

[Transcript] Leading / 36. Andy Burnham and Andy Street: A Tale of Two Cities

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

And me, Anastasia Campbell.

And we have got the Mayor of the West Midlands and the Mayor of Greater Manchester with us. So, they centre on two of the great cities of the United Kingdom in the surrounding areas, and they are here with us today.

Now, so that is Andy Street, West Midlands, and Andy Burnham, Greater Manchester.

But this is our first podcast, gentlemen, with two guests in the studio.

And annoyingly, you have the same name.

Now, our listeners have already worked out that Rory and I have very different voices and very different accents, which they're probably pretty well used to by now.

So, I think we should start by getting the listener accustomed to the voices and accents of our guests, and that way we won't have to keep saying Andy, S, Andy B, whatever.

So, going alphabetically, I'd like the first Andy, Mr Burnham, to introduce himself and give a brief description of current job and a very brief potted version of life so far.

Well, thank you for having us both on, by the way. It's an honour, isn't it, Andy?

I think people may be used to my No Man's Land Northwest drawl by now, so maybe they do know my voice. So, I am the first elected Mayor of Greater Manchester, having been in Parliament for 16 years. And in the last six and a half years, since I've been doing this job, I've been energised, liberated. It has been my favourite period in my political life for sure. We're doing some really great things, as I'm sure Andy will say he is in the country's third city region. It's a brilliant job and it's an exciting place to be at this moment in time in Greater Manchester. The skyline of the city is changing dramatically. We're growing faster than the UK economy, which is a pretty good thing. So, we're here to tell you why, I think both of us are here to tell you why, at a time when the country feels pretty broken, English devolution is definitely one of the things that is working and is fixing things.

And I'm Andy Street, Mayor of the West Midlands, like Andy B said, inaugural Mayor of the West Midlands. And one of the lovely things about this is you can shape it when you start something. In terms of accents and identification, I'm probably the only one with a mild, brummy accent and I'm proud of that, even though it's not historically been very fashionable. Unlike Andy, though, I've not got a background in politics. Obviously, I'm a business person first and foremost and I guess my formative time as an adult anyway was in John Lewis, where I was lucky enough to be the boss for 10 years. And I still look back with incredible fondness on leading a great British brand, but equally, I've thoroughly enjoyed the last six and a half years of doing something very, very different. Well, thank you for being here. As you know, the motto of our podcast is disagree agreeably, so that we're going to begin by asking each of you to say something nice about the other person. Even though you're on different sides of political fence, obviously, we've got a Labour Mayor and we've got a Conservative Mayor, but I'm going to start maybe unfairly putting the man who's not the politician initially on the spot. Not unfairly at all. So it's very clear what I want to say positively about Andy May. There could be many things, but the thing I'll pick out for this is he is a born politician. For someone who has to learn the art, you see the opportunity faster than I will ever see the opportunity. But a particular thing I want to pull out, I've been full of admiration for how he's worked with the Conservative government for the benefit of his region.

Well, I take it as one, Andy. And thank you. Thank you very much. I think we would both probably

say that these roles allow you to be more yourself than perhaps other political roles, and that's one of the strengths. And so I've seen you. I like to think as you are. And I don't think I've met many people who are more decent and caring and compassionate than you. You are absolutely rooted in your place. And I've enjoyed working with you these last six or so years. Give us a... We do like in these podcasts to talk about your past and delve into... You know all about it. You went in your black book when you were towering straight. But just give us briefly a sense of the jobs that you do. Because I do think there's a problem in our country that people kind of lump politicians all together, don't necessarily a lot of them know how it all works. So what does the mayor... And I still think there are people who think you're the guys who walk around in chains, as opposed to you're actually, you know, very powerful executive politicians. So what do you do? What's your job? Well, there's a number of ways I could answer that question, Alistair. But in essence, you're the figurehead for the place. And you may have responsibility over certain things like transport, policing, fire service, all the things that I could mention that I have direct responsibility for. But at the same time, people look at you and say, why aren't you doing something about the airport? Or why aren't you doing something about, well, anything, the weather, where you name it. So in many ways, we're there to sort of, if you like, be a voice for the place. And the thing that I would say, the big difference between my 16 years in Westminster, and the six and a half years in this role is you kind of start from a different premise, which is a place first approach. So you are dealing with things differently. You know, if you're not putting the place first, and you're going with a sort of party script, you're really not starting the job in the right way. And I think Andy's done his job in that way. I've done my job in that way. And I think that therefore allows you to do politics differently. And I would say we are doing that. We're kind of putting place first. We are working differently in a pragmatic sense. And that is actually what is its great strength. And I think if Westminster operated more on a place first premise, then I think it probably would connect better with the public. So I hate to agree too readily with what's been said, given the mission is supposed to be agreeable disagreement, but that is the nub of it. This is a different political job. I always say my only responsibility is to champion the West Midlands. That's what people expect of their mayor. There is the formal bit. You might call it the job description, as it says on the tin. Yes, you're responsible for public transport. Yes, responsible for the education and skills across some aspects of the region. But really, you are expected to step into anything that has an impact on your region long term. One of the things that's a bit ambiguous and what we've just heard is what exactly your executive, sort of chief executive authority is. And you should be able to see that very clearly because you were a chief executive. You were somebody running a business. What did you have to learn in the first three, four years in the job about the difference about being the chief executive of John Lewis and your current job? So the strange thing in that question, Rory, is everyone assumes there is a huge, sort of vast canyon of difference. And I would actually put it to you that there's more similarity between being a chief executive of a company and this particular political job. Chief executive of a company, the box stops with you. You're on the TV. If somebody's gone well, somebody's gone badly. You're accountable for the results. I feel accountable for our performance in exactly the same way. But in terms of telling people what to do, presumably as the chief executive of a big company, I felt as a politician often

that

I was representing, I was championing, but I often felt more like a non-executive board member in relation to my civil servants than you would do running a company. And I think there is a subtle difference in this particular job. So very clearly, I have a chief executive and a whole civil service, you might call it. They're in the West Midlands combined authority, which has gone from literally nothing. There wasn't a room, there wasn't a secretary, anything to quite a substantial organization now. And they deliver, but as always clear, they take their political instruction from the executive politicians. So you do have that responsibility.

And Andy, in Manchester, what's your relationship with the local authorities in that area? That's the other thing I think people struggle with is who are they meant to, in the Gillian Keegan mould, thank when everything is going well, and who are they meant to shout at when it's not? So in many ways, I'm one of 11. There are 10 greater Manchester boroughs.

And you're one of 11? Well, if you're going to sort of go about the job again in the right way, you've got to think of it that way. You could say in some ways, if you're the head of that team, you're the captain of that team, but thinking of it as a team is really important because the organizations that Andy and I lead are called combined authorities. So unlike London, where the GLA is a sort of separate layer above the councils of London, the 30 or so councils, the 10 councils of Greater Manchester and the seven seven councils of the West Midlands. Thank you,

Andy. You know, they are our combined authority. So we are at our best when we make decisions where the team is with us. And the seven in Andy's case, the 10 in my case have all said, okay, this is the right direction of travel because the great strength of the Greater Manchester system and the West Midlands system is if you can agree with everybody, the whole city region then moves us one in that direction and it becomes a really powerful thing. I mean, I have some to answer your question, Rory, my powers are slightly different from Andy's. You know, I have powers over policing as the police and crime commissioner. So I've changed the chief constable, I've appointed

a new one, that's my decision, but I will do it talking to the other leaders. I'm the first mayor to take the decision to put buses back under public control and in the law, that's my decision and my decision alone. But again, you use it in a way that brings people with you. And we were a three party state in Greater Manchester. I know people think of it as the the People's Republic, but you know, we had a conservative leader and a Lib Dem leader until recently, it was always better to have all 10 lined up behind the decision before moving forward. And just to build on that, when I said this role is a different political role, if I think of the political balance of the West Midlands, four Labour councils, three Conservative councils, one Conservative mayor, 14 Conservative MPs, 14 Labour MPs, there is an obvious point. You achieve

more when you work together. Our adversarial Westminster system completely different to what we have, where we have to work together to get the best outcomes. So one of the things, I mean, let's we're talking in London here, and it's tempting to imagine the mayor's responsible for everything. So if the tube's not working, you're like, why haven't you fixed the signaling on the Piccadilly line? And if knife crimes going up, you know, why haven't you sorted out the police? And if there's no affordable housing, why haven't you built the affordable housing? But I guess the mayor is often tempted to say, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa,

you know, I don't have full power over these things. I don't control the full budgets on these things. So for me as a voter, it's often difficult to know whether I can actually hold in responsible for the fact that the signaling is rubbish on the Piccadilly line.

Well, I think it's there's no point arguing really at times with people. I mean, we kind of do, I guess, sometimes Andy, don't we will say, well, look, I'm not directly responsible for that. But where does that actually get you? I think, you know, we've gone from a world in the English cities outside of London where people didn't have one person to complain to. And therefore they found it hard to hold the system accountable, because who did they complain to? They didn't have an idea. When the train started going wrong in the north of England, pretty much, you know, year after we all came into our roles, the least they had one person to say, this is wrong, fix it. Now, I didn't have the power over it, but you've still got to take on that responsibility to do your best to fix it. So I wouldn't personally get too hung up on, do I have power over this or do I not? You have clearly huge power of influence over all public and private bodies within within the city region. And you have something else, which I would say is our superpower as mayors, and it's a convening power, get everybody around the table, get the conversation going and get a solution that in many ways, Andy, I would say, I don't know what you feel, that's our greatest power that's given to us to bring people together.

Let me just jump in, though, because you, Andy Street, are in a situation now, you're Mary West Midlands, and you've got Birmingham City Council, a labour council that's going through really difficult financial problems. Is there not a part of you, even if you're not as natural a politician as Andy Burnham, is there not a part of you that's thinking, on the bigger picture here, there may be some political advantage?

Yes, is the honest answer to that, Alistair, and let's be honest, we face that day in, day out in our role. We're recording this on the day where this news has broken, and literally just before I came here, I was thinking about the statement I was going to give to the media, and it would have been oh, so, so simple to slam them and their end of it, because that's perhaps the traditional political answer. But there's something in here that says, yes, the labour leadership of Birmingham must be held accountable for what they've done, but also the citizens of Birmingham, sitting at home thinking, and what's my mayor going to do about this? Is he going to rise above the sort of Punch and Judy tradition? Is he actually trying to go and do something positive to resolve this? And ultimately, I hope in that tension, I would always fall for the latter.

And Andy, what have you learned about that you've been in Westminster politics, as has Rory, who tried to get out of it and be a mayor? What have you learned from what you two are doing now that might be useful in Westminster politics trying to change from the pretty messy situation it's in now? So as I said before, Alisa, I had 16 years there. And in my first eight years, I did what you told me and read out the script in the studio and voted us. And then I kind of made my way up a little bit, as you might remember. And there was a big moment in my life. And I've got to be honest about it. It was going as Culture Secretary to Anfield on the 20th anniversary of the Hillsborough disaster. And I had been, as you know, at the other semifinal on that day in 1989. And I knew everything about how people felt in Liverpool, both red and blue parts of the city about, you know, I've been at Hillsborough myself in 1988. I knew it all in detail. So it kind of became a moment for me in my political journey as to what I was about and what I was trying to do. And I realized at that point, without going to all the detail that I had to step outside of the

norms really, if I was going to advance, I couldn't, I'd made a decision that I couldn't go to Anfield without reopening Hillsborough. My brother had said to me, only go if you're going to do something with the family's and don't go if you're just going to go for the thing, you know, you've got to go if you mean business on it. And so having made that decision, I knew at that moment it put me on a different path. And I had to start operating very differently in Westminster, because I'd made a commitment to the families. And I just started, I think, to sort of understand how power works in that Westminster system or how it doesn't work often and how it had left an entire English city crying injustice for 20 years and hadn't done anything for them. So how do you overturn that? And it was when I kind of, if you like, came out of my sort of tribal comfort zone and started to speak to people and made a connection with Theresa May, particularly, and working with my good friend

the mayor of Liverpool City Region, Steve Rother, and we started to sort of, you know, work around the place and just operate differently. Well, that's when I realized that that is how change gets made. And that is where change is more likely to be meaningful and lasting. And there were other

examples in my sort of second eight years in Parliament, I would say pretty much it was a game of two halves for me. My first eight years were a traditional Westminster sort of journey. My second eight years were very different. So by the time I left Westminster, I took my first steps out of Westminster the day I walked forward to address the cop, I think. And by the time I left, I was in a very different mindset and very ready for the role that I've since taken up.

I wondered, Andy, whether paradoxically the fact that he was a professional politician for a long time allows him to talk more introspectively about failures, about change, and that maybe I'm going to give you an opportunity to do that and to see if you can reflect on ways that you've changed in your life, things that you did less well in, what you've learned along the way, why you're a different person now to who you were in the past. Oh, I think everybody changes

in that way, Rory, just with the passage of age. It's that simple. I've learned that perhaps the most powerful form of leadership is leading from behind. And those classic business books about appointing brilliant people around you, that is probably the single most important piece of advice. And I genuinely think that what I've tried to do in this job is very different to how I perhaps thought about my early days of running a company in that sense.

To what extent do you think your personal life being openly gay has been important to you?

How much do you talk about that? Are you a very private person? Are you someone who finds it easy to talk about this kind of thing? It's fascinating. Well, I think it's fascinating.

You're going to say only get asked about it in interviews.

Yes, that's exactly the right answer. It is utterly irrelevant to how I do my job, to how people relate to me. And it is the fascination of the, what's the word, the commentator rather than those people on the pitch. So I genuinely think it's...

But it's partly because am I picking up that you're quite a private person who doesn't want to talk. I mean, we're all first by his mental health, but he talks about it nonstop.

Hang on a minute. You can be a private person, but you're still very honest about your situation. There's never been any debate about that. But it honestly is utterly irrelevant to how I go about things in one sense. In another sense, it probably is relevant because it sort of sets your own value set, your standards. So in that sense, it's there deep in what makes you the person you are.

But in terms of wearing a sign and then people reacting to you because of that sign, I can genuinely say irrelevant. And I think that's an incredibly positive thing about the society that we have. The only thing I'll say about it, not where it is relevant, is if you look at this history, if this job had existed 20, 30, 40 years ago, you wouldn't have been able to get it and be open about yourself. So that's where I think... So it's a good thing that you feel that it's relevant. But I think it's still quite important that people... In a way, it's important that people think it's irrelevant. That's exactly the point I'm making, that if everyone's sitting around talking about it on the streets of Coventry and Wolverhampton, it would be a complete failure. The fact is just accepted as the way it is and you're a leader in your own right with all of your personal experiences going back over the last 50 years making what you are, that I think is incredibly positive. But I think it's again, the difference between the world that Andy and I are in and the Westminster world, where those personality things and the kind of scrutiny of people is much greater. And I think always, in my experience, became quite dysfunctional really, you know, the Strangers bar culture of everybody finding out everything and kind of rumor mill and gossip. When I look back at it now, I think Westminster needs a complete overhaul, a huge overhaul. I just don't think it functions properly. It's trapped in that party first approach. And what I was saying before is it's only when you allow for collaboration, when things can move forward and move forward in a positive way. I just think the Westminster system is kind of, it's really not connecting with the public because it just watches people point scoring all the time and people tune out from it. And I think the listeners to your podcast, I think, are in that space a bit, aren't they? The fact that you two are doing this together and the appetite for your podcast to me speaks to a kind of desire for a very different way of doing politics. As quite a private person, you're not a professional politician, you were a thinker. So I'm being honest with you. What's the most interesting question you've ever been asked in an interview that actually made you think? Oh, gosh. And it's probably one about failure and what you learn from failure and how failure can be a good thing, actually. And certainly my experience, some of the toughest things is what you learn most from that can sound like a cliché, but it genuinely is true. Oh, my time, it would be working, John Ness, when I was early director, you know, the star kid, and I screwed it up completely. And I thought I should have been sacked, but someone gave me a second chance. And second chance is very important in life. So have you given second chances to people who have thought of failure? I hope that people would say yes, as long as people learn from their experiences. Just on the political arrangements, do you think it benefits you that there is a conservative government in Whitehall? Or actually, is there a sense that it might sometimes end you? And likewise, if there's a Labour government, is that going to be good for you as Mayor of Manchester, or might that give you problems that you have to kind of wrestle with? I think it's in terms of how you play this role, being part of the governing party is definitely a disadvantage. Because I constantly have to interest of West Midlands first, that's what I said my job was, they're the only people I'm loyal to, I'm not whipped to everyone, but there's a good part of the government who think he's supposed to be doing our bidding all the time, and he should be loyal to us, and they don't like it if you're not. And you've been very critical of the whole levelling up? Occasionally. And you have, this is the whole point, you choose your moment to

have to do that, because you only have so much political scope to do that. My assumption, and Andy may correct me, is that he's actually, if you are part of the opposition party, it is more straightforward. But as I said earlier on, he's been quite wise in working with government as well. It's a very complicated question, isn't it? And I think we wrestle with it all the time, because I've not wanted to do the point scoring thing. So sometimes people think I am doing that, so I got accused of doing that in the pandemic, but I can assure you, when I oppose tier three, and the financial package they kind of put on the table, trying to give people two thirds of their wages, people who worked in bars and restaurants, that was real. That was speaking for a region that was hurting at that moment in time. And it was true to what I said when I left Westminster, that if the government get it right, I will say so. But if they get it wrong, I will call them out in the most powerful way I can with everything I've learned in my time in Westminster. I've tried to stick to that all the way through. And I think this is where I think both political parties in Westminster have to sort of accept our role. We can do things to keep the people of our city regions, if you like, connected to our political parties, because we're prepared to act that little bit independently. Alistair will remember in the early days of devolution in Scotland, Scottish Labour got branded the branch office, and it killed Scottish Labour for a period. Welsh Labour didn't go that way. They always kept more of a sense of where, no, hang on, we're for the Welsh interest first. And I think Westminster needs to understand now it's created these roles. You have to give people latitude to be placed first. And that will be true, hopefully, when there's a Labour government shortly.

So we have a lot of international listeners, and some of them will be sitting there thinking, I want to know more about these places. So I'm going to start with you, Andy Burnham. Can you say some nice things about Birmingham and the West Midlands and try to explain how you would think their distinct strengths are? And then I'm going to ask you to do the same about Manchester. Okay. I'm going to put those jokes aside. We do have a very healthy rivalry, but actually... And some precise things, different industrial heritage, different cultures. True of the English cities outside of London, all of them actually, they have much more in common than what separates them. And actually, if I do, the West Midlands, the black country culture, as a warmth and a humour, I think it's a bit of the Irish influence as well, particularly in Birmingham, the big Irish influence in Birmingham. It's huge in Liverpool, obviously, but it's pretty big in Manchester as well. And I think there's just a sort of, there's a cultural sort of commonality there between the English cities. And there's a sort of, people are decent. And the West Midlands, in many ways, would mirror large parts of Greater Manchester. And do you feel any tension between a city whose heritage was steel and a thousand trades compared to a history of cotton or differences in art and culture or anything like that? Do you feel that last today? Well, I won't get on to football because Andy's going to be distinctly playing second best there. But the culture is the same things. The interests of Andy's residents in West Midlands, football, music, popular, they're the same, aren't they? They're the same things. I think there is a difference, though, when you look at Manchester. I think Manchester is different to Liverpool and other cities in the north, in that it's always had an entrepreneurial spirit. You know, people think back to that era, the height of cottonopolis and, you know, the power of the city in the trading environment. But it always also had a social conscience. And, you know, this is a city that never walks on by on the other side. So I proudly point to the fact

that it's the home of the suffragettes, the birthplace of the trade union movement and the place where those cotton workers refused to handle slave pick cotton in Manchester.

We've got a fine progressive tradition. Well, the first thing is we don't count first, second and third cities at all. We're sufficiently confident not to worry about the numbers. So the first thing to say just on it is, Andy's right, when you look at the data, and we'll come to some of the emotional stuff in just a minute, but when you look at the data, the West Midlands are great in Manchester, almost identical. So there is an obvious point here, the issues that we're facing are very similar. If you look at the...

Similar to the big population size... Populations are almost identical. If you look at the economic output, it's almost identical. If you look at some of the performances where we're weak and we freely admit, we've still got huge issues to deal with. We have very similar data. So it is, there's a huge commonality there. In terms of what we've contributed to the world, well, there's no debate. Where did the Industrial Revolution start? There is absolutely no question. Where was the heart of nonconformist entrepreneurship? Well, it was in Bournville, wasn't it? Or, say, we've got a first note of disagreement in this podcast. There's no debate about that. What do I admire, Manchester, to come to? I actually admire our confidence. And the truth is, we lost our confidence. The deindustrialization in the West Midlands happened later than in the North,

but it actually happened much faster, particularly through the late 70s and 80s.

And we were left in a really weak place. Our sporting prowess fell away, production of musical breakthroughs fell away. So at the same time, at the turn of the millennium, Manchester was finding it's cool. And we had some catching up to do. And part of my job has been to, I can't produce musical football, but I can make sure we tell the story in a more confident way.

Just to say very quickly, I grew up in Greater Manchester, actually, and it was in the area in the mid 80s when we'd lost a lot of things and it was pretty moribund. But when I got to university, ended up in a very different world, the one I'd grown up in, I all of a sudden had people saying to me, oh, what? You saw the Smiths at Salford University. And I was like, oh, my God, I've got something that they actually want. And it was like a, I remember that experience of thinking, wow, we've got things, we've got cultural capital that people in these really wealthy, affluent parts of the country want from us. And that was a big thing in my life, those bands of the 80s kind of made us think, oh, hang on, we can be better than this.

We can sort of lift our heads up a bit. Just briefly back on the political relationship. So you've had a situation recently with Ulez in London where Labour lose a by-election and the party nationally seems to me to be sort of turning a bit, honestly, it can't, who's the same party. And the government, even though it was a Tory mayor who brought Ulez in, spots a political opportunity and seems to me starts to turn up, not just tear up his Ulez approach, but entire environment approach to the environment. And I just wanted there, whether that makes you worry, Andy, about this point, Andy's point about, you know, whether you've got decisions that you make, positions that you take that your party doesn't necessarily like, and whether that becomes much, much harder to manage if you have a Labour

government. And what are you giving that any thought? I think it does become harder, for sure. And obviously, I've had a degree of difference on issues with people. But I think you have to come back, as Andy Street said earlier, to the role when I was elected in 2017. And then again,

in 2021, I was very conscious that people beyond traditional Labour voters had given me their support. And you just have to be clear that that is the case. And out of respect for those voters, you have to put the place first, even if that causes difficulty with your party. Now, you know, even in opposition, you know, you will have differences. And I just think this is where the British political culture needs to grow up a little, it needs to allow the fact that there are combined authorities in the big English city regions now, that are cross party in their makeup. And we are doing things that Westminster needs to understand and get used to and not kind of always try and sort of slap us down or contradict us. It just needs to understand. Sometimes we will answer them back. And sometimes we will say something different back to them. And that's a healthy thing, not an unhealthy thing.

If you were going to be very radical and push for much more power going down to local regions, let's say some government came along in 10, 15 years time, wrote a whole new constitution and tried to really lean into this question. Can you give us two or three things? I'm not saying the necessary things you support, but if you were going to be radical and bold and you really wanted to do decentralization, what might they be? So the answer to this is about money as power. And this is the Rubicon that is still really to be crossed. Now, let me just explain. You said earlier on, we've got lots of international listeners and they probably think this is a very odd conversation because if you were in France or suddenly the US, the idea of powerful city region mayors is absolutely known. And the French model of them either being having been in national

politics, then going local or the other way around. It's just the way it is. And we've got some fantastic examples of what they've done to transform cities there. We are in the infancy of this. We've only been at this for six years and we started from the most centralized country in the OECD by a mile. So we've just begun to swing back the pendulum to responsibility being taken near where people live, near the seat of the action. At the moment, the way it's worked is we have asked government to give us cash. And actually, I think we've both been pretty successful in getting money out of government to improve the fortunes of our regions. I've got all the numbers. We're very proud of it, but we're still asking. The real breakthrough is if we actually raise the cash ourselves. The thing is, Andy, as well, you know, what you're saying is as though it's a kind of radical departure for Britain to have more power in the regions. But the great city region that you lead and the one that I lead, these were the powers in the land in the 19th century. We were building the railways, we're inventing the railways, you know, bringing through that big Victorian infrastructure. And it was a 20th century phenomenon,

I think, that power was kind of more drawn back in into Westminster. The thing I would answer your question with, Rory, if you were to ask me, what's the big sort of change, radical change the country needs? We should, in my view, follow the German example of a written constitution

in which there is a basic law. And that basic law requires an equivalence of living standards between the 16th lender of Germany. And I believe we need the same in this country in a constitution, which would be a new thing anyway. But there should be a requirement that there should be a basic equivalence between the different parts of England. And if there was, I think we'd live in a better country. Andy, where are you on a written constitution? Something that leads to real, the whole country thinking about how we can change our politics? Yeah, whether or

not

you need a written constitution, I will freely admit, I have not thought that through. But the underlying point is absolutely right here. This is holding Britain back as a nation overall. And so this is a national crusade to bring about equivalence. And that's why we've both got into these jobs and why all the levers have to come together to achieve this. Have we also got to change our economic model? I mean, it sometimes feels to me as though the way in which the Treasury calculates return on investment favours places like London. The very narrow model makes it feel as though the pound they put in here, they get more return. They're not thinking about social justice. They're not thinking about the environment. They're thinking about a very narrow model of financial return. Love to hear you on that. Well, you're absolutely right, Roy. You've put your finger on that. And if you had that basic law that I was describing, that economic model would have to change and you'd start to have to have investment on the social case for investment, not just on the economic case. This came home to me when I was Chief Secretary 2007 at the Spending Review, where Alistair Darling had asked me to put a funding package together for Crossrail,

now the Elizabeth Line, which I dutifully did, but said to the Treasury civil servants, but I want a whole range of regional projects to announce at the same time. And I got one, which was a feasibility study for the redevelopment of Birmingham New Street Station, which you'll be pleased to know, Andy, I did sign off at the time. You did sign off and it's a marvelous investment. I just did the early thing. I said to the Treasury civil servants, where is the list? And they said, well, nothing has passed the Green Book Minister. And that's when the kind of scales drop from my eyes, really, because the Green Book is an economic test. So the projects will score higher where growth is already highest. So you're constantly giving more tomorrow. And that has been the British economic model. And that is what has got to change if we're to see growth in the English city regions, which I believe they've all got the potential to provide. It's correct where you're both getting to. So yes, there's lots of technical stuff in the economic models, and they do need changing. But the big question is whether you put equal value on actually achieving the aspirations everywhere outside the Southeast, as you do in basically continuing the very high achievement levels in the Southeast, which of course are a huge national asset. That is true. But it holds the country back as a whole, that there is such under potential in the rest of the country. Okay, Andy's Rory, let's take a break.

It's the concept that I've waited all my political life for. The sadness is that it's been a a vacuous slogan. And that makes me despair because as Andy Streeter's articulated just now, it's what this country needs. And actually, it would bring a lot of people back to politics if levelling up was real. And it's not just about money being more fairly spent, it's about agency, isn't it? You know, power in our places, in our nations and regions. That's what levelling up should be. And you know, it's sad, isn't it? You know, we had the last general election fought on get Brexit done and level up the country. One has been a disaster and the other hasn't happened at all. Well, I say it hasn't happened. We're about to introduce a big change to our transport system. We're bringing a London style transport. And I think it's going to be the great to manage to combine authority that will do the biggest and most visible act of levelling up in this parliament. Andy Streeter, do you agree that levelling up was in the eyes of those who were using it, particularly Johnson, literally just a slogan without a strategy?

No, I don't. I think that's the first time there will be strong disagreement in this podcast.

I think that allegation is often made. I don't think it bears scrutiny. If you look, I mean, Andy's talked about transport, so let's use that as the example. It is definitely right for decades. The resources all went into London. And lo and behold, the productivity of London, just like any other international city that's had huge investment improved dramatically. And regional cities were starved. That has definitely changed in the last six years. The stat is we've got seven times as much money as we used to have for our transport investment. The government have put cash on the table. They've not given us the responsibility necessarily for deciding how to be spent ourselves, but there has been investment. I'll rephrase slightly, Andy. I'll rephrase slightly. There's been some moves in that direction that we've got some productivity growth in great much of this higher now than the England average, to a degree. But if you really go with what that phrase means, level up, you're talking of colossal investment. You're talking the level investment that went into East Germany after reunification, because such is the divide. It's not been the driving mission of this government. No, I didn't say it had. But you said it was just a slogan, and I do not agree with that. Okay. I think the Johnson it was. If you look at what Michael Gove has done consistently, we talk about the cash over redistribution. But there are also issues to do with private business, where it is located, going back to what Andy said about the 19th century. That's what drove the cities of outside London, a vibrant private sector. The efforts around inward investment outside London have been good. I can prove you more business has come in, more investment has come in as a result of that. That will drive opportunities in the West Midlands. If I look at the improvement of the qualifications of our workforce so that we can attract those people, if I look at the way in which R&D has gone into our universities, some of those long-term determinants, there is a positive story. One thing that she said I thought was very interesting is... Only one. No, there's many interesting things, but just the last answer was about the way in which you didn't feel that necessarily you had the full decision about how the investment worked. My intuition is that industrial strategies work best when they're more decentralized, they're more local, when there's more flexible control, because you know your place best. What would it take to shift to a model of industrial strategies where you, as examples of people, the two Andes, had more control over the local application? Give us a sense of what a good... Give me one industrial strategy in Birmingham, one from Manchester that I can get my head around. With pleasure. And Rory, this won't be unfamiliar to you, because in Theresa May's day with Greg Clarke as Secretary of State, our two regions were the pilots for having regional industrial strategies. I was a huge believer in them. And even though the national government has moved away from them, we have not. We call it our plan for growth for the West Midlands. And what it does, to answer your question head on, it chooses the clusters where we have a competitive advantage, not just against Manchester and Liverpool, but against Boston and Barcelona and everywhere else. And they're fast growing areas.

Give us an example from you and then an example from Manchester.

I'll give you four straight at the top of my head.

Logistics really strong, of course, elements of professional services, aerospace manufacturing, and the biggest one of all for us, electric vehicle manufacturing.

Thank you very much.

So I'm going to talk about an enabling policy for a good industrial strategy.

And that is technical education.

When we had the recent negotiation with Michael Gove, and absolutely Andy, I will say, Michael has been a big supporter, hasn't he?

And fair enough, he helped us bring through a new trailblazer set of powers, which we appreciated.

We said to Michael, we need technical education at the top.

Because when investors are talking about coming to Greater Manchester, the biggest reason why they may say, we're not sure, is this thing about, can you get the people?

Can you get the talent?

We want to bring through the country's first integrated technical education system.

In simple terms, at 14, two clear equal routes for young people in Greater Manchester.

One academic university route, the other technical towards qualifications in the world of work.

Technical education has always played second fiddle in this country.

It's always been the poor relation.

And the reason why it's never worked is you can't fix it from a national level.

The needs of the labour market in Greater Manchester are different from the West Midlands.

Therefore, you have to have a devolved approach, or you will never fix technical education.

I've said I want a Greater Manchester baccalaureate.

So the young people growing up in Greater Manchester know what GCSEs, we're saying to them, those are the ones you should take to get the best jobs in the tech sector or in the green sector.

And inevitably, there's a kickback from Whitehall, but we're going to stick to our guns on it.

We want to fix technical education and create parity between academic and technical.

In your last answer, you mentioned Brexit.

I'd like to ask you both what your sense is of what Brexit has done to the country as a whole, and then more specifically to your regions.

Well, when I was queuing at Palmer Airport, I have my passport stamped and it took,

I wasn't thinking it was, it was turning out great.

I'll be honest with you.

No, it personally, I think, you know, without rerunning the referendum, the decision to go for a hard Brexit has been utterly disastrous, and has damaged us immensely, I think.

And I'll just give you one example so that it's not rhetoric.

Let me give you a practical example.

You know, I've mentioned it, we're world famous for our music industry.

You know, that is one of Greater Manchester's top exports, but it's actually one of the UK's top exports.

We are dominant in that.

So what sense is there in turning down the offer of visa-free access for our musicians to Europe?

I mean, what on earth drove that other than ideology and rhetoric?

And that's damaged our music industry.
So I was no Brexiteer, as I think you all know.
But maybe listeners don't.
But my region was the biggest pro-Brexit region in the country.
So I suppose, as Andy said, no point going back.
The decision was taken, it was democratically taken.
There has been a sense of, and there still is in parts of the West Midlands,
a sense of empowerment.
It actually was a decision that was genuinely taken by the people.
Now, that might seem an odd thing for me to pull out Alistair,
but I do genuinely come across it regularly.
But economically?
Economically, the situation is very clear that it was damaging to the West Midlands.
Being the export capital of the UK,
higher proportion of our GDP from exports than anybody else,
our exports fell away dramatically.
The good news, now that I voted for it,
is the recovery in exports in the last year has been quite dramatic.
And we're almost back to where we were pre-Brexit.
What are we going to do?
Just this point, my getting towards the very final question from me,
and then back to Alistair again, what do you think about the bigger world?
A lot of the better around Brexit was we were going to move away from the European Union.
We were going to get closer to big growing economies like China.
And six years later, that feels very different.
Chinese economy not growing the way it was.
We can see defence and security problems with being too close to China.
And we're beginning to think maybe we need to be closer to some of our European neighbours.
What is it about big changes in the big global economy,
Southeast Asia, China, the US, India that might affect
First Birmingham and then Manchester and then back to Alistair?
So you picked up India.
We've had to make some bets.
One of the things about this job is resources are not very plentiful,
and you have to choose what you're going to do.
After Brexit, we chose we're going to focus on our relationship with India.
It's paid off.
Record inward investment to the West Midlands last year,
India for the first time,
the biggest investor in the West Midlands ahead of the US.
And obviously, if you think of their growing sectors and some of our strengths,
there's a real piece of that mega economic piece has paid off.
Tell us about that.
Has that come together with their sectors, your sectors?

What sort of things are they investing in and how does that work for them and for you?
They're investing in a lot of the advanced manufacturing sectors.
And the things that they are most attracted by,
again, linking some of the conversations together,
is the R&D in our universities and the skill talent that we have.
That's why we have to keep working on that.
So if I think about the 21st century and what are the big driving forces of change,
it's digitalization and decarbonization.
And where are those changes happening most?
They're in cities.
Cities are leading those changes.
We're bringing that stuff through more quickly.
And so Michael Bloomberg has been a big influence, actually,
and Steve Rotherham, I think, Andy's had some connection with them.
He connects mares them around the world.
And what you get a sense of, Rory, when you're in those settings is
actually city to city, people to people relationships,
and then the diplomacy that falls out of that,
is actually where it's at, really,
because if you're always doing everything through the prism of national government
and the tensions that come with the UK-Irish relationship or UK France,
politics gets bound up in that and progress stalls.
So it's been said, I think, by a mayor of the US,
that the 19th century was the century of the Empire State.
The 20th century was the century of state national government.
And the 21st century must be the century of the city,
because they're the drivers of change.
And English cities are not punching their weight on the world stage.
Michael Heseltine, I think, has been...
You commissioned a report, Andy, didn't you, that said this.
Free up the English cities to really get in that game
of driving digitalisation, decarbonisation.
And then I think we will reindustrialise the West Midlands
and the North of England in a good way.
My final question, Manchester, I think,
Andy Street, you would accept, has got two football brands a bit bigger.
Yes.
You'd accept that, OK.
For now, but that's the question I was asking.
So the question is always substantial.
The Villarra are on their way back.
They're all battered, Burnley. I'll give you that.
Yeah, yeah.
So that Manchester football gives you something

that is very, very powerful globally.

I'm not saying that Villarra isn't a big name in Birmingham City in its own way, especially now you've got Tom Brady involved.

Yeah, yeah.

Watch this space.

OK, OK.

But what I want to ask you is about big, big moments and big events.

So both of your cities have done the Commonwealth Games in the recent past.

I just wonder what you get out of those.

And the reason I ask that is because I don't even see recently a couple of cities pulling out of bids for the Commonwealth Games, including Melbourne.

One, would you think about trying to step back in?

Did you get something very, very lasting and enduring out of that?

So we watched with admiration how Manchester dealt with it in 2002.

I was enthralled with how London dealt with the Olympics in 2012.

So when the opportunity came for us of the Commonwealth Games, we were going to win it.

We were going to win that bid and that was it.

And it's one of the lovely things about this job is the longevity of tenure.

How long do cabinet ministers stay in their posts?

We've both been doing this for six and a half years.

We hope to continue to do it.

And you are able to see these things through.

And it is very clear that the Commonwealth Games has been an incredible success for Birmingham and the West Midlands.

We've done lots of research on it.

The brand of Birmingham has been improved internationally.

And lots comes from that where the students apply to, where the businesses apply to, all of that where the tourists go.

And it has got a long-term advantage.

So I would say to anyone who was going to do it and is now pulling out fools.

And just one little postscript which you'll have, the money that we got back from the underspend on the games, we're actually now using it for all sorts of things, the legacy.

But one thing we just announced last week was we're hosting what they call Sport Accord, which is where the international federation of all big sports, including the Olympic Committee, come for their annual conference, a wonderful showcase.

We would not be doing that if we hadn't done the games.

Well, and I would agree.
I mean, 2002 was massive for Manchester.
And obviously it created the infrastructure that supports Manchester City
and everything that's grown in that part of East Manchester.
The transformation there is just phenomenal.
People couldn't recognise what was there before.
I think this is where the mayor gets a bit boastful
towards the end of the discussion.
I think I would say we are the biggest football city in the world.
We have got two clubs that are Champions League winners.
Now, only you know this.
Who else can say that?
Milan can say it.
I don't think Madrid can even say it
because Athletic have never won it.
So we are a colossal football power.
Whenever I go around the world, and I've been to India,
as Andy has been, we'll be going to Japan later this year,
the football clubs come with us.
So we deploy our cultural capital very much on the world stage.
And everyone wants to talk.
Well, they want to talk about Manchester United.
Mainly, I have to say.
But City obviously are becoming an irresistible force.
But both obviously, the power of those two,
and often they will come together.
And they're great actually the way they engage both clubs
in the life of the city.
But then you go to South by Southwest,
as I did earlier this year,
and you introduce New Order from the stage.
I mean, we have got big, big cards to put on the table
that kind of get noticed,
perhaps more than some of London's cards.
And you're still traded off.
My name's, say, Ali Campbell.
He's got to say, yeah.
And of course, Aussie Osborn.
But I will make a date to come back to see you
when the Villa are in the top four,
which is clearly where we're heading.
And of course, Birmingham City have fulfilled
what they have to do.
And it's a breakthrough.

But the point about these big brands
being ambassadors is absolutely right.
And the cultural history is part of that as well.
And we've tried to bring,
we have less strength in football at the moment,
but in terms of culture, cuisine,
all these things can be brought in.
Biggie Blinders, good for Birmingham.
A huge for Birmingham.
If you go to New York and talk about,
yes, and you talk about,
you've been to Birmingham away,
yes, and I'm very accurate.
You go to New York and you talk about Brom.
They talk about Biggie Blinders.
Yeah, sure.
Huge.
I think Rory just sat you getting more and more jealous
that you're doing these jobs,
because it's the one that you want to do
as London Mayor, but it didn't quite work out.
I would have loved to be a Mayor.
I think both of you have done such amazing jobs.
It's a real privilege to be with you both.
Thank you.
And I'm a great admirer of you both.
Thank you.
Thank you very much.
Thank you.
So, Rory, our first double header,
us two with two others.
What do you make of that?
Well, I thought it was absolutely lovely.
I mean, I actually really thought
that Andy Burnham's analysis of Westminster
and my sense of what I've been writing about
think that it's almost identical.
I mean, I've always loved Andy Burnham and admired him,
but listening to him, I really did think,
my goodness, I'm moving to Manchester.
I think there's something so interesting about
what could happen.
And it's probably the most exciting thing
in British politics.

It's the one time you picked it up that I was getting excited.
The one time I felt in the last few weeks
doing the podcast, I really want to get back into this.
Like, I'm interested in this.
There's something happening here
that I really want to get involved in.
I see how I felt that.
And it was interesting for example,
put into one side Andy Burnham's ridiculous claim
that he used to do everything I told him to do.
I thought it was interesting for example,
if you think about the people
that he mentioned really, really positively,
Theresa May, Michael Heseltide,
Andy Street and the work that he was doing,
he's definitely found a kind of new way of doing this.
And I think the point he made,
this is what we were trying to say about
Sadiq Khan and Lulez.
And I get this, we were the people who tried
to destroy Ken Livingston because we didn't want him to run.
But the central parties have got to embrace this thing properly
and understand it is about being different.
And I really hope that Labour embrace this
in a way that thus far I don't feel they are.
Yeah, I do think that's right.
I think there's two challenges.
One is that sometimes my friends in Labour
feel that things are quite tightly controlled,
that three or four people in the centre are running everything
and they're not really making the most of people like Andy Burnham.
But I think he's become, I don't know what he was,
but he's become an extraordinary communicator.
It's a lot of charisma there.
There's a lot of confidence there that Labour could be using.
And I think the second thing is let's lean into the formal package.
One of the things he was saying as we were walking out the door is
they're ready to go now.
They've got the delivery mechanisms ready.
If you give them the money, they can deal with it.
That might not have been true 20, 30 years ago.
But if a new government came in that really wanted to make something of this,
Manchester, Birmingham, you could give them the resources and wow, they could fly.
Andy Street, first time I met him, very not like a politician, really, was he?

No, but paradoxically, it's something that I think you noticed when we were interviewing Mr. Suleiman.

Sometimes the people who aren't politicians can sometimes seem more cautious and sometimes a little bit more defensive than a politician.

Yeah, yeah.

I sensed him getting a bit prickly with your private life explorations, which is fair enough, I guess.

But I thought both of them, though, had a real, a genuine passion for what they do.

And I felt as an interviewer.

I mean, it was my fault as an interviewer.

I should have realised earlier on he didn't want to talk about his private life at all.

But as soon as I got him on to industrial strategy in Birmingham, boy, was he interesting, fluent.

No, I thought it was very, very good.

I think we should think about another double pairing at some point.

What about the Israeli ambassador and the Palestinian ambassador?

Well, I can assure you there would be much less of the sort of,

I would like to pay tribute to my dear friend and colleague across the table.

Yeah, yeah.

Anyway, thanks a lot.

See you soon.

Thank you.