnowing of the Chaff. A.K.I. Genocide. Yeah, in which tens of thousands of people, people were killed from a minority ethnic group that opposed him. He staggered on and then in 2017, when he was trying to get his wife, Grace Mugabe, to take over, he was toppled in a coup d'état. And this really mattered to me because I was the UK Africa minister at the time. And I remember going in very, very early in the morning to the crisis room in the foreign office as this coup was taking place, sitting there with our ambassador who was trying to argue that we shouldn't be calling it a coup and that we should hope that Emerson Manangagwa, who was the man who seemed to be taking over with the backing of the military in South Africa, was a good new hope for Zimbabwe and would be an improvement. And there was extraordinary optimism at the time. I traveled out to Zimbabwe. Theresa May let me fly. I was the first British minister to visit there in many, many years, about 20 years. I was the only European or American Western minister at the inauguration of Manangagwa. And I was the first person he met after he was inaugurated. And I met civil society activists who were incredibly optimistic about the changes he would bring. And I'm afraid I was knowing much less about Zimbabwe than many of those people. I was very, very gloomy from the beginning. The whole thing seemed wrong to me. I was horrified by my first meeting with Manangagwa. He turned up with two military officers with medals all over their chests and the meetings. He spent most of the meeting reminiscing about his time in guerrilla training camps in the 1970s and talking about his friendship with Kabila in Congo. And when I tried to push for reforms to the elections, I really wanted to try to argue and was hoping that Britain could do this, that we could lead the US and our European allies to strike a deal. Because we had a carrot, which was the IMF and the World Bank. We could step in and really help the Zimbabwean economy, which was in real trouble. Zimbabwe then under Mugabe and now again, but then had been an incredible inflation. The whole economy was wrecked. So that was the carrot we could bring. We had the stick of continuing to isolate or exclude Zimbabwean. I hoped we could use those things to get him to commit to free fair elections. And since he was leading in the polls, it seemed as though he ought to have been able to commit to free fair elections without too much risk. All of that unraveled. And it unraveled very, very quickly. And all the optimism of our ambassador in civil society collapsed. And Emerson, who was called Emerson the Crocodile, maybe that would have been a clue to the kind of person he was going to be. Well, that was when that name first started to be applied to him. It was really because of his political skills. People felt he was very deaf politically. But I think it was the reason to have been gloomy from the word go was that he was very much part of the Mugabe operation. They did fall out, but they were together in terms of the freedom movement, the Five for Independence. So they were, you know, the time that they made that transition from freedom fighter to running the country, they were heroes, not just the home, but they had a lot of support abroad. Mugabe wasted so much of that. I've told you before that I met Mugabe a few times and met him in Nogatua as well. But you got the sense that their respect for Britain was zero. I think you had a lot of optimism if you thought they were going to listen. Wasn't that the inauguration of which you were shoved out of the way because some minor Chinese official wanted to sit there?

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That was the Kenyan inauguration. But it's all part of a general pattern.

Yeah. But I think that the election coming up shortly, and it's a big election this because they do lots together. They do the presidential election, the parliamentary election, and local elections. And the poll here, of course, is not an easy place to poll. And essentially, the last poll that I saw, the question was if there were election tomorrow, which was free and fair? And at the moment, the opposition leader Nelson Chameza, who leads something, a new party called the Citizens Coalition for Change. And the reason he's got a new party, by the way, is that they kind of sort of pushed his old party out of business. He almost won the election last time because the system for their presidential election, the same as the French, there's going to be about I think it's 11 contenders. If nobody gets above 50%, then there's a rerun. And of course, what happened before was that Morgan's Fangerai, he was the opposition leader who was leading, but couldn't get over 50%. And in the end, did a deal to, because there was a lot of violence, once he became clear that Mugabe might lose. And that is what is feared now, that if Melangagua loses, that that will spark off violence before the second term. But you've said before about our own dear country, that if you look at the economic position, it's very hard to imagine how a governing

party can possibly win. But just take a look at some of this. Inflation went up in June from 86.5% to 175.8%. Food inflation is at 250%. And the response of the central bank was to lift interest rates from 140% to 150%. So you're talking about an economic situation that is really grim. There was one point at which the inflation reached 231 million%.

But that was way, way back during the financial crisis. But you have a situation now where people want to be paid in American dollars rather than the Zimbabwean dollar. So the economy is a complete

basket case. And that is the backdrop. Yeah, I also, I mean, one of the things that I hadn't fully understood when I was meeting Melangagua, but was there in these conversations that we were

having about Yosef Kabila is the very, very, and this was, of course, part of the appeal of Robert Mugabe and part of the appeal, I think, still of Emerson Melangagua to many other African states. So he's not running a democracy at all. I mean, it's a totally fraudulent, fake democracy. And Biden, for example, didn't invite him to the meeting with African leaders for that reason. But all the African countries in the Commonwealth have been pushing for Zimbabwe to be readmitted to the Commonwealth. And I think one underestimates the extent to which still these people who were seen as heroes of the independence movements in the 60s and 70s have incredible charisma and reputations across the continent. And that's really what he was referring to when he was referring to being in training camps with Kabila. The story of that, it's a kind of amazing Cold War story. Melangagua is a very, very young man in his early teens. He was sent off to be trained in Egypt, in Tanganyika, in Mozambique. He was then sent to China. The Chairman Mao's government in China trained him and some others in Barbuins. He then returned to White Run, Rhodesia, and set up this thing called the Crocodile Gang, which murdered a white reservist policeman. He then blew up a train. He was arrested, finally for blowing up the train and was supposed to be sentenced to death, but he argued that he was under 21. So he served 10 years of very, very brutal. I actually didn't serve, I think he served about six and a half years, but he was put in very brutal imprisonment, solitary confinement,

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let out only 15 minutes a day, and then became the head of Mugabe's secret service. That partly also explains what's happened now, which is that after my not at all successful attempt to try to get this group from the US and EU and the UK to really push for free and fair elections in Zimbabwe, and it was a very interesting moment that for me as a politician, because I had Simon MacDonald, who was the Permanent Secretary in the Foreign Office, saying I was a naive idealist and there was no point even trying to do this. And I still don't quite know looking back on whether Simon was right. And actually, even by 2017, Britain no longer had the influence or power to really be able to influence countries to improve their election things or whether he was wrong. And actually, if I'd kept trying and kept pushing, we might have been able to make some progress on some of the things. What's your sense on influencing these things? Well, you know, I was listening to the data this German thing, and they were talking about about Niger, and they were talking about the fact that the French were now seen as such hate figures. And they actually made the point, these were two German diplomats who were talking. And they made the point that actually, they felt that Britain's post-colonialist record of maintaining some kind of relations, but absolutely freely letting the other country go, had been more effective, they said, than France, which had sought to cling on to a lot of the powers which formerly it had given away. So one of the reasons, for example, why there is such resistance and opposition to the French in parts of Western Africa now, is as a sort of blowback against that. Now, I don't know if that's right or wrong. But I do remember from some of the Commonwealth heads of government meetings, that there was always a sense, and as you say, particularly with those countries that had had real struggle to get free from Britain, there was a little bit of them looking down on us. And I think that being particularly resistant to influence that we probably thought we still had. And I wonder whether that is partly what the ambassador was maybe trying to tell you, you've kind of got to go with the flow?

Yeah, yeah, I think that's right. And I think she probably, you know, it's a perfectly reasonable calculation. She'd made a real effort to get close to Emerson Mungakwa. She'd correctly predicted that he was going to become the next leader. She was very proud of the fact that she had a closer relationship with him than any of the other ambassadors. And here was I coming along saying, I think this is a bad guy, I think we're going to have to put down some red lines, we're going to have to force him to do things he doesn't want to do. And she really felt that I was endangering that relationship that she craved it and probably without much benefit. Anyway, the truth of the matter is that all failed. And that whole gamble to make him pro-Western collapsed. He's now become very close to Putin. You know, he was the guy who in that summit, which Putin, which we talked about, which Putin held with African leaders about five, six weeks ago, was the most explicit in saying that he fully supported the special operations in Ukraine and onwards fully supported Putin's invasion of Ukraine. He's been dealing very closely with Lukashenko from Belarus and has been doing these extraordinary deals, effectively taking guns and butter and agriculture machinery.

Well, it have Rory, if the Tories right-wing have their way and drag us out of the European Convention on Human Rights, he'll have a rival in Sunak because he'll then be in a formal alliance with Russia and Belarus. It's the two European powers out of that.

I think that's maybe stretching it a little bit. I can't defend Rishi Sunak for a second.

I don't think he's endorsing Moon and Gagwa. In fact, actually,

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gives me a chance to say something nice about James Cleverley, which I rarely do. In Zambia, a change has taken place and a guy called HH, finally, a young, more liberal, more pro-Western progressive politician, having been campaigning for well over 15 years, has finally taken power. He's a sort of clue to what might happen if Nelson Chemisa, by some miracle, were to make it through. Once HH took over, it's been wonderful. There's been renegotiation of debt. Britain has been very generous in that. Janet Yellen has visited. In Zambia, you suddenly see the country lurching very, very quickly in a pro-Western direction, and the UK and the US and others being very generous towards Zambia in a way that's really terrified the Chinese, which is why I think that China, which has big lithium interests in Zimbabwe, along with Russia, are going to be doing all they can to make sure that Moon and Gagwa remains in power.

Well, there's another metal that's extremely important. I can't remember the name of the listener who has every week been saying, why haven't you mentioned Al Jazeera's investigation into the gold mafia? The reason we hadn't mentioned it is because neither of us are really aware of what it was, but I've since had a look at your friend Al Jazeera's some of their work, and they have done a pretty amazing, very long investigation into these gold smuggling gangs in Southern Africa with a particular focus on Zimbabwe and the involvement of very senior officials in smuggling and money laundering, which of course helps them to get around sanctions. Anyway, I won't go into all the detail now, but we should maybe just put some of it in the newsletter. It's a very, very interesting story about how modern money and modern politics works. A little shout out. I've often mentioned my friend Joshua Knot, who does his Africa brief, and he's drawn my attention to an amazing African professor who died recently called Professor Tandika, who's taught in London. Tandika has a very, very interesting way of analyzing African economies. He says there are basically three forms of African economies. There are the Southern African economies where the minerals are deep in the ground. There are the West Coast economies like Ghana, which are cash crops economies, and then there are the economies in the center of Africa like Congo, where the minerals are much easier to get. What he says is that for economies like Zimbabwe and South Africa and Zambia, where the minerals are deep in the ground, you have this combination of coercive states because they have to force labor to work in these very difficult conditions, large numbers to be working underground, and also being captured by these mining businesses. I think that that's part of the story of your talking about with gold, but also with lithium and everything else they're doing. Yeah. One of the real mouth-opening scenes in these films from Al Jazeera is when one of Zimbabwe's leading ambassadors moves there. He's been given a special role to attract investment from different parts of the world, and he's being set up by these undercover reporters, and he offers us to use his diplomatic privileges to carry more than a billion dollars of dirty cash into the country. There's another one where somebody is offering an introduction to the president who he calls the king, but you'll have to pay \$200,000 for that. It's a pretty murky scene. Anyway, that's another one. You keep going on about Joe Biden being told, too old. Menengagwa is 80. I think his opponent is good several decades younger than that, but shall we take a break? Very good.

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Welcome back to the rest of politics with me, Rory Stewart.

And me, Alistair Campbell.

This is a real thing for somebody who's at the centre of political communications, Alistair. We've had the Conservative Party leading on an NHS week. Now, this really surprised me, and I'd like you to explain this to me, because if you look at the polls at the moment, Labour is really leading very, very strongly on NHS waiting lists. So, between Rishi Sunak and Keir Starmer, who respondents trust the most to achieve each of the following? Cutting NHS waiting lists, 37% for Keir Starmer, 18% for Rishi Sunak. Growing the economy, 34% Keir Starmer, 29% Rishi Sunak. So, they're close, actually, on things like inflation, economy, national debt, but Starmer has got twice the figures of Rishi Sunak when it comes to cutting NHS waiting lists. People have much more trust in him on the NHS. The only thing that Rishi Sunak is leading Keir Starmer on is in the question of stopping small boats crossing the English Channel. In other words, on these five pledges that he's made, there's only one of them that he's currently ahead of Labour on, and on the NHS he's well behind. So, why would they announce an NHS week?

Rory, you're asking me who worked for a competent, efficient, professional government to analyse the thinking of a government that, frankly, is none of those things.

So, I find it very, very difficult to do.

Oh, God, give it your best shot. Give it your best shot.

I'll give you a best shot. There was a wonderful question this week from somebody called Joel Rawlings, who said, after small boats week and now NHS week, should Sunak have a be-a-fit-and-proper government rather than just spouting divisive nonsense to get the right-wing press riled up week?

And I think that's what we're dealing with here, and I'll give you an example.

Let's just take it back for a second, though, because I get the small boat week stuff, and obviously, he's leading in the polls on that, and that's appealing to a particular base, and you and I are very concerned about that because that's an anti-immigrant base. But it's a real base. There's a real chunk of voters out there who are very upset about immigration, upset about small boats.

But they're now, Rory, they're now a little bit upset because they had small boats week, and every single day, something went wrong on it.

So, let's just go through the small boats week, and then we'll come back to NHS week, and I will try. Okay.

Thank you.

So, during small boats week, on one of those days of the week, always the 10th, they had a record for this year of people crossing on small boats, 756.

That took them in that three-day period, the 10th to the 12th, there's 1600, which took them over the 100,000 mark since 2010.

Current asylum backlog, 173,000.

So, the small boats week seems to have highlighted that it wasn't working very well.

So, they say, ah, well, Rwanda, but that's not going well.

Ah, well, we've got the barge.

What happened on the barge was that suddenly they discovered that it had legionella bacteria

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in the water.

So, the very, very small number of people who've been put onto it, like 15 when it should have been 500, then had to be taken off.

And so, and then, of course, at the end of it, we had the most nauseating tweet of the week award to Swela Braverman, my thoughts and prayers with the people who just died trying to cross the channel.

So, that didn't go well.

Let's fast forward now, too.

No, no, no.

Let's put pause for a second before we go to our next question.

I mean, I think, I mean, it's such a difficult issue this, but there is no doubt.

And I think we both agree on this, and I think you would,

or maybe I'm being a bit cheeky here, but I suspect if you were in government, you would also feel that it is not sustainable or sensible to have a lot of people crossing the channel in small boats in this way.

It's dangerous for them.

It's no, it's not even the beginnings of a sensible form of asylum policy.

And any sensible government, and I think Keir Starmer's also accepted this, needs to find a way of stopping this.

It's, it's not, I mean, I understand.

Rory, you have to have a proper plan.

You can't just spray it.

Look at the other thing that happened during small boats week.

They basically said, well, if plan A Rwanda doesn't work, we've got plan B, which is Ascension Island.

And then we had a story saying that the RAF wouldn't fly them there.

They don't have a plan.

They're making this up day by day is costing a lot of money.

If they actually invested the money they were putting into the barge and Rwanda and to get in the backlog down, then they might make some progress.

I mean, I think actually it's very interesting plan being put forward by something called ESI, which is a think tank called the European Stability Initiative run by an amazing Austrian called Geralt Knaus, who suggests that really the key to this obviously is getting the French to cooperate and properly police those beaches and obviously the, you know, 200 million euro or whatever where she's, you know, agreed to give the French government hasn't actually resulted in the kind of policing the beaches.

But what Geralt Knaus and ESI suggest is that France is a safe country and that Britain should not be prioritizing taking asylum seekers from France.

If people have made it to France, they're safe.

Instead, Britain should be prioritizing taking asylum seekers from countries where people are genuinely at risk.

And the way to do it is to say to the French, we will take asylum seekers applying for asylum in France who come from countries where they are genuinely at risk.

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And in return, we will return to France, anyone who crosses on a small boat.
But the six people who died from Afghanistan, how do we know what they did?
They're safe in France.
They're safe in France.
Okay, but they might have...
That's just really important.
I mean, this is important.
I think you're being far too fair.
You keep talking about a sensible government.
We don't...
This isn't a plan.
I know.
I'm not defending the government.
I'm not defending the government.
You are defending the government.
I'm defending a report from ESI and Geralt Knaus, which has a sensible solution to this problem.
Nobody in the British debate is having any sensible conversation about this.
Labor isn't, you aren't.
All that's happening at the moment is we're rubbishing the government.
I agree.
The government isn't doing it right.
Rwanda's daft, the Central Islands daft, barges are daft.
That's their policy.
I agree, but can we move on to talk about what a sensible solution might be?
That's fine.
But the guy who's writing your report for the think tank,
he's not going to be running the British government.
He's going...
The British government has as its vice chairman,
somebody who says that if they don't like it on the barge,
they should fuck off back to France.
Rishi Sunak defends that.
Soella Braverman defends that.
So I think you are defending the government unless you actually are willing to say
that this is classic populism.
It is not designed to address the problem.
It's designed to exploit the problem.
Rwanda is there, as you said earlier, to get the base fired up.
The barge is there so that people can watch the telly and say,
yeah, they should fuck off back to France.
That is what we now have.
We don't have a policy.
We have a government exploiting a problem.

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So I don't think you can say it's all down to everybody.

It's labor's fault.

It's my fault.

It's your fault.

We have a government.

Generic, Robert Generic effectively said this the other day, that if they brought the backlog down too much, it wouldn't be a deterrent.

So they want a high backlog.

And they're not doing anything to bring that backlog down.

100% agree with you about Rwanda, Ascension Islands, barges,

Robert Generic's comments.

I think all of that is horrible.

The government is getting this wrong.

100% I am not defending the government.

However, I do think that it is important to recognize France is a safe country.

And it is mad to have a policy in place that is encouraging people to make dangerous crossings from France.

It would be much more sensible for Britain to be taking asylum seekers from countries where they're genuinely at risk, not countries like France.

And if they agreed to take asylum seekers applying for asylum in France to Britain, in exchange for returning anyone who crossed on a boat back to France, I think that would be the core of a good policy.

OK. And I'm not going to disagree with that.

I'm simply saying that with the government that we have,

I think that's a non-starter.

And I'd like to see Labour produce a good policy.

OK. I agree with you on that.

I agree with you. This government's rubbish.

But I'd like to see Evette Cooper take this plan seriously and try to tell us why she doesn't think that's a good plan.

Look, the Labour Party, I agree, has to have detailed proposals that they say how they're going to address problems where they're attacking the government.

But I think on this, and we can talk about the National Health Service in a minute as well, the idea that the Labour opposition right now should be the ones who are expected to solve problems which are fundamentally being both created and then exploited by this government, I think is a bit rich.

So let's go on to the National Health Service.

Now, why they have a National Health Service week is, I suspect, because they're thinking, right, we're not in great shape on this.

Let's show that we've got a plan.

Now, that's the only logical explanation I can give.

So what actually happened, and this goes back to my point,

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we've got this really weird thing in our politics at the moment.
We've effectively got a government that's behaving like an opposition
and an opposition that's trying to behave like a government.
And both actually, I think, will be better off
if they try to do the jobs they've got.
Labour being far more aggressive in opposition
and also far more proactive about bringing forward its own agenda for the future.
And the government, as that question has said, stopping behaving
like a sort of 24-hour juvenile campaign team
and actually start governing.
So I think they've come out.
And you know the first thing that happened in NHS week?
They're basically getting rid of the cancer,
the two-week waiting time to see a cancer specialist.
Right, so that's a bad start.
And then what was it actually about?
And I think that sometimes it's an advantage
if you're following politics to see the extent to which
the Tory party has got so many papers in its pocket.
There was a piece in either the times or the Sunday times,
I can't remember what it was.
And it went through week by week
how the Tory party were going to be campaigning.
They're going to have a week showing
that only the Tories have a plan to deal with small boats.
And then they're going to have NHS week.
And the purpose of NHS week is to show
that the health service is worse in Wales and Scotland.
No mention of Northern Ireland, by the way,
because they don't care about it,
and that because nobody can vote for the Tories there.
So we've now had for the last couple of days
this row going on about Wales against England,
dividing rather than bringing people together,
completely overlooking the fact
they have totally different reporting systems.
To be fair to the Welsh Government,
they've come out, they've admitted they have challenges.
Nobody making the point that how much money
the health services get in the rest of the UK
is dependent on the economic performance of the UK as a whole.
And then likewise up in Scotland to go at the SMP.
It's all about politics, Rory.

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It's got nothing to do with governing the country.
Yeah, I'm not disagreeing with you on that.
It just seems a slightly weird bit of politics
when this is their weak spot.
When Labour's double digit ahead of you on something,
I wouldn't have thought it's the thing that you want to emphasise.
Yeah, but you've got to fight back, haven't you?
I mean, it was when you get to election.
And also it's one of his five priorities.
So if he's going to stick to these five priorities,
and to be fair to him, he is doing that,
even if it's all a bit sort of a bit lame.
I mean, he was out today in a hospital.
I mean, the guy's in permanent campaign mode.
Even on holidays in campaign mode.
You know, can't wait to go to Disneyland,
man of the people, all that stuff.
Briefing out stuff.
You know, there was one of them that said, you know,
Starmers, Sunax, he's fired up after eating lots of sushi
and working out to Taylor Swift spin classes.
And he's going to come back to kick sand in Starmers face.
We don't have serious politics anymore, Rory.
No, no, I agree with you on that.
Now, let's move on to the even grimmer story
of the far right and the populism in Europe.
And you've been listening to some interviews and speeches
by politicians from AFD, the Alternative for Germany.
Just before we get onto that,
just a little bit of a recap for listeners on populism in Europe.
So most major countries in Europe,
in fact, almost every country in Europe,
with the possible exception of Portugal,
and I'd like to talk a little bit about Portugal,
why it's the exception,
but pretty much every other country in Europe
has a strong populist and often far right thing going on.
In two countries, actually, sorry, three now,
Hungary, most notably, and Poland,
you have these populist governments in place,
strongly authoritarian populist governments, right?
In Italy, Giorgio Maloney, who inherited a party
with neo-fascist roots, is the prime minister,

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and her deputy prime minister is this man Matteo Salvini, who's a pretty brutal strongman, who was a great apostle of Vladimir Putin, and has been against same-sex marriage and all this kind of stuff. But I guess the places which we've been focusing on a lot recently are Sweden, where we talked about the Swedish Democrats, which become the second largest party. It's another party with neo-Nazi roots. The Netherlands, where the second largest party is this thing called the Party of Freedom, with only one member, who's this man, Giert Wilders. Oh, how would I pronounce his name? The Vilders.

Very good, thank you. Who compares the Koran to Mein Kampf and is all set up on the anti-marriage stuff. France, we've talked about a bit, where the RN, which used to be the National Front, took a 9 million euro loan from a Russian bank, which was part of a 40 million euro loan, was run by Le Pen's father, who was a Holocaust denier. And now we're on to the AFD in Germany, which again, having done very, very well in 2017, where they were the third largest party in the country, seemed to collapse a bit in 2021, but now are well back again in the polls, polling second. So tell us a bit about the AFD in Germany.

Yeah, just briefly, I think you missed out one of the big ones there, which is the right-wing populist party in Finland, which is now a part of government as well.

So there's-
True Finns.

The true Finns, yeah. So look, there's no doubt that in most countries in Europe now, there is a fairly substantial minority that is very right-wing, populist right-wing, ultra, in some cases, ultra-nationalist. And the AFD, as I said to you earlier, I got a message from, including from a journalist that I know and respect, who said, listen, I think you're being a bit soft on them.

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And he sent me a whole load of clips
from recent interviews and speeches.
And some of them were utterly horrific.
There's a guy called-
You mentioned Mein Kampf there.
One of the TV stations did a thing
where they went up to delegates at the AFD conference
in Magdeburg recently,
and they read them a succession of statements.
And they said at the end of each statement,
who said that?
Was that Björn Hucka,
who's this leading AFD figure in Turingen,
or was it from Mein Kampf by Adolf Hitler?
And of course, none of them could answer.
Either they dismissed him and said,
you're just causing trouble, all they said.
Oh, I think that by Björn Hucka, maybe not.
And I then thought, you know,
and part of me worries about even talking
about people like this because-
And there's a real breast-beating going on
in the German media at the moment,
because this guy, Hucka,
he was one of the summer interviews,
one of the German traditions is this summer interview
that they do on some of the big TV stations.
And a regional station, MDR,
did this interview with Björn Hucka.
And one of the things he said was that
he thought, obviously, mixed marriages
with people from different religions
was a terrible thing,
and immigrants were weak in schools, etc.
But he went big against inclusion.
And he said at one point that
including people with disabilities in schools
was an ideological project,
i.e. of the left, from which we need to be freed.
Now, Germany is a signatory
to the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Disabled,
which includes inclusion.
Now, of course, it set off a huge, great sort of thing.

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He got attacked for it, probably welcomed being attacked.
So you sort of think how we got to a place
where this guy, he's now on 30% in the polls in Turingan.
The FD nationally is on 20%,
and this guy in Turingan is on 30%.
And his combined polling at the moment
is ahead of the three parties
that make up the governing coalition.
So this is a real thing.
There's a lot of similarities
between these parties across Europe.
Absolutely.
The Russia thing is part of it.
I mean, they're all, you know, there's another guy.
The guy, they had the conference I mentioned,
which I was watching a bit of,
and then they had another conference.
I felt one conference was enough for me.
They then had another one
where they were selecting their candidates
for the European elections.
And the guy who's number one in the list
is this guy called Maximilian Kahr.
And I'm going to do this in German, Rory,
and then I'll tell you what it says,
because I think it does sound a lot scarier in German.
He said that this is our platform.
Kein Klima zenden Wohlstein,
Kein Gender zenden Familie,
Keine Einwanderung zenden Volk,
Kein Krieg zenden Frieden.
No climate, in other words,
we're not talking about the climate, but prosperity.
Not gender, but family.
Not immigration, but folk, us, the people,
the real people.
And then finally, not war, but peace.
And they had a big thing, no weapons to Ukraine,
stop criticizing Putin.
So these trends, I mean, a lot of these parties,
I mean, it's interesting how there's a sort of
right-wing populist playbook emerging so clearly.
Many of these parties now, as you say,

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15, 20% of the polls, many of these, many of the countries I've mentioned, the second largest party. We haven't talked about the Freedom Party in Austria, York Hiders Party, absolutely enormous. They got up to 26% in 2017, collapsed again. I mean, many of them get caught up in corruption scandals, in case Austria is something called the Ibiza, Ibiza affair, where again, somebody posing as the niece of a Russian oligarch managed to persuade senior government ministers to give them concessions, business concessions, in return for positive media coverage. So I think there's a collection of things. There's climate, AFD are genuine climate deniers, but many of the others downplay climate as much as they can. Immigration, obviously, absolutely central to everything that these people say. A loss of stuff about families, often opposition to same-sex marriages, which you get from people like Salvini, Islamophobia, very central to a lot of what they're doing. And often, as you say, historically pro-Russian, although some of them have changed, interesting Salvini and Maloney having been very pro-Putin were critical of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. So the invasion of Ukraine actually lost Russia some support amongst these groups, which will surprise them, because they really took them for granted and saw what they were their natural allies. And of course, the Poles have been very strongly anti-Russian. Well, they're worried that they'll be next. The other place we didn't mention was Bulgaria. And the star guest speaker at the AFD conference was a Bulgarian politician called Kostarin Kostarinov. Now, as you're a massive football fan, you will know there was a Bulgarian international of that name as well. So not to be confused with the man who played 48 times for Bulgaria. But this guy, he got a huge round of applause for basically saying Germany's got to take its place again as the great power Uber Europa. Goodness, yeah.

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And on the list, on the list of the European candidates, one of them was going on about drain the swamp. That's Brussels, rather than Washington. One of them was going on about dexit. That's not their official position, but it's obviously part of it. And they also talk about the great replacement. Yes. I mean, interesting. Many of them have moderated their position. Many of them started as strong Euro skeptic anti Euro parties, anti Schengen parties, but many of them, including Marine Le Pen and France and AFD, have muted that down. I do think, though, apart from being appalled and horrified by them, when you get to 20, 30% of the vote, it becomes increasingly difficult to simply ignore or exclude these parties and taking seriously the fact that there are very, very large chunks of populations in Europe who are now increasingly unhappy about the scale of immigration and some of the economic sacrifices they feel they're having to make on climate change is going to be definitional. And I think, since it seems very likely that the Labour Party is going to come in in Britain, but I think other moderate progressive parties around Europe, we can expect them probably to be responding to some of this by tightening up their own immigration policies and beginning to tighten up some of the climate taxes they're imposing on people, because you can't continue to ignore 20, 30% of your population indefinitely. No, I agree, but also the policy, there's no doubt that some of the same mistakes that people like me would have made in relation to the right as it was rising up and eventually ending up with Brexit, then a lot of that will be going on now, and I think we shouldn't repeat those mistakes. But I honestly, this is back to our government, I really don't believe the answer is in meeting populism with populism. And I think that this is time, and this is where I do think Labour should be, to be honest with people, that these are real challenges, really difficult, and what's more, they're going to get worse because of climate, and they're going to get worse because of the growing inequality

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there is between and within regions,
and they are the big challenges that have to be addressed
and they're not going to be addressed by this week, that week,
the next week, turning everything into a 24-7 campaign
if you're in government.

I guess what you need to do is don't become a populist,
stick to policies that are ethical and progressive,
but at the same time, acknowledge voters' feelings,
and explain that you have a plan,
and how that plan is going to address the things
that they're deeply concerned about.

So you've got to find the balance between saying it's tough,
it's difficult, it's going to get worse,
but here is a very, very clear plan
on how we're going to get on top of those things.

Good.

Good bad.

Good bad, yeah.

Speak soon.

Speak soon, bye-bye.