

[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 184. Question Time: Why Britain Needs Shorter Prison Sentences

Thanks for listening to The Rest is Politics. Sign up to The Rest is Politics Plus to enjoy ad-free listening and receive a weekly newsletter. Join our members' chatroom and gain early access to live show tickets. Just go to therestispolitics.com. That's therestispolitics.com.

Welcome to The Rest is Politics Question Time with me, Rory Stewart.

And me, Alistair Campbell. Now, Rory, have they been listening?

Regigirl wants to know, has Rory been giving advice to Alex Chalk about prisons? How have we reached such an appalling situation? Rishi Sunaka's chancellor had known about prisons running out of capacity and yet chose to fund Eat Out to Spread It About instead. Nick Hudgel, why is it so difficult to build new prison spaces and why have we run out of space?

This is a story about judges apparently being told go easy on the prison sentences and other prisoners being let out early because, frankly, our prisons are full.

Yeah. Well, it's not just a story about that. It's a story about something that I'm really proud that Alex Chalk is doing. So when I was the minister for prisons and sentencing under David Gork, we worked together to abolish short sentences. So short sentences in prisons, people going into prison for six months sentences or 12 months sentences are absolutely terrible in every way. In Durham prison, the average length of stay when I was the prison's minister was something like eight days. I met a man in Bedford prison who'd been in prison nine times in a year. And these short sentences are just enough to wreck your life. So you lose your rent, you lose your job if you've got one. But of course, they're not long enough to do any useful work in terms of educational rehabilitation. And short sentence prisoners drive a lot of the violence in prisons. They have very high suicide rates. And they contribute, of course, to the overcrowding nearly 50% of prisoners in at any one time. Certainly when I was in in some of these prisons were short sentence prisoners. And I think the final thing, so I keep adding final things, is that we had very good evidence that short sentence prisoners are more likely to reoffend than if they didn't go to prison at all. So randomized control tests were on this like a medical trial where you study carefully with academic partners over time, a random collection of the population. So random collection were the same offenses who were not sent to prison, given community sentences in a random section that were sent to prison. Those that were sent to prison were more likely to reoffend. In other words, these short sentence prisoners were increasing danger to the public. So cut to the chase. David Gore, can I try to bring this through? We were defeated basically because Boris Johnson came in with his populist government and hated the idea of going soft on crime. And to my delight, Alex Chalk, who I keep saying, and I really believe is one of the good guys in the government, has now come and said that he will now look again at reintroducing that legislation, which was one of the few things that I was really proud to be able to try to get through when I was in government. Yeah. Although you and David Gork did it because that is your belief about how to change our approach to prisons and the criminal justice system more generally. They have been driven to this because of the catastrophic state of our prisons, which are full. And this is something which you asked Rishi Sunak to do at one point. I remember you telling about when you went to say, can we stop sending people to prison for not paying their TV license or the council tax and so forth? And he was very opposed to that. And this now is driven by necessity rather than out of any sort of strategic approach. And there still seems to be no plan for how we redevelop the prison estate in a way that makes us even think that it might become something that can be part of a rehabilitative process.

[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 184. Question Time: Why Britain Needs Shorter Prison Sentences

Yeah. Well, our prisons are absolutely shocking, really shocking. And a lot of this is about politics. I mean, sadly, the instincts of the Conservative Party under Boris Johnson were very much about longer sentences, locking up more people. And unfortunately, the instincts of Keir Starmer, which really surprised me because he was director of public prosecution. So, he knows this stuff well. So I was expecting him to be more liberal on this stuff. He's gone even further. He's put out, as you remember, media campaigns saying that he would propose to lock up even more people committed or convicted of offences than Rishi Sunak. So I think this is a real problem where both these parties have dug themselves into promising to lock up more and more people. And the truth is that we simply don't have the places for them. If you look at the graph and we'll share it on there on our newsletter. But when David Gork and I were in, we were beginning to bring the prison population down. It's now begun to rise very steeply. And the rhetoric that Labour's putting in of locking up even more people will make it rise even more steeply. And there is no way that the building of prisons can keep up with this. And it costs a lot of money. I mean, one of these new prisons with maybe 1500 people in it, a new super prison, costs you nearly £2 billion to build. But we're talking about the numbers projected to be 20,000 people more than we currently have pretty soon.

You mentioned the main podcast in relation to New Zealand that one of the reasons that Labour perhaps did even worse than they expected to was because of the perception that they were soft on crime. So you can see politically why Labour might be doing this. But I completely agree with you that we have got to have a fundamental reappraisal of who and why we are sending to prisons. Now, Rory, talking of going to prison, COVID inquiry, Quinty Senthall wants to know will Johnson and Sunak face charges for their lack of cooperation with the COVID inquiry? Mike Webster wants to know why is the BBC and others not giving more airtime to the shocking revelations in the COVID inquiry? I mean, I'm fascinated by this when obviously when COVID was the dominant issue in our lives. These characters, you know, Dominic Cummings, Boris Johnson, Matt

Hancock, they were never sort of out of our lives. The COVID inquiry, which you really have to go, you have to go and look on their website to find out what's going on because there's so little media coverage of it. But what is emerging is, if anything, even worse than we thought at the time. Oh, it's shocking. And one of the, and it's something that, you know, I was right at the heart of, I was in the sort of very odd position of finding myself and Piers Morgan campaigning hard against Boris Johnson to try to take COVID secrecy in the early days. And the culture that comes across, particularly from these WhatsApp messages, I mean, there's been revelations that we've complained about the way in which the Cabinet Secretary Simon Case has been behaving. But the WhatsApp messages are absolutely unbelievable. We can see the permanent secretary sitting down. This is at the head of the permanent civil service. So, and I keep saying we should be interviewing more ex-Secretaries of the Cabinet on this program, because I think they are extraordinary people. And these, you know, these are the classic yes, Prime Minister figures. Well, Gus O'Donnell, former Cabinet Secretary and former colleague of mine, and he was, his evidence was compelling. But I saw nothing on the media about it. He was talking about the impact on the civil service of having politicians that you felt unable to respect or trust. But then you see the current Cabinet Secretary Simon Case, it's just part of the gang, basically. Well, it's very, very odd. So what's happened in these WhatsApp messages,

[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 184. Question Time: Why Britain Needs Shorter Prison Sentences

and they're worth looking at if you want to see that the way that, you know, I've been criticized in politics on the edge for some time sounding a bit gloomy and about the way that politics works. But you look at these WhatsApp messages, I couldn't make it up. It's worse than anything I've described in that book. So this is him 14th October, 2020. This is the kind of a Humphrey figure who's meant to be the dignified head of our entire civil service, writing to the head of communications. I'm not sure I can cope with today, might just go home. Matt Hancock just called, having spoken to the PM. According to Matt, brackets so aim off, obvs. PM has asked Matt to work out regional circuit breakers for the North and to bring recommendations. I'm going to scream. Now, this is the Cabinet Secretary talking about the Prime Minister and the Health Secretary. Yeah. I mean, you can't really imagine, I don't know, suburb trend sending that kind of WhatsApp message. Well, I can't if I think of all of the Cabinet saying, so we had Richard, we had Robin Butler, Richard Wilson, Turnbull, Gus O'Donnell as I mentioned, you know, I can't imagine any of them talking like that. But this all comes from the top. This is the fact that we had in Downey Street, Johnson, Cavalier, disregard for fact, disregard for detail. And the other messages that are even worse in a way are those from Dominic Cummings. I don't know if you've got the one in front of you or I don't. But some of his, I mean, the contempt that he has for the person who appointed him to the job and to the ministers who are meant to be running the show is mind blowing. It is way worse than we thought at the time. It's absolutely unbelievable, isn't it? Because there is a democratic point here. I mean, whatever you think of these people, they are the Secretary of State and Prime Minister, they've been elected, they're meant to be running a government. And as you say, I mean, you know, you had run-ins with Richard Wilson and you said he wasn't Jonathan Powell's favours person, I'm a real fan of his. He's a really old fashioned, dignified, serious Cabinet Secretary. But just to continue for a second while I'm on my rant, Kane writes back saying, WTF are we talking about? What the fuck that means? Yeah, yeah, they're clearly in a meeting, right? They're in a serious meeting, presumably with the Prime Minister and these Cabinet Ministers, texting to each other under the table. WTF are we talking about? Case replies, whatever Carrie cares about, I guess, so that's Carrie Boris Johnson's wife. Case then writes, I was always told that Dominic Cummings was the secret PM. How wrong they are?

I look forward to telling the Select Committee tomorrow, oh, fuck no, don't worry about Dom, the real person in charge is Carrie. And then Case concludes, it's the Cabinet Secretary again. The government doesn't have the credibility needed to be imposing stuff, within only days they're deciding not to. We look like a terrible, tragic joke. I cannot cope with this. But Roy is horrific and he talks about the Select Committee quite soon, he and Cummings and Johnson and Hancock and Sunak, they're all going to be at the COVID inquiry. But why is our media just sort of not covering this stuff? I don't understand it. I mean, obviously I've seen this through the media. But it's not big news, is it? I mean, it's not been big news. Most of our listeners will probably be hearing this for the first time. It's strange, isn't it? It's strange. And I was really, I mean, actually, I'm hoping they might ask me to testify of COVID inquiry because I had a very weird moment because I came out very early saying that we needed to look at what was happening in Italy and lockdown earlier. I found myself under extraordinary attack from Downing Street during that period, real kind of get into line. And senior people effectively trying to bribe me, ringing me up on a Sunday morning saying, Roy, you know, it's a job we think you might be

interested in doing and sort of slight hints that, you know, maybe I could get some kind of honour if I shut up and stop complaining. But you're like me, Roy. You don't believe in the Honour System, do you? Well, I definitely believe in the Honour System, but I believe even more in my own peculiar sense of honour. But anyway, listen, you should, you should write the inquiry. Yeah. Yeah, I will. My sense of the inquiry is that they're being very thorough, but it must be weird that there's sort of, it seems to be day after day, there is stuff emerging that I think in a normal, healthy political culture, which isn't now just sort of treating the current, you know, lot as the people that they have to cover day after day after day, that is the stuff we forget. We sort of live in the moment and then we forget the importance of learning lessons of the past. We talk about learning lessons through these inquiries. I think if you're not even covering them, they're obviously going to cover it massively when Johnson goes and Sunak, maybe Hancock, maybe Cummings. But you know, this stuff, I think, I sort of read that and I thought these people can never be allowed in power again. I'm afraid, look, it's a brutal thing to say, but I am afraid that a Cabinet Secretary who is exposed for saying those kind of things should go, you cannot continue to serve as a Cabinet Secretary if you've made that clear, your contempt for the Prime Minister you're supposed to be working for, your contempt for the Health Secretary, your total lack of seriousness in central meetings, I'm afraid it's just not good enough. And I believe Simon Case is meant to be a nice guy, I don't know him, but it's not good enough and he has to go.

Well, I'm pretty sure that if there's a Labour government, they're going to have to make quite a lot of changes because clearly that is a system that is not working. And it goes back to the point about being at the top, Johnson at the top of the political machine, Simon at the top of the civil service machine, and that stuff spreads. So if the fact that he's talking to special advisers like that, that spreads around the system and it's just very, very corrosive. Yeah, no, it's interesting. Here's a question though, just to give you something to get your teeth into. James Withers, based on Alice's experience of the Northern Ireland peace process, does he see any of the same ingredients in place to forge peace in the Israel-Palestine conflict or are the prospects universally bleak?

Well, this is something we talked to the ambassador about and I said that I just couldn't see how you could even begin to get a peace process going at the moment. But he actually, to be fair to him, was saying you always have to have hope, I agree with that. He was also saying that the principles, the outlines of it are there in the Oslo Accords and some of the agreements have followed from that. I think at this stage, I said to him, if he was suddenly put in charge of the Palestinian negotiations, who does he negotiate with? How do you even get this thing off the ground?

Do I see any of the same ingredients in place? Well, one is the current engagement of the United States and the international community. You made the point on the main podcast that you felt that America retained its eye off the ball, but the current state of engagement is definitely an ingredient. Bizarrely, the state of the crisis has the potential to be an ingredient. But ultimately, the ingredient that I don't see there at the moment is the capacity on either side for people to be able to say, this has gone too far. We have to re-engage in a political process. Now, I think that can come. So that's why the prospects are not university bleak, but they do feel pretty bleak at the moment. Okay, we've got lots more questions to come.

[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 184. Question Time: Why Britain Needs Shorter Prison Sentences

Let's take a quick break.

Here's another one for you, which I guess is pitting your emotional feelings against your political judgment. Ian Fraser, polls are showing a consistent majority think Brexit is a mistake and would support joining the EU. Should the Lib Dems, and I might add to this, should Labour make joining the single market a manifesto commitment? And what's your political judgment on whether that would be a smart thing for Lib Dems to do or maybe even for Labour to do?

Well, I think both of them are behind the curve on this with the public, and I think have been for some time. When we talk to David on leading, I completely get that he is focused on quite a lot of these so-called blue wall seats where he's in competition with the Conservatives, and therefore he doesn't want to make a big deal of Brexit because a lot of people voted for it. And likewise with Labour, they want to win back a lot of people who drifted over the Johnson, drifted over to Brexit and threw that vote for the Tory party. But I just think now, the scale of damage being done, we're seeing it in all sorts of different ways day after day after day after day, large and small, and the shift in the published opinion polls about whether people think it's been a success, it's nearly virtually university, and I've seen there's something that's gone wrong, something that has to be fixed. So I would like to see both Labour and the Liberal Democrats make far more noise about what's going wrong and a far bigger commitment to some of the options that have to be there to start to put it right. And for the Lib Dems in particular, I don't understand why they, I think they're missing a trick in doing that. I really do. I really don't understand it because their voters in particular, and I know that you just get a lot far more voters than they currently have, but the sort of people who are minded, I think in those so-called blue wall seats, to shift from Tory to Lib Dem, are people who are not, they're not the fanatics, they're not the ideologues, they're not the people who are going to sort of march to the drum of Liz Truss and Soella Braverman and Nigel Farage. So I think, I just think they're locked into a way of thinking that the public has already moved through.

Yeah. And I'm kind of, I mean, I did think the same thing. I got actually, I was, surprisingly, I've got more attack for the way that I interviewed Ed Davies and almost anything else I've done. People said, you know, why was Rory so mean to Ed Davies? He seemed, you know, he wasn't disagreeing agreeably. But I guess what I was trying to get at there is that although he came across, so Ed Davies leader of the Lib Dems in our leading interview came across as a very sympathetic person, his personal story is impressive. I did not think, given how long he's been the leader of the Lib Dems, that he really had a clear answer to why people should be voting for them. And my instinct is, you're right, they need to lean in to the EU SU. That's going to be their distinctive point. Labour's not going to do it. So why not at least say we'll go back into the customs union? Yeah. And also, you know, as ever, it is always easier for the Lib Dems to make big promises that get they don't get attacked as much by the other parties. And nobody thinks that they're going to be the government. But I think in terms of being seen to lead in the moving of the dial on this debate is actually for them, a good thing to do. Now, Tom Gorman, yeah, Birmingham is the latest of seven councils, some blue, some red, in the last three years to issue a section 114 notice declaring unsustainable financial problems. Is there a systemic problem with local

government?

Well, there's a systemic problem with how much money local government has lost in recent years. I was talking to somebody the other day who works in special educational needs, who said that if all our councils were to meet what they know is required to deal properly with the crisis in special educational needs at the moment, that virtually every council in the country would go bankrupt. And actually was suggesting that if a Labour government comes in, they may have to write off an awful lot of debts. Yeah. I mean, basically, there are two things here, isn't it? The first thing is that the country is much poorer than people acknowledge, and that we don't have the money. And this is partly because the demographics part about the fact that our NHS gets more and more expensive as our population gets older and older, obviously older people cost more in terms of health care. So that's one problem. I think the second problem is, and it's a big problem for someone like me who really believes in devolution, decentralization, getting power out of Westminster and down to the local bodies, is that these councils are not always managing responsibly. Councilors are not full-time. They're often part-time people. They're often retired people. And there's a real problem. We have to take the risk. We have to say that they should raise their own revenue. They should be able to do their own taxing rather than getting handouts from the central government. Because so long as they're getting handouts to central government, they can borrow money. Remember, some of these councils went big on borrowing from

Icelandic banks in 2008. Absolutely. Yeah. So they can borrow money. And in the end, they know that the central government has to bail them out, which is not a very good setup. It's a bit like your teenage child maxing out your credit card, maxing out their credit card, knowing that the parents are going to step in. So really good local government will mean giving them

tax-raising powers, but it will also mean saying they have to have some sort of consequences rather than just expecting the central government to bail them out when they borrow too much.

Now, a couple on Scotland. Ian Goerling has the SNP run its course for Scottish independence. And Steph Powell, should there be automatic violations when MPs switch parties? This is the SNP MP who has switched, who has defected to the Tories, which I don't know whether that helps the Tories or hinders them, I don't know. But what's your view on that if you think, if an MP defects mid-Parliament? Well, of course, it's something that Winston Churchill did. He literally walked across the aisle from the Conservatives to the Liberals, and then he walked back from the Liberals to the Conservatives later. So traditionally, the answer is that people like Churchill didn't expect to have to go into a by-election. They felt that they were elected almost more as individual MPs and they could change party. We had a number of defectors back in the new Labor days, and there's been one recently, hasn't there, Christian Wakeford? So you had Quentin Davis, then you had Alan Howard, Sean Woodward.

Yeah. Yeah, we had quite a few, and we didn't have by-elections. So I don't think I can argue this one on a ground, on principle grounds. But I guess the point is that people vote for, yes, they're voting for a party, but in our system, they're also voting for an individual who then makes his or her own political judgments. But boy, oh boy, did the voters get angry. I mean, they are not amused. And I think with the people who defected to Labour, you had to find them new safe Labour seats, didn't you? Quentin Davis, I think his seat was David Cameron's seat,

[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 184. Question Time: Why Britain Needs Shorter Prison Sentences

so he wasn't going to be able to... No, he was up in the middle and somewhere, wasn't he? Was he? Anyway, I think he wouldn't have been able to run again in the Conservative seat that he had if he'd stayed there. Yeah. Well, I know Alan Howard went off down to Wales. Sean Woodward

ended up in St. Helens. And what about the point about Ian Gurney's point about, yes, I don't know if you had the chance to follow any of the SMP conference. There's an amazing picture we should put in the newsletter of Nicola Sturgeon arriving at the SMP. And the capture was, I'm not here to overshadow Humza Yousaf. And she was absolutely surrounded by the biggest media scrum you've ever seen. Why would she turn up? Why on earth did she think that was a sensible thing to do? Presumably if you'd been managing Humza Yousaf's campaign, you would have advised her, given that

her family's been under police investigation, to stay as far away as possible.

Yeah, but then I guess she thinks, well, you know, that's sort of accepting that as it were, she's persona non grata. Well, that's fine from her point of view, but from Humza Yousaf and the SMP's point of view. And what Humza Yousaf must be going through at the moment, he's got his party conference, he's leading a party that's clearly in quite a lot of difficulties, just had a pretty catastrophic by-election defeat at the hands of the Labour party. And he's got this terrible situation with his mother-in-law stuck in Gaza. And by the way, Roy, I have to say, I don't know whether they've rectified it, but I was genuinely shocked when I saw in one of his interviews that neither Rishi Sunak nor James Cleverley had picked up the phone. You know, the guy's first Minister of Scotland, whether he's SMP, Green, Liberal, Monster Raving Looney, is the first Minister of Scotland, he's a fellow leader within the United Kingdom. And I just think, although they're busy, I get that they're busy, but not to pick up the phone at a moment like that just strikes me as a bit odd. Anyway, has the SMP run its course for Scottish independence, Roy? I know what your answer is going to be. Well, I think it is losing steam. And I think the issue doesn't, isn't central. And we've got some good polling data we can share again from Peter Kellner on this, but it looks as though it's less and less of a priority for Scottish voters. I'm speaking to you from Scotland now. And I still think there is huge space for what I would call a Liberal Unionist party. Slup. Slup. Scottish Liberal Unionist party. Yeah. No, because I think the Scottish Conservative tradition is different from the English Conservative tradition. I think it could be more centre ground, more Liberal, but also stand up for the idea of the United Kingdom. And I also think there'll be huge space for Labour as was proved in that by elections. So I think the SMPs, I mean, it's been a one party government for a long time. And I think for better or for worse, nobody really does well after about 10 years. It doesn't matter which party you are, you begin to get a bit loose, you begin to get a bit cosy, you begin to get a bit complacent. Dare I say, you can also begin to get a bit corrupt. And voters want to change.

Genetics papers, how many hours per day do you read and how do you find the time? Also favourite board-themed history books. So can I start you on how many hours per day you read and how you find the time? It totally depends. I mean, some days, some days nothing. Some days I write all day and I'm not reading much at all. And sometimes you watch a lot of sport, don't you? Let's be honest here.

But I can write and watch sport. On Saturday, when I watched six hours of rugby, two rugby

[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 184. Question Time: Why Britain Needs Shorter Prison Sentences

Union, one rugby league, I did write several thousand words while I was...
And you also managed to watch an Afghanistan-England cricket match as you remember when we were
corresponding, yeah? Which was amazing, which is incredible. And also,
by the way, there was another earthquake in Afghanistan and there are thousands of people missing. And of course, because of Middle East, I don't think the second earthquake, I don't think I've seen anything about it. No, we've got to keep focused on it. Well, I read, I suppose, probably two hours a day minimum. What books? Books, yeah.
And how much time do you spend doom-scrolling and how much time do you spend reading newspapers
and all that stuff? So according to my phone, I'm spending about two hours, in addition to my two hours reading books, doom-scrolling. That's not bad. So here's books to recommend. So firstly, we must recommend general history books by our co-podcasters. So definitely read Tom Holland's books on Rome, which are just fantastic. And he's such a smart guy. He's so interesting and thoughtful.
And William Dalrymple. There we are, yeah. He's been very, very outspoken on Israel Palestine. Very good. Well, now I also think if you want to be a bit more ambitious, probably the best ancient historian, Peter Brown wrote an extraordinary biography of St. Augustine. Sounds a bit tough to read a biography of St. Augustine, but if you want an insight into the late Roman Empire and its collapse, nothing better. And then I suppose here's something a bit more left field maybe for people who are more interested in politics. If you've not read Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore story, the story of how essentially the leader of Singapore took a pretty poor country on the side of Malaysia and turned it into this global economic miracle, it's beautifully written and a really good way of getting some contemporary history and politics at the same time. Yeah, I think I've told you before, he was one of the most impressive people I ever met, his intellect, absolutely extraordinary. I've got a bid in, by the way, Rory, with his son, who is the current Prime Minister. But I think when he stops being Prime Minister, which will be in the relative near future, I think he'd be a great guest on the rest of his politics leading. I'm going to recommend one book, which I think is particularly important to read now. It's The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich by William L. Shirer, and I think it's important to read it now because I think if, he says in that book, that if everyone had actually read and absorbed mind camp, then it's possible that the world would not have ended up where it did. And I think if you, I did something the other day, which I've not done before, if I have, I can't remember doing it, but I went back and read the Hamas Covenant, which was first written in 1988 and was then revised and softened a little in 2017. But if you read that, I think the same could apply. Okay, that's depressing stuff. Now, my final question, Rory, from KP, in these very difficult times where each day seems to bring a new heartbreak, Ukraine, Israel, Gaza, the voice, cost of living, what do you both do to keep your spirits up?
Oh, blimey. Well, what's your answer to how you keep happy?
Well, I'm not happy.
You sound quite chirpy today.
I've sound okay. I mean, a lot of the time I'm not happy and I kind of have learned to live with that. I keep my spirits up, partly with my morning cold water swim, music, incredibly important,

[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 184. Question Time: Why Britain Needs Shorter Prison Sentences

reading actually, reading non-new stuff, I think is important, you know, mainly books, but also kind of other stuff. And I do, you know, leaving you after this, I'm off to another school. I do find my spirits rising when I go into schools. I really do have a feeling that the younger generation is kind of on it in a way that we don't respect sufficiently. But yeah, I throw those and obviously, if, you know, Bernie at the moment, we're in the relegation zone, as I'm sure you know, Rory, but if we beat Brentford on Saturday, my spirits will rise a little. Very good. And also, you know, and the podcast keeps my spirits up, actually. I, you know, when we started on this rather strange road that we're now traveling down, you know, that explainer you did on Israel the other day, has had almost a million views on YouTube. We had 2.7 million downloads last week. Now, I don't, it's not about the numbers. It's about the fact, I think it might keep my spirits up in part by feeling that, you know, even though you're not in active electorate politics, nor am I anymore, that we can still kind of keep engaged. And that does sort of, it doesn't necessarily keep my spirits up, but it keeps me going and it keeps me motivated. And I do think it's incredibly important to be motivated.

I think I own a apology tube, because sometimes, as you say, when I'm being interviewed by journalists, you tend to accuse them of fluttering their eyelids at me. But I sometimes are a bit sort of dismissive of what we're doing. But I actually think that I've been very proud of what we've managed to do on Israel Palestine. I think navigating a course through this, using this long format, using the opportunity to have these longer conversations with people, our long interviews, long podcasts, is allowing us to do things which I'm sure the BBC or CNN would like to do, but they're not really set up to do. And I've been really proud of the way in which we've managed to give space to difficult arguments. Look, here's something for me to keep spirits up. It's from a play by Seamus Heaney called The Curate Troy, which is based on an ancient Greek play. And what happens in this Greek play is that the hero, Philip Titi, is sitting grumbling on an island full of kind of vindictive hatred, saying, I'm never going to get off this island. And then suddenly miraculously, he's convinced to go back to Troy. Sorry, I'm going to pause for a second while my thing is... Oh, I think the clock helps. The clock helps, didn't I? I think the clock is good for the tone of this one. All right, very good. Good, good.

Anyway, so do you realise it's five minutes early, Roy? It is five minutes early. It's necessary because otherwise I get in trouble from you, Alistair, for being late. Punctuality is important. So I actually, I acted at the Edinburgh Fringe. I played this part and the lines that stuck with me were this. Because of course, what Seamus Heaney's reflecting on is the way in which it was possible to feel hope, even in Northern Ireland, even with everything happening. Maybe it applies to feeling hope, even with everything we know about Gaza and Israel. So he says, history says, don't hope on this side of the grave. But then once in a lifetime, the longed for tidal wave of justice can rise up and hope and history rhymes. So hope for a great sea change on the far side of revenge. Believe that further shore is reachable from here. Believe in miracle and cures and healing wells. Call miracle self-healing the utter self-revealing double take of feeling if there's fire on the mountain or lightning and storm and a god speaks from the sky. That means someone is hearing the outcry and the burst cry of new life at its turn. Oh my Lord, that's brilliant. And when we were in doing our thing in Belfast, and I went to that before you arrived, I went to see that play about the troubles. And I bumped into Seamus Heaney's daughter, who is a fan of the podcast Rory. So I'm sure she'll be absolutely thrilled to hear her dad's poem ending this episode of the Restless

[Transcript] The Rest Is Politics / 184. Question Time: Why Britain Needs Shorter Prison Sentences

Politics Question Time. Thank you. Bye bye. Bye.