

[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 165: Question Time: Populism in Portugal, texting David Cameron, and a challenger to Trump?

Welcome to the Restless Politics Question Time with me, Rory Stewart.

And me, Alistair Campbell, and Rory, I want to start with an apology to our listeners.

When we get things wrong, we always admit it, and I don't know why I said this, because I knew even after I said it that it was wrong, but anyway, this is from somebody called Ann Onimus. Ann Onimus? Oh, Anonymous, I see. Very, very funny. Ann Onimus says, you were very poorly informed about the police service Northern Ireland data breach. The release of the data was in response to a freedom of information request. It was not due to a cyber attack. It reportedly went through five separate checks before being posted. It should not have been so easy, as you suggest. It may not have been an accident. Ann Onimus also goes on to point out, it's Catholic members of the PSNI who are at risk of a result of this breach, as they're considered by some on the far right nationalist side as treacherous for having joined the force previously infamous as the RUC. Second part of that question, fairly loaded, Ann. What's really strange, Rory, after we recorded it, I realized I'd said that, and I knew it was absolute bollocks, but I forgot to phone the production and tell them. So there we are. It went through.

Just on this one. So I mean, the BUCs reported on this. So essentially, there were two breaches. The first breach happened when data was made public in error in response to an FOI request and appeared online for three hours last Tuesday. And then a second data breach involving the theft of a spreadsheet with the names of 200 officers and staff emerged the following day. And that, as she says, is not a cyber breach. That was actually the theft of a police issue laptop and radio from a private vehicle. But it's somebody, a second person, just been arrested by an online police. So taking it very seriously. But it's a reminder to all of us, because if you read too quickly these stories that says a major data breach, one's a major assumption is that it's a cyber attack, not that somebody's releasing it in response to a freedom of information.

No, but I knew because I remember thinking at the time, who on earth would have released that as an FOI? So anyway, slapped risk for me and I'm blaming the heat. Now, the next one is you. Populism in Portugal. Tommy Ribeiro-Homes. Rory teases with the Portuguese exception to the populist way, but you ended up not going into it on the podcast. The populist shaga party has grown rapidly over its short existence. And indeed it has Rory. It's now the third political force. I sort of knew that when you said it. And I thought maybe he knows more than I do here. But, you know, they're going into the European elections and they're currently at 13.2%, which isn't bad for a, you know, smaller party. They've got 12 seats in parliament. And even though they've got none in the European parliament, on that voting, they gained three or four seats of Portugal's share in the European parliament. And they are pretty right-wing. I mean, they've got similar rights to premises slightly neo-Nazi groups.

It's definitely true. They do have this party, but Portugal has had a different history to other European countries. And I don't want to overdo it, but I think that you can make a case that Portugal's been a really remarkable example of moderation. You presumably are cheered up by the fact that the two main parties are the Socialist Party and the Social Democratic Party.

Absolutely. As far as it's done pretty well, I mean, you know, so yeah, they're a rare

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success story on the more progressive side.

It's worth looking at them. Maybe you should look at them a bit more. So obviously Guterres, who's the UN Secretary General was, was their leader, Antonio Costa and now. But people often sort of think about them as though they're just a sort of subset of Spain. But in fact, their historical experience is a bit different. Yes, like Spain, they were under a dictatorship to the early 70s, but it wasn't a dictatorship that like Franco's, it wasn't one that tried to crush kind of national identities. It didn't have quite the extreme brutality of Franco. They had a much more dramatic transition out of dictatorship. Spain, there were a lot of issues that weren't dealt with in the 70s that continue to haunt and you see this through moving Franco's body and stuff. Unlike Spain, they didn't grow into this huge housing bubble. And Spain, of course, has massive automobile industry, wind manufacturing, tourism on one of the largest scales in the world. Whereas Portugal is still very much doing things like manufacturing cork, manufacturing shoes. They're also different because traditionally, a bit like Ireland, which I guess is maybe a comparable economy in terms of size and scale until it started to grow so quickly. The problem in Portugal wasn't immigration. It was immigration. Portuguese leaving to go to other countries, the way that people do from places like Romania or Albania. So there wasn't the same underlying stuff. And finally, I think in the financial crisis, Spain ended up with nearly 50% youth unemployment. And I think their general unemployment rate shot up to nearly twice that of Portugal's. So maybe there haven't been quite the same drivers in Portugal in terms of the 2008 financial crisis, immigration and other things. I mean, they still obviously inherit the problems with social media. They did go through a brutal situation, the financial crisis, their debt. But maybe that's part of the reason why they've tended to be more moderate and more centrist in their politics since the 70s. Costa is now in his third term, which is pretty rare for any leader these days. But there have been quite a lot of scandals and resignations in recent months in his third term. I think he's lost double figures now. He's lost ministers and secretaries of state, which is almost Boris Johnson level, and partly to do with some issues of corruption and also past conducts. But I think that you're broadly right that we're talking about a pretty successful progressive government. We should thank our eagle ear to Portuguese listener for pointing out that we didn't go back to something that we said we were going to. So thanks for that. Very good. Okay, next question coming in from Siddhartha Kare. What are your predictions for the Republican primaries? Any thoughts on the Reagan-oriented Vivek Ramaswamy? Is this the guy that everybody's talking about with the big money coming behind? Yeah, so Vivek Ramaswamy is very, very young. I think he's in his late 30s. He is famously kind of fast, eloquent talker. He is an extreme isolationist. He seems to want to have America to have almost nothing to do with the world at all. He's, I think, said that if America manages to get independent with semiconductors, then there's no point in defending Taiwan at all. And as Rhonda Santis loses some of his momentum and energy, people are beginning to focus more on Vivek Ramaswamy. Well, I don't know much about him at all. So I'm buying to your superior knowledge on that. And look, I feel that unless these legal cases against Trump really do him, I think he's going to be the candidate. It's not that long ago. People were talking about Rhonda Santis as being the great white hope. As you said yesterday, he's virtually vanished.

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I see Trump's not turning up for the first debate. Chris Christie had a wonderful, wonderful put down on him about that, basically saying that he was both useless and a coward. So there are some sort of voices coming out telling the truth about Trump.

Very good.

James Thompson, in light of GCSE and A-level results, in your well-traveled and worldly opinions, which education systems from which country is the most fit for purpose and effective?

How should we measure success in schools? We had quite a lot of questions about education this week. Jack Harris, seeing as the education secretary has admitted that A-levels about extension exams are pointless in the long term, I was wondering if you could define the point of education. I don't think she was quite saying that. She did say something, I think, rather odd for an education secretary on the day that exams were coming out. She said in 10 years time, nobody will care. I think that is a very odd message for an education secretary put out there. Well, I'd defend her for a second, because I think one of our questions that she defended didn't they? It is true that by the time you're 10 years into the workplace, people don't pay any attention to what your A-levels were.

Yeah, but is that the sensible thing to say on the day that kids are sweating over their exams?

I just thought it was a very, very odd thing to say.

Okay, even though it's true.

Well, it's true in some regards, but you still have to go in, particularly in the modern world, people having to reply for jobs for most of their lives. So I think it does matter.

So it's partially true, but I thought it was a very glib and silly thing to say on the day that, everybody's getting the exams. On the main point, let me just say, the countries which overwhelmingly top virtually every big global education survey you see are Canada, Finland, South Korea, and I'll tell you the one that's coming up big time on the rails is Estonia.

And they're all different. But if I can think of three things that I think they really drive through their system. One is no segregation, whether that's by class, whether that's by private public, whether that's by grammar, they all tend to want to go to the same schools.

The second thing, which I think is the most important is that they really value teachers.

And that is not just reflected in pay. And the other thing is that those teachers are not on a totally constant treadmill of exams and inspection. And the third thing is the some strong system of local oversight. And I think they're things that we weakened. Tell us about the local oversight.

So it's not all done from the center. It's more devolved down to the local authority.

Yeah, the local authorities have real power. They're properly funded from the center. But then there's real local oversight of schools. And I think that we have got our system much more centralized than it used to be. But I think this point about teachers is fundamental.

You know, we do seem to have had over the last few years in particular, a sense of government and the educational sort of authorities being at war with teachers. And I just think it's not the way to go. Teachers have got to be valued in a way that at the moment they're not. So I think that's the answer to James's question. Those countries which value their teachers make everybody feel ownership of the schools that they go to. I think Canada and Finland in particular, I don't know about South Korea, but Canada and Finland, there is virtually no private education market at all, because they know that they can go to good schools. Everybody knows they can go to good state schools. So there's no point paying a lot of money if you can get a good education anyway.

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Yeah, I agree with you. So what did politics teach you about yourself? Amy Gandon, what did you most

learn about your own character during your time in politics? What positive and what negative traits did it bring out in you? Oh, Lord. And any more of one than the other?

It definitely brought out my obsessiveness. Is that a good thing or a bad thing? I think there were times where it was good and there were times where it was bad. I think it definitely played into my sense of tribalism. Although you would argue I still have a lot of that, I can tell you I have a lot less that I used to. I think it made me quite intolerant at times. I think it made me, I often, and I still have this, I often will analyse something and see a problem so clearly that I just cannot understand why other people don't see it the same way. And that is always a mistake in politics. What about you?

So I found politics very, very damaging, very damaging for my kind of body, mind and soul. I think it's a world that doesn't really encourage stepping back and having the space for critical thinking. But I also learnt the flip side of that, which is I learnt my weakness, which is too much of a tendency to get into the details of things. I became a better minister when I was able to really boil down my thinking to a simple position, a clear simple position. And initially, I sort of slightly despised that. But I realised that actually it was moments when I was able to say, for example in prisons, I will resign unless I bring violence down in a year. A simple statement like that really gave me the kind of entry point into doing the kind of things that I wanted. So it's a very, very strange profession though. I think it's not just social media. I think the whole emphasis on campaigning, the whole style of political argument pushes against what we need, which is careful, thoughtful policy analysis. So I found it very, very difficult. But in a way, you're saying that that was because that is your character and your character didn't change. And that's why you found it difficult. That's maybe not a bad thing.

No, I think parts of my character probably did change. I probably became a bit more fragile, a bit more insecure, a bit more needy. I mean, after five years on the back benches, I began to notice to my eternal shame that I was sending kind of creepy texts to David Cameron, congratulating him on his latest speech in the hope that he might promote me.

Oh, right. Okay, I see. Okay. So that is not you?

Yeah, that I did not think was me. No, I went in thinking I was a pretty kind of independent, secure figure. And I sort of stood up to Cameron and I disagreed and I rebelled, you know, big vote about the Hasselords. And I tried to chart my own course. And then, as the years rolled on, and I found myself stuck in the horror of the back benches, I began to discover this more creepy ambition emerging, which made me pretty ashamed of myself. My book has been about trying to get people involved in politics. I hope you don't sort of go around the country. This is Willy Wilde, I used to say, stirring up apathy.

He used to say that was, he used to say that was his job was to go around the country stirring up apathy. My great theory is that the way to change is to make people stare really hard at the problem, be brutally honest in their analysis of the problem. And that's actually the way to make things improve. Yeah, well, I hope you're right. Here we are. This is also really about politics and how is Edward Gauchier, I've just reread, obviously, a Tory rereads books, Marie Laconte's great book about gossip at Westminster. To what extent do you think gossip is a good or bad part of Westminster? How much should it factor into your daily roles there?

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I mean, the place was just full of gossip. It was really, really disturbing.

One of the things that made me sad is highly intelligent colleagues. And you know, whatever you thought of them, people like quasi-quoting had a big brain, but it was impossible to get them to be serious. It was impossible to get them to sit down and talk in detail about policy. The whole culture of the thing was about offhand jokes, gossip, sitting in the tea rooms, looking at the newspapers, seeing which scandal had hit another colleague, gossiping about who was being promoted

and who was going down there. And the culture of the journalists too, the lobby, was basically not really about taking ideas seriously or the integrity of individual seriously. It was all about who's up and who's down. What was your experience? I absolutely hate gossip. I don't really see that as gossip. What I hate, and there's a lot of it in politics, is when stories develop about people and nobody knows whether they're true or not, but nobody really cares because it's just gossip.

Now, I fell victim to some of those. I remember this story went, I think I've talked to this story about a story went around that I was having this affair with the Tory MP's secretary. And it went, it was like everywhere. It was like, you know, and I sort of started to see people looking at me differently and all that sort of stuff. And it was like, and I saw it. So, do I say anything or don't I? And, you know, it was completely untrue. Now, I didn't, I had loads of stuff thrown at me all the time. So it didn't really bother me that much. But it bothered the woman a lot. And she, I think, found it very, very difficult to deal with it. And then there's other sorts of gossip. I often think about Leon Britton, the stories that went around about him, that were just truly horrible. And used to hear people say, well, you know, no smoke without fire, no smoke without fire. But it was gossip. No, no, it's completely horrible. So I had the same. So I had a story that was put in the newspapers and was reported in the newspapers from a spreadsheet put out on the sexual misdemeanors of Conservative MPs. And my name was listed with

the name of my parliamentary assistant. So it said, Rory Stewart, and then the name of the parliamentary assistant, I'll repeat her name on this, but Rory Stewart asked his assistant to do odd things. Literally, I have no idea what this was. I mean, maybe she had complained to someone in the canteen that I'd asked her to go and get sushi or something. But the implication was clearly some kind of weird sexual activity. And of course, I was, you know, I was a married man, I had kids, and for her, unbelievably shaming and embarrassing to have her name out. And I was being attacked at the same time at she's Dominic Raab. And I said to the Conservatives that time, I'm going to go out and challenge this. I'm going to go straight in the media and say this is complete nonsense. I'm going to put out a Twitter statement. And I was under huge pressure from the media operation number 10 to do nothing. I can see that. Why? Well, because, because what happens is that if you do it, then everybody else will be expected to do it. And of course, they can only do it if it's not true. That would be the thing. That would be the thing. So the ones that said, you know, so and so and so and so, you know, you can't walk by and without impinging your arse. And I remember the document, by the way, you'll be pleased to know that I don't remember you begin it because they were far worse offenders. And I guess even I at something like that would look at that and think I'd immediately see political advantage. And that's again something that's wrong with politics as opposed to oh, shit, this could happen to us. So the fascinating thing is how disingenuous the press team were. They didn't say to me what I'm

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sure is true, that that was the reason they were doing it. They said, oh, no, no, no, you'll cause yourself more trouble if you put out a statement. It'll just, it'll just make more of a story.

I put out a statement. I completely ignored them, put out a statement on my website, put out a statement on Twitter, killed the story instantly. Nobody mentioned me again. Everybody else continued

to be in a morass of problems and allegations because some of these allegations you say were true. But it was a real kind of reminder of the weirdness of completely unfair humiliating gossip. And then your own party preventing you from getting out and clearing up. And I completely agree with you. Everybody reading that would have been like, well, no smoke without a fire.

I mean, really would you say that about Rory if he hadn't done something weird? It can't actually be that he's asking the guy and get sushi. And it's named her name. So she had to put out a statement as well saying, Rory, I promise, did not do anything weird to me. But did I pressure her to put out that statement? I mean, once you start it, where does it end?

The thing about gossip, the guy is so corrosive. And of course, it's so tempting in politics.

If you can get a rumor going that somebody's up to no good or you get a rumor going that your nose is going to affect them psychologically or affect their private life, affect their home life or whatever is so tempting to do. Now, I think I'm, you know, I was pretty good because I do hate it. I really do hate it. But I've got to be honest, there were probably were times when if there was a rumor flying around, you sort of let it fly, I guess, but it's pretty horrible.

It is horrible. It is. It's horrible stuff. Right, Rory, let's have a quick break.

Now, here we are, Rory. Question for Rory. This is from Holly and the EV. Can you envisage yourself being part of a One Nation Tory revival following a conservative loss in next year's general election? Question for both of us is a One Nation Tory revival even possible in today's Conservative Party?

This is something I think about every day. If I felt that a One Nation revival was possible in the Conservative Party, I would be standing for election at the next election. But honestly, I don't. I don't recognize my own party at the moment. I fear that when they come out of the next election, they will be taken over by Suella Braverman or someone on the right and that if somebody like me were to stand again and try to lead the Conservative Party back to the centre ground, I would find myself in a very weird, isolated position. I'd feel like Mitt Romney trying to challenge the Republican Party or Liz Cheney, that actually the party is now seized by Conservative Party members who are very, very far to the right of people like me and are deeply suspicious, see us as traitors, see us as remainers.

Would you get selected in Penrith?

It's an interesting question. I don't know. I didn't stand. So, Alex, you said, why do we never do good news? And you've found good news in Guatemala where an anti-corruption candidate is one. But he's an interesting case as somebody who got, I think, 11% of the vote in the first round, made it through the second round of presidential election one. I think that if I had run to be mayor of London as an independent this year, I might have had a hope under the old electoral system because it used to be like the French presidential system. If I could come second to Citi Khan, first round ahead of the Tory, I'd be able to win possibly in the second round. But that's been changed back to a first pass to the post system. And one of the problems, I think, of our current system is that our parties have quite a sclerotic grip. And I feel that it would be pretty difficult, difficult to win as an independent anywhere. Maybe Penrith

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would have been different, but pretty difficult in most places to win any kind of conservative association. But if you say, right, so let's take this guy in Guatemala, Bernardo Arriavalo. So, as you say, he starts from a low base and he ends up winning. And he does it on an absolutely, on an anti-corruption state of politics. Look at the hell of us. We've got to clean this up. And he wins. So what you're doing in a way is you're saying, okay, the Tories are going to lose, you think, somebody likes to have a braverment is going to come in. Therefore, there's no place for me. Okay. And for your sort of politics. But what that means is that the Conservative party just keeps going in the same direction. Is there not a case for people like you, David Gork, et cetera, trying to get back in so that eventually the penny drops and the Conservative party goes back to being something more sane and sensible or moves into something completely different? There's a total case for it. But if you put it in an American example, it would be, it feels to me a bit like saying to a Republican, why don't you get in and try to turn the Republican party away from Trump? And when you put it in those terms, it seems kind of absurd. It doesn't seem credible that Liz Cheney or Mitt Romney are going to turn that machine around. And I don't get how you do it. I mean, David Gork and I tried. I obviously ran for the leadership trying to imagine a different type of Conservative party and we ended up just being thrown out of the party, thrown out of Parliament. So I think it's pretty tough. I think it's possible that if they go through an experience like they did in 97, where they lurched to the right eventually under Ian Duncan Smith and came back towards the centre, then somebody like me could re-engage and maybe be part of a broader movement with a team that could try to make the case for one nation conservatism again. But it feels pretty bleak. And to be honest, I'm not getting very friendly signals. I'm not in a world in which number 10 is reaching out to people like me. No, I can see that. Now, can I ask you a question where you have to defend me? Yes, delighted to do that. Are you going to defend me whatever I do? Yeah, whatever you've done, I'll always defend you. Sean Dexter says this, I'm just getting over seeing Red Mist during Alistair's dogmatic rant during the small boats discussion. Well, no, it wasn't a discussion at all, was it? Rory was trying to explore a new idea for addressing the problem, and Alistair bumping his gums was not really adding value. Sure, I do love the phrase bumping his gums. I wasn't unreasonable, was I? No, I think you had a very, very passionate case you wanted to make. And you wanted to keep the focus on your central point, which is that you thought the government was being outrageous on this issue, and you want to land a point that you thought I wasn't accepting or listening to, which is you wanted me to acknowledge that Rishi Sunak and his government are turning the small boats issue purely into political weaponization. So we were disagreeing agreeably. And you thought that I was trying to change the subject onto the rights and wrongs of immigration and asylum policy. And in fact, actually, there was an interesting email from one of your defenders that you forwarded to me, who took exactly the opposite view. Obviously, I'm extremely pleased by the man with the bumping the gums because, although I signed up to defend you, I'm obviously more on my side than yours. But here's the other side of the argument. Finally, some feeling even anger from Alistair on small

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boats. Of course, it ended in an agreeable disagreement, because that is the nature of the trip beast, albeit highly enjoyable, sometimes education, occasionally even riveting. Rory just doesn't seem able to not defend the government at the same time as castigating them. Excellent.

Incidentally, some thoughts on very good. Am I the only one who finds it intensely irritating every time the words are spoken? So I conclude it's to do with the fact that Rory's found aware of stopping the conversation every time his small sea conservative argument is on the threshold of being ripped to shreds. It doesn't help my mood. This is clearly straight out of the Etonian debating society playbook tactic, which Alistair seems to fall for each time.

Who was this wonderful person?

You forwarded onto me.

Yes, I know, but we have to give this person the name.

Steve Tall, 53.

Good old Steve.

Let's be honest, you do do that with very good, don't you?

Very good.

You do?

Very good.

Whenever I'm really getting steamed out, you just go very good and move on.

Very good. So let's move on.

All right, boy, this one. James Ferguson.

Do Rory and Alistair think outdoor residential learning should be part of our curriculum for young people? And is there a chance of it happening with the emergence of outdoor education bills by Liz Smith, who I think is a Tory in Scotland?

Wonderful Tory in Scotland. I've actually often seen her climbing Mon Rose.

Sam Rowlands in Wales and Tim Farron in Westminster.

Tim Farron, my neighbour in Cumbria, who's a great fell runner.

Have we got three outdoor education bills coming forward in the

Welsh, Scottish and UK parlance? I think outdoor residential learning is bloody brilliant.

There's actually quite a good system that's been set up for this with some cross-party support, which it'd be interesting to see whether governments will continue to support, which is national citizen service, at the core of which is basically outward bound.

And it's targeted particularly at getting mixed groups of people, many of them from deprived backgrounds. It's an option to go out and spend a few weeks learning personal life skills.

Good for the economy, the Lake District, because it often seems to happen around places like Oleswater. But of course, it is expensive. And I think the challenge for anyone running an education policy is how do you balance the very, very good things? I mean, it's amazing what people get from that experience. If you've not done it before, it's genuinely life-changing. But of course, it can cost hundreds of millions of pounds a year to fund it properly.

And there's so many other demands in education.

Yeah, but they found millions and millions and millions and millions to give to their mates on COVID, didn't they? That's right. All they got to do is shake that money tree a bit more.

Come on, here's a question for you. You'll like this one because it won't make you remotely

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defensive. There's no way at all this question will irritate you at all.

Here we go. Okay, yeah.

May Song Gladys, how much damage is the perception that Peter Mandelson is heavily influencing Starman's strategy doing to Labour's election prospects?

Well, not at all defensively. In my experience, when people talk about a perception, they're talking about something that has been created by enemies who can't quite find the truth for themselves. In other words, May Song Gladys doesn't know that Peter Mandelson is influencing Starman's strategy or not. May occasionally read it in newspapers, probably quite hostile to Keir Starmer. So that's my answer to that question.

Very good.

Not at all defensive.

No, that was good. That was calm. That was cool.

Yeah.

My question is from Phil Davis.

As you are both exceptional linguists, Flattery will get you everywhere, Phil, would you ever consider learning Welsh? I actually speak a bit of Welsh, you know.

Do you go and give us a bit of Welsh?

Well, I speak what I call traffic Welsh.

Go on, give us a bit of traffic Welsh then.

Well, Araf. Do you know what Araf means?

No, what is Araf?

I'll give you a clue. Just before you're going round a bend, you'll often see the word Araf written on the road. What do you think it means?

Slow down. Slow down.

Slow, slow.

Hedlu. I don't know what pronunciation is like, but Hedlu, do you know Hedlu?

No, what's that?

You see Hedlu a lot. That's police.

Gwasanethau.

Gwasanethau.

Go on then.

Service station.

Service, the services.

I'd love to learn more Welsh. I mean, it's important to me because it was the language of Cumbria. I mean, obviously the word Cumbria is Cumbria. It's for the Welsh nation.

And one of the things that really offends me about signage in southern Scotland at the moment is it's in Gaelic. It says Feltigw Alba, which is completely bizarre because nobody in southern Scotland ever spoke Irish-Scottish Gaelic. It's complete historical nonsense.

What they spoke was Welsh Gaelic. So in fact, the sign should say Criso i Cumbru.

Or you could have both. Rory, I think you slightly missing the point here.

What am I missing a point about?

Well, because very few people speak Gaelic in southern Scotland, in the borders.

Historically, nobody ever did. It was not a Gaelic-speaking part of the country.

There are a few schools there now. But anyway, what is doing is, and bit like the Welsh do, they want to be proud of having their own language. I think you're making it quite a small part of a history. Now, there may be a massive outcry against me saying that.

Yeah, there will be a huge outcry because people will point out Ihenogled, the Old North, was this enormous Welsh civilisation dominating southern Scotland and northern England. And that's where the Gdoddon comes from and the famous Welsh lullaby, which is all about Derwent Water. Oh, God, you can't put this all on. Look, you're talking about a flag and a three words on a board Rory as you cross the border. You can't have this whole bloody story there. Here's a question for you. How many letters are there in the Welsh alphabet?

Oh, I don't know. What's the answer to that? 29.

29. What are the letters that we don't have?

Oh, I don't know. And they've got seven vowels.

Oh, gosh. Well, I mean, we should interview another Welsh MP. One of the things I love, it's a naff thing to say, but I loved walking into the cloakrooms of the House of Commons and hearing the Welsh MPs talk to each other. Speaking Welsh. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Here we are. Anna Currie, do you think the September cabinet reshuffle is still on? Do you have any predictions? I used to hate reshuffle speculation stories.

We had a couple of ministers who were given dozens of different jobs, depending on which paper you read. My advice to all of our listeners and any story about reshuffle is don't believe it, because even if it's true, they probably don't know that it's true.

And is it ambitious MPs leaking out their own names? I mean, is it basically people close to journalists saying, I, this trust or whoever, are unlikely to be getting a job?

No, I think it's more, there'll be a bit of that, but I think it's more that,

by the way, I think we can rule that out. But I think it's more, we're going back to the point earlier about the discussion earlier about gossip, is that journalists go out for lunch with ministers and they all sort of talk up a few people, talk down a few people, say things like, God almighty, you should see soon eyes rolling every time trees, coffee opens a mouth. And okay. And I honestly do think some of it is based on stuff as basic and simple and useless and stupid as that. The worst thing about reshuffle stories, two things. The first is the ministers think they're real. So when it says, you know, Downing Street think that so-and-so is actually really useless. Downing Street thinks that so-and-so is absolutely brilliant. That minister reads it and thinks, oh, that must be true. When nine times out of 10, it won't be. It will have just been made up or kind of, you know, dressed up, flammed up with the sort of the touch of the Downing Street bit. And the other thing it does is it really kind of undermines the effectiveness of a minister inside a department where people sit around thinking, well, they're not going to be here very long. We don't have to worry about them too much. So it's not very good for good government.

Well, I was really struck by how good people like Liz Truss and Pretty Patel were in the early camera mirrors, making sure that they saw a lot of journalists and that their names were always in the center of these conversations. And weirdly, number 10 responded positively to that. I remember

number 10 saying, well, you know, one of the reasons we're promoting them is they're such good media performance. And actually, Liz Truss and Pretty Patel are not particularly exceptional

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media performers I wouldn't have thought. Well, I'd say Liz Truss is exceptionally bad. But that was the line. And the line was really created by her proximity to journalists. Right, last question from you. My last question is from James and it's for you, Rory. What amazing story do you have regarding governance and sustainability that really brought out the key fundamentals of governments while maintaining high levels of sustainability? Blimey, that's good. That's, I hope, a joke question on the fact that I keep grumbling about the words governance and sustainability.

Because I think the point that we're getting out of that is that you can cut that question about nine different ways because sustainability could mean environmental sustainability, financial sustainability. I mean, the whole thing is drives me around the root. But a more serious question is the only thing I ever did in that era, which I was remotely proud of, was introducing the plastic bag tanks. I put 5p on your plastic bags, which reduced the number of plastic bags by some billions. Well done. Just on the words thing, though, are there any words outside politics that you hate? If I were to tell you, for example, that I, if somebody says the word portion anywhere near me, it's like polystyrene on glass. It's a weird word, isn't it? It's got a nasty feeling, hasn't it?

I hate it. But are there any words like that that you don't like?

No, but then you're more musical than me. But I can see that's a very unpleasant word, the P-O-R-T-I-O-N word. I've got quite a lot of words that I don't like being said near me, but that's probably number one. Portion actually does something physical to me.

Yeah, I can sense that. I can feel that. Right. Well, I'll try to avoid that.

Okay, well, I'm off to learn my Welsh Gaelic so that I can put a bit of graffiti on the sign as I drive through Scotland. Coming to see you.

Very good. All right, lots of love. All the best.

See you soon. Bye-bye.