

[Transcript] Leading / 38. Theresa May: Windrush, police, and the cult of personality (Part 1)

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

And me, Alistair Campbell.

And very, very pleased to have one of my genuine political heroes with us today, which is Prime Minister Theresa May. And we've been hoping to get Theresa May on the podcast for many, many months, and she's finally decided to come join us, which is great. And it's going to be, I think, a very interesting episode, because obviously there are profound disagreements between Alistair and Theresa.

Profound agreement between me and Theresa. So we will try to navigate our way through this complicated thing. But I wonder whether we could begin a little bit with your childhood and a little bit of a sense of what it feels like to be asked continuously about your childhood. And obviously, we live in a modern world in which, I guess, if you had been glanced on or someone, they wouldn't really ask you much about your childhood. But we live in an age where people are more interested in the personal. What is it that you, firstly, normally would say about your childhood? And are the things that you sometimes are getting more comfortable sharing about your childhood, which you were less comfortable sharing before, which you could give listeners a sense of it, which maybe hasn't come across so much in other interviews?

Well, thank you very much, Rory. I mean, it is great to be with you. After that, those kind words you said about me, I don't think I should point out that the last time I saw the two of you together, you were both wearing skirts. So...

True.

True.

And you were dancing.

And I was dancing.

This is true, yes. But I think in your comment about childhood, Rory, you've hit on one of the things that often has frustrated me about today's world and about interviews and media and so forth. I really get annoyed when the first question anybody's asked. And senior politician, as Prime Minister, X has happened, you've had to take a decision. How did you feel?

Well, actually, how I felt isn't really relevant to the fact that this is a decision that's affecting people's lives. And so that does slightly sort of frustrate me.

Let's just sort of push in on that for a second. And this presumably, do you think this has changed over your experience of politics? So you were born in the mid-1950s. I think you first became involved with conservative politics, I guess, in the mid-70s. And do you feel this has really changed that people weren't so much asking Ted Heath or Callaghan how they felt they were focusing more on the decision?

Yes, I think that's certainly true in the past. It was much more what is the decision and why has it been taken and what will the impact be? And why do you think we're so interested in your feelings?

I don't know. Is it the cult of celebrity that we've got these days?

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I don't know.

Maybe I don't know.

Do you think you'd have been more comfortable, Rory mentioned Gladstone, do you think you'd have been more comfortable in a different political era?

I think probably my style would have been more comfortable in a different political era. I think my style would have been more natural for a different political era rather than today's world. And of course, my style was affected by my childhood. I mean, you were asking me about my childhood, Rory, and as a daughter of a clergyman, you know, brought up in a country, Vicarage, I was always very conscious that whatever I did or said wasn't just people weren't just looking at it as me. They were looking at thinking my father through that and the church potentially. And there's a bit of that obviously in politics. I think it's not just you, you're representing your party, government, internationally, the country. So you have to be very careful about how you approach things.

Paradoxically, I'll just come back to that in a second. But paradoxically, that means that you were almost, in a small way, a public figure almost from childhood because I guess your father was a public figure at least within that small community and you would have been associated with his family and I guess went to church with him on Sundays. And so it's almost as though you were being trained to think about not just who you were as an individual, but what you represented that you're standing for an institution.

In a sense, yes. And I mean, I suppose at the time I didn't really think about that. But as I've sort of come to think about it and perhaps looking back at my time in politics as well, this is a thread that I see going through that. And it's an odd thing. I think a lot of people would find it difficult to understand that sense that you're not just there representing yourself. I mean, I try to sort of set this out a bit in my book, but I think for a lot of people reading it, they might think, well, hang on a minute, that must be a bit odd being a child and thinking that you can't just go and play with whoever you want to play with or say whatever you want to say. But I'd always had that sense of just being careful.

Now, I know you don't want to talk about all the personal stuff, but I'm going to, you mentioned the book. And I don't like the personal stuff, but you've come straight in. You mentioned the book. And the book is dedicated to my parents, Hubert and Zadie Brazier, who taught me the meaning of service. Now, they're quite unusual names, those for that era. So just tell us a little bit about your parents.

Yes. Well, my father's name Hubert, he was actually named after his cousin who died in the First World War. And my father was born towards the end of the First World War, and so was named after his cousin who had died. My mother's name, and I've never actually been able to find out what the real origin of the name Zadie is. But the story goes that her parents, the first child was a boy, her mother wanted to call the boy Kenneth, her father wanted to call the boy Morris, her father won, and her mother said, right, the next child's my choice. And she came up with Zadie. But you don't know why. I don't know why, where she found it, where she got it from, or anything.

It doesn't feel sort of Vickers wife country residence sort of name.

No, not in any sense. I mean, my mother was brought up in Reading, but she was always, her parents went to church, she went to church as well.

It's not, and a lot of people mistaken, of course, they always used to think it was Zadie, rather than Zadie. Obviously, you grew up in a family where the faith was deep. But how deep is your Christian faith? Well, I'm a practicing member of the Church of England, and always have been. And it's, in a sense, this is one of the questions that I think is quite difficult to answer, because the faith has always been there. So I think it's part of me. Has it played a role in your politics? I always, I once had a wonderful argument with Rory's fellow Etonian, the Archbishop of Canterbury, where I said that I basically thought that Jesus must have been a socialist. Is that a bad thing to think?

I wouldn't attribute any political opinions to him.

Okay. What I would say is that, well, I think this is one of the really interesting, and to me, fundamental problems, in a sense, with politics. The assumption that if you're interested in social justice, if you're interested in trying to find a way to help those who are more impoverished, to have a better life, you must be Labour. No, absolutely not. That's at the heart of conservatism. We believe in social justice. We believe in helping those who are, if you like, at the lower end of the income scale, some would say, you know, that the bottom of the sort of societal hierarchy, we believe in raising them up.

I think Labour believes in keeping them down. Let's have another one of this one, please.

We'll get into this one. Rory's interrupted me already.

I'm interrupting you, Rory, but we'll get into this one. But remind people of the speech that you made on the steps to Downing Street in 2016, which I think echoes that. So you stood up on the steps to Downing Street and you said, if you're born poor, you will die on average nine years earlier than others. If you're black, you're treated more harshly by the criminal justice system than if you're white. If you're a white working class boy, you're less likely than anybody else in Britain to go to university. If you're at a state school, you're less likely to reach the top professions than if you're educated privately. If you're a woman, you will earn less than a man. If you suffer from mental health problems, there's not enough help to hand. If you're young, you'll find it harder than ever before to earn your own home. A lot of that would resonate with you. Totally. No, in fact, I actually tweeted after that speech, well, if she does this, if she does what she's saying to do, it'll be hard not to say that's a good thing.

Because I remember one thing in particular, you talked about the burning injustices and you talked about mental health, which I thought was a good step forward. And of course, I guess you sense you argue in the book that you weren't allowed to do the things that you wanted to do because you were thwarted over Brexit in particular. But I do, I think, have a basic problem with the conservative, the philosophy of the conservative party. I don't think it really is about levelling up. And I don't think the Labour Party is about levelling down. I think that's a very fundamental difference between us, but you reject that entirely. Yes, I do. In a sense, my experience, my beliefs of what conservatism is about, it's what I see from a lot of the conservative party over time. Now, all parties can go in one direction to one extreme or another at various stages and so forth. But I do think that sense of social justice is part of what actually is there for us as conservatives. And you talk about mental health, I was pleased to be able to do a lot on mental health in terms of the NHS long term plan, putting more money into mental health. I've had a couple of people literally in the last three or four weeks who've come up to me and said, thank you, because they're working in the mental health field. There's so much more to do and I

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fully accept that. But I may not have been able to address all of the injustices, but I was able to work on some of them. I think you were the first female, you still call it the chair man in the conservative party, I believe. Another big difference between us. But when you were the first woman chairman of the party, you did coin the phrase, the nasty party, the Tories of the nasty party. Do you think the Tory party today is more or less nasty than it was then? Because I feel it's very nasty. I think at the time that I use that phrase, and what I said was that people, basically people out there call us the nasty party. It was because of a sense that towards the end of the government that obviously lost in 97 and perhaps subsequently that we knew the price of everything and the value of nothing, I think was the sort of phrase I would use, that everything was in statistics, everything was in figures, and far less about people and about their experiences and about therefore how you helped people. And I think that really, I don't think we're in that position now. I think there's much more a sense of understanding how people are feeling about issues. That's why we see the government taking steps in certain areas that they are taking.

Yeah, they're actually the right sort of people, though.

I'll come back to that, but carry on, Rory.

One of the things I think that you've touched on there, which I think is important for understanding the 90s and early 2000s, is this sense that politics had become under John Major, under Tony Blair, and also I think under Clinton in the States and under Schroeder in Germany, very much a sort of technocratic center ground where it seemed as though we'd reached the end of history, everybody agreed about economics, everybody agreed about politics, and therefore it did become quite kind of dry and technocratic. You almost got the feeling that politics was about sort of think tanks and learning lessons from Sweden. And maybe one of the ways in which populism and people like Boris Johnson or Donald Trump got their edge is that sense that they were better able to do the emotions, better able to do the humor, better able to not speak in dry, technocratic language. Well, I think you've opened up what could lead to a very long discussion there about where politics has been going. I mean, I do think that you're right. And it goes back to what we were talking about earlier about, if you like, the cult of celebrity. People were looking for something that was, in a sense, livelier, more interesting, more exciting, more about a person rather than about the issues and the action that was being taken. But it was against the background. And this is, I do worry about, if you like, the uncertain world that we're in at the moment. We took for granted during that period of time and had been for some time that there was a settled world. There were still things happening in various places, but by and large, there'd been a settled world. There'd been a, if you like, the Cold War, both sides knew where they stood. They knew the line you didn't cross. And also, there was a sense, I think, that liberal democracy was in the ascendancy. And it was, you know, we didn't need to worry about it because others were embracing it. What we now see is, my goodness me, no, we have got to worry about it. And it's partly a mixture of these elements that you've touched on, this sort of element of politics being more populist, being more about the person and less about the actual issues. And it's become more polarized.

We talked a few months ago to John Major, and he, we discussed a speech that he'd made in democracy, we trust question mark. And the question mark was very important in that.

And I think the sense we got was he was genuinely worried about the future of democracy. And I get

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a little bit of that in your book as well, that you have a real worry about the direction that we're heading in on that basic question about democracy. Do you just like to give us your thoughts on that? Yes. And actually, I've talked to John about this. And we do, I think, very much share those concerns. And it's a concern about it partly drives from the polarization of politics. Now, you can talk about populism, because those two in essentially become the same sort of thing. It's about a politics which has become much more, I would say, introverted. You see, countries look and the pandemic encouraged this country is looking just at themselves and their own borders being much less internationalist and globalist in their approaches. But it's also about a politics that looks for the easy answer. And often the populist has the easy answer or what seems to be the easy answer. But most of the things we deal with are complex. They don't have an easy answer. And if you put all of those things together, I think together with a sense that in a number of areas, politicians aren't delivering for people. And this is where I worry about a younger generation and their approach to democracy. There's polling evidence here and in the States that a decreasing proportion of young people think democracy is the way to run a government. And would like the idea of a strongman leader. Would like the idea of a strongman leader. And of course, that's another element that we've seen around the world, that sense of if you're a strong man, then you must by definition get everything right. And just a sort of footnote on this. JJ, who did your polling and who I saw in the States last week, was pointing the fact that if you look at voters under 25 for the first time, we're seeing strong polarization within that age group. Traditionally, the disagreement was between older and younger people. Now within the younger group itself, there are very strong polarization between more progressive and anti-progressive positions. And I was very struck by this in the States. I made the sort of speech that I often make in Britain where I sort of talk about the center ground and the wonders of the kind of liberal center ground. And in Britain, that's quite attractive. In the States, my friends who are mostly on the progressive left hate the idea of the center ground. They say, we're not interested in the center ground. We want to destroy Trump. We want to destroy the right. Got to take the gloves off. We got to go in hard, forget about trying to compromise. I think this is really, I mean, I do worry about the position of politics in the States and its implications. And I think the thing that in particular is that it's not just the politicians, the media have been, if you like, following. So you get a situation where people who have a particular polarized view can watch a TV channel that just pumps that polarized view out at them, can be in groups on social media that are an echo chamber of that view and don't allow for any consideration of any argument from another side or any debate about an issue. And there's a lack of respect. Alistair and I, as you pointed out, only have different views on our politics, but we can sit and talk about them and debate them and respect the fact that we each have different views. In this polarized world, and I think increasingly as you're saying, Rory in the States, there isn't that sense. The word I use in the book is absolutist. Either you're 100% with me or you're 100% against me. There's no ground there for the center. You've touched on something that we talked about in the main podcast this week with Rupert Murdoch stepping down. Do you wish that the government you were part of

had followed through with the Levison report and the second part of the Levison inquiry? Because I think what you're talking about a lot is media driven. What you're talking about in the United States is really driven by Fox News. What you're talking about here has been driven, I think, by Murdoch, by Rothermere, by some of the DACA, the major media owners. Do you wish that we'd actually done more on that? Again, it's not a simple yes or no, because I think there were more complex issues around the whole Levison part one and what would have been part two. I mean, but the interesting thing is the media that you've cited there are either broadcast or print media. Of course, for a lot of those young people who no longer have that interest in democracy, they won't read a newspaper. It's social media that is the way in which they get their news, the way in which they understand politics. I mean, you guys are helping people to understand politics by doing a podcast which a lot of people listen to and they can get that sense of the being issues out there that need to be debated, that need to be argued. Okay, Rory, Theresa, plenty more to get through. Let's just take a quick break. We're back in a minute. I sense from you reading the book that you say you're not telling the story of the live story and it's not a traditional memoir. You're alighting on this theme of abuse of power. So abuse of power as the theme and you talk about Hillsbury, you talk about Grenfell, you talk about Windrush, you talk about Daniel Morgan, which is a story I covered decades ago when I was on the mirror. You talk about all these big issues and it's a very, very interesting account of them. But I do worry that you've overlooked quite a lot of major abuses of power that you had a ringside seat on. I would argue austerity. I would argue could be seen as an abuse of power because David Cameron won an election and then brought in cuts including 18% of the Home Office and police that I don't think was there on the manifesto or on the platform that he stood for. I think Brexit's been an abuse of power in all sorts of way. Now, I understand why you see the main abuse being people like me tried to stop it. John Burrow didn't operate in the way that you would like him to. But do you see why some people might think actually this is quite a partial view of what abuse of power is in this country? Well, first of all, just to pick you up on a couple of things, if I may. I mean, it wasn't that John Burrow didn't operate in the way I would have liked him to. It was he didn't operate in the way I thought the Speaker of the House of Commons should have operated. Of course, the book covers abuses of power, incidents, issues. You've mentioned some of them, Hillsborough, but also things like Rotherham, child sexual abuse, various other issues. What happened in Parliament? And yes, I put Brexit in there as well, which I experienced, came across, dealt with as Home Secretary or Prime Minister. There will be other abuses of power that aren't in that. But I wouldn't agree that austerity was an abuse of power because decisions had to be taken on the financial circumstances that we found. And you're going to get very bored with me for saying this. But remember, Liam Burns, note that he left. There is no money left. Hold on a minute. Theresa, you were talking only about civility between the, that was a friendly gesture by an outgoing Chief Secretary. No, but what about, what about Rory? Rory wants to get back to the childhood. We've got onto abuse of power, and I think we should, we should stay with it for a bit. So just to explain for readers, Alastair and I have now read the whole book. Listeners. Listeners, I'm sorry. I don't keep getting this wrong. But I hope there'll be readers of the book. So the book is very interesting. It isn't a political memoir. What it is, is an

attempt to go through these abuses of power. And put together, it's pretty shocking. So we do actually have a number of lessons outside the United Kingdom, and these names will not be familiar to them. So could you summarize briefly what these things are? These are names which are familiar to everyone in Britain, Hillsborough, rather. But just talk us through. Imagine talking to an American or an Eastern New Zealand. Give us an example of five or six of these cases, and what happened in each case? Well, certainly, if I start with Hillsborough, because in a sense that was the starting point for my thinking of this. In April 1989, there was a football match, a soccer match, which was taking place at a stadium called the Hillsborough Stadium,

hence the name of this. And what happened was because of decisions by the police who were policing that match, to let Liverpool fans, Liverpool was one of the two teams who were playing, more Liverpool fans in than actually the stands that they were going to be in, could accommodate. And they'd got metal fences to stop them getting onto the pitch. And so people couldn't get out once they were in, they couldn't get out easily. Because of that decision, actually, fans were crushed to death. And in total 97 people lost their lives, our biggest sporting tragedy. But then, so there was the police, what the police did then, and then after that, there was the whole way in which the establishment, if you like, but particularly the police, in my view, covered up what had happened to the extent that the police altered witness statements. Now, our democracy depends on people trusting the police. They expect if you give evidence, if you make a witness statement,

the police aren't going to take it away and change it. And the majority of those were altered in order to be more favourable to that police force. 140 witness statements for something altered.

Yes, absolutely incredible. South Yorkshire police force. But everybody blamed the fans. The police said it was the fault of the fans. They said they were drunk. They said they didn't have tickets. They did things like testing the alcohol limit in the blood of a 10-year-old who had died at the event. And for decades now, the families of those who lost their lives have been campaigning for justice. We have a degree of justice for them. Nobody's been prosecuted, apart from on minor health and safety prosecution. We have a degree of justice for them, because we were able to get second inquests that said that these fans were unlawfully killed and the fans were exonerated. Now, the last person who sat in that chair was Andy Burnham, who was singing your praises about the

work that you and he did together in taking it to the place that it's now got to. Your book quotes the dramatised documentary of Anne Williams' life, which I absolutely loved as well.

And just to remind, Andy Burnham said in our interview that this was the moment that he lost faith in politics. He said this was the moment when he was booed at the ground and he realised that actually politics was not working for the people and it completely changed his mindset.

But again, I was a journalist at the time of Hillsborough and that operation to blame the fans, yes, the police were involved, but it was run out of Downey Street and it was run with the help of Tory MPs like Irvin Patnik. Now, that was an abuse of power. I do put that in the book. I put Irvin Patnik in the book. And I also cite the fact that the government seemed to be unwilling to consider that the police could have been at any fault, partly because of this, partly because as conservatives there's a sort of respect the police, etc. And there's sense almost that the police could do no wrong. And I put the story in the book about one of the leading campaigners

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meeting Margaret Thatcher a few days afterwards refusing to shake her hand and when asked by Thatcher was then Prime Minister, why not? She said, well, I'll shake your hand when I know what the police were doing. And Margaret Thatcher's response was their job, my dear.

So there was no questioning of what had happened.

And it just comes as a very interesting theme because you became the longest serving I think Home Secretary in 60 years. I mean, you were Home Secretary for seven years. And of course, you had enormous respect for the police. You came from a party with, as you say, a very strong attachment to law and order. But you partly made your reputation by being quite clear about these things. I think one of the reasons you first came to my notice was what seemed like a very, very brave speech to the police federation. Can you talk us through how you navigate as a politician showing respect for an organization and also saying there are things wrong?

Well, I think you've got to have, if you like, a fundamental sense yourself of what is right. And then you're able to make those, it seems to make those judgments. And I was always very clear with the police as long as they acted lawfully, I would give them absolutely full support. But if they didn't act lawfully, then it would be a different story. And that's what I pick up on stop and search, for example, where I did try to change some of the approach to stop and search for a number of reasons. First of all, it became pretty clear to me that there were young black men just being stopped and searched on our streets because they were black.

And secondly, because the inspector found that over 25% of the stops and searches were being conducted unlawfully. So I think if you know,

if you have a fundamental sense of what you believe to be right,

then that helps you to make that judgment. And can I just come in on this? Because I've always very interested in you on this. You tend to be, I think, instinctively very pro-police, don't you?

Could you tell us a little bit about that and your experience with it and how you feel about these things and criticisms around Hillsborough and criticisms around stop and search?

That's a very good question. Maybe I have a more natural trust of authority than I should.

Recently, there's been some terrible stuff going on and they rightly get condemned for it. But I think we're in danger of moving into a place where actually we don't have any respect or trust for the police. And that's really dangerous. I think that's where I'm coming from.

Yes. And I think it is dangerous because it's a fundamental pillar of our democracy and our way of life that we have a police force that is obviously enforcing the law, but that people can have that trust in. And so there's another example in the book of the Daniel Morgan case, which you said, Alistair, I hadn't realised, you'd covered it on the mirror.

And Alistair, can you just tell us a bit about the Daniel Morgan case?

Well, Theresa knows a detail better because she's written the book about it. But essentially, it was a murder that there was collusion and cover-up. So a man got beheaded in the car park, the police got an axe in the head. And the police did not bother to do a proper search of the crime scene. And despite years of investigation, nobody was ever actually convicted of murder. And there'd been collusion.

And I commissioned a report of this, a panel report. Baroness alone chaired it. And they took, I think, seven or eight years to come to it. But it's a really fascinating, in one sense, but deeply worrying in another, in the sense, report about what happened.

The suggestion is that police informants may have been involved in the murder,

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and therefore the police were not moving. That's the implication, is it?

Well, one has to be careful here as to who you're putting the potential blame on. But there were issues around... He was a private investigator. There were issues around the links he had with certain police, but also questions about the links some of the police might have had with organised crime. And there was this melting pot of issues around there. But the bottom line is it never got properly investigated.

It never got properly investigated. That's the absolutely critical thing.

I mean, and simple things. You've just mentioned it, Rory. Not properly searching the scene of the crime. I mean, we're used on television these days to those programmes like CSI and so forth, where they pick up the slightest little speck of dust and have these wonderful IT systems and so forth, that science, that technology that can identify it, they didn't have that in those days. But, you know, you still search the scene of the crime to see what evidence you could find. There's clearly a desire not properly to investigate. Of all of the ones that you talk about, what would you... Which is the one that you felt got closest to you and your responsibilities? Were there any way you're looking at them and thinking, actually, I could and should have done things differently as Home Secretary? I guess I'm thinking of Windrush.

You're thinking of Windrush, yes. Yes. I mean, I suppose that on Windrush, had it been raised that there was a group of people who were going to be affected?

So, this is obviously people who'd come to the UK, been invited to come to the UK, mainly from the Caribbean. Just to explain to an international audience, after the Second World War, the British government invited people predominantly from the Caribbean to come to the United Kingdom,

to fill gaps in our labour market and to do incredibly vital jobs. And at the time, it was a period of the British Empire still running where it was assumed that these people coming were absolutely welcome in Britain going to be British citizens, but their paperwork was not formalised and later laws put them in a position in which themselves, their children, even their grandchildren, who'd been living in the United Kingdom, some of them since the late 1940s, were in danger of being deported on the grounds that they weren't proper British citizens. And it's called the Windrush scandal because the famous boat that brought the first people was Windrush. It's a bit like the Mayflower going to the United States. Sorry, back to you to explain more about it. Well, I think you've explained that the problem very well, Rory, which was at that time,

nobody thought it was important to give them documents that proved that they were in the UK legally. And then government after government started tightening up the immigration rules, changing the immigration rules, to the point where there was a much greater sense of needing to identify people who were in the UK illegally and take action to remove them from the UK. And unfortunately, here was a group of not all of them because some of them had applied for passports and had documents, but a group of people for some of whom had no nothing to prove that they were here properly and legally, yet who had contributed to our society, who had worked largely in areas of the public sector often, helped to build up the health service, our transport systems, and had brought up their children and grandchildren here and suddenly found

themselves being questioned as to whether they were really British. I mean, I guess earlier,

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when I said that, you know, we think about the right sort of people, I wonder where the part of the problem in a lot of the injustices that you're talking about is actually this sense of you talking about social housing, for example, they're often seen as second-class citizens, perhaps the Windrush generation seen as second-class citizens. And so therefore, the establishment authorities didn't have a kind of automatic inbuilt sense that these people are valued. Is that not the problem that led to a lot of the problems that you're highlighting in the book? Certainly for some of the problems I highlight in the book, that issue of being treated as second-class citizens, so attitude to social housing in the Grenfell tragedy, attitude to girls who were being sexually abused in in Rotherham, for example, or actually boys as well, but predominantly girls. I think in the Windrush issue, it was less that a group had been identified, but were considered to be second-class citizens and therefore weren't considered. I don't think the group was identified properly. I think this was one of the problems. Is that because of the cultural change? So when Attlee was Prime Minister and they arrive, I guess the government sitting there thinking, well, they're going to be welcome because of the change they're going to be part of. And then a few decades later, the debate around immigration has changed completely and it is a bit toxic and that's what maybe led to the scandal. Certainly the debate around immigration had changed significantly over the years. And I think it was that these people found the Windrush generation, found themselves caught up in that change, if you like, that had taken place to the way the authorities approached it. I mean, Wendy Williams in her review, which she did of Windrush and the Home Office, I think makes the point that there was a lack of understanding from officials and maybe others that there might be people out there for whom who were here legally who would be potentially caught up in this. One of the things that is striking, I did an interview which Alistair still keeps teasing me about was Novara Media and they wanted very left-wing interviews. He basically said that had he had his time again, he would have voted for Jeremy Corbyn over you. I did not say that. I did not say that. This is Alistair's view on the thing. However, in it, one of the things that they really were most angry about and you felt the moral outrage and sort of condemnation was around Windrush, the hostile environment, and of course austerity separately. But how do you navigate this sense that on the one hand, you are trying to stand up for an idea of proper conducts and politics. And on the other hand, there is a group of people, the Cyprus group of people out there who think that Conservative Party and you are completely on the wrong side of this, that you're violently evil, that this is racism, this is the hostile environment. How do you resolve this? What would you be saying to Novara Media? What would you be saying to constituents who saw you in that light? Well, I think one of the first things I would say in relation to the immigration issue is about fairness. There are many people who have come to the United Kingdom, they've migrated to the United Kingdom, they've followed the rules, they've come here perfectly legally. Sometimes it's taken them some time to do that. They've had to jump through all sorts of hoops in order to get their visas and their right to remain here and so forth. And it's not fair to them that there are people who can come here illegally and live the same sort of life and carry on living the same sort of life for many years. And it's that that lies at the heart of the issue of trying to take action in relation to those who are here illegally. I'm deeply sorry for the fact that there was this group of people, the Windrush generation, who got caught up in that

and who we didn't at any stage realize or understand could get caught up in it.

But would you be sorry, for example, if when those fans were going around with big posters saying go home or face arrest that a young child with brown skin might look at that and think they're talking about me? And I think the fans were wrong, very clear about that. We should not have done those, we should not have done those fans. And was that because the debate had become toxic? I don't think it was because the debate had become toxic. I think it was because there was a real sense that if you like, something had to be done in relation to illegal migration and trying to encourage those and one of the elements was trying to encourage those who had come here illegally to leave, to fess up. But that was a step too far.

I suppose one of the things that interests me is I really, really strongly agree with what I think the Central Messiah book, I mean disagree if it isn't Central Messiah, but I thought the Central Messiah book was that we do actually need a sense of moral compass and politics. It's not enough just to design constitutional structures that unless people have a sense of public service, we're in trouble. But it is a problem for politicians, given that we all make compromises all the time, we all do many things that we're ashamed of. It's quite difficult standing up for moral principles without being accused of hypocrisy. I feel this

and it must be something that you feel too that it's tough as a politician trying to stand up for moral principles. Well, I think it is tough and I think one of the aspects that makes it tough is a sense of people decrying you if you try to stand up for anything that appears to be a moral principle. So it is difficult, but I think the central point that you've picked out of my book, Rory, is right, which is that this is about public service. Being a politician is about public service. Being a police officer, civil servant, many other areas is about public service and it's that sense of when you're in that position, you are in a position of power.

You're making decisions, you're doing things which affect other people's lives and it's making sure that at every stage you recognize that is not about exercising your power over them, but about serving them and making the right decisions in order to serve them.

Well, one of the things that made me sad as a conservative MP is that some of our colleagues at least didn't really emphasize the civil servants in terms of public service. They almost treated it as though it was a business. So with that sort of item of name names, but you'll be able to think of the kind of people that I've worked for in government who very much were sort of dismissive of the traditions. I've worked for Boris Johnson. Actually, thanks to you, Minister of State and Foreign Office under Boris Johnson.

But it was very difficult to appeal to some of our colleagues about the traditions of those services, their sense of public duty, the unwritten rules, their sense of pride. Instead, they were looked at purely in terms of how can we save money? How can we make more efficient? How can we take away their pensions? How can we rank them against the private sector? We lost a sense

of what's special about these things and what would attract people to do jobs which were less well paid because of a sense of belief. I think, right, but I would add something to that, Rory.

I think there's also an attitude among some of my current colleagues, and we've seen this in recent years, that the civil service is out there to stop them, that it's party political rather than neutral, which the civil service is. But did you have any experience of that?

I was just about to say, I had no experience of that whatsoever.

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My view was that I think the civil service is the jewel in the crown of the United Kingdom. I think having, unlike America, where half the people who are working for you change when the president changes, if the party changes, in the civil service, you have a group of people who are utterly committed to public service. When I talk to them, and often I'd ask people in interviews, why do you join the civil service? It's always about public service, and they will serve whoever is in government. But their job, as I've always said to them, right from the very beginning, is to provide the best possible advice, the best information. The politicians decide what the politician does with that. They may think the politicians made completely the wrong decision, but actually the elected politician makes the decision. But they have that sense of giving of their best. I do worry about an attitude that we've seen creep in towards the civil service, which is constantly... Not constantly, but from time to time, we hear these statements about how the civil service is getting in the way of government doing what it wants to do. Well, Liz Truss essentially built her entire leadership around that theme, and she's still doing it. I mean, Dominic Cummings and the blob, and it's all this stuff of sort of blaming everybody else for problems that you're not addressing through the political process. It's... Yes, that's the problem. If you're a politician and you want to do X, then actually... Now, the civil service may say, well, there are these negatives about doing X. Well, that doesn't mean they're trying to stop you because you're a jury. That doesn't mean you're trying to stop you. No, they're trying to draw your attention to what might be consequences that are going to be difficult. Now, Rory said he was going to raise this, but he hasn't, so I'm going to raise it. What was it like spending all those years in opposition from 1997 when you were first elected? Did you enjoy that time? 13 years in opposition. 13 years in opposition, which resonates, I guess, for a lot of the Labour Party at the moment who've been 13 years in opposition. What was your time when you thought, God, this could go on forever? No. Did you always think you'd get back in? I always thought that we would get back in. But it's interesting, our politics has changed really since Margaret Thatcher came in, because previously, you know, when I was a child, when we were growing up, there were constant changes of government. Then we had Margaret Thatcher in for a period of time, then John Major, Tony Blaine, Gordon Brown, and then we won't go through the number we've had. But it is deeply frustrating being in opposition, because you will raise issues, but you know you're never going to actually, or very rarely, unless you can get some cross-party agreement on an issue, which is probably not one where there's going to be a leading political issue by definition, then you're not actually getting things done, and politicians want to improve people's lives. Now, having said that, you do get things done for people because you're a constituency member of parliament. And I think that's absolutely fundamental, and one of, again, one of the great benefits of our system, that everybody, if you're on the shadow front bench or the front bench in government, you're still a member of parliament. Can I, on the constituency member of parliament, so you are very, very unusual as a modern prime minister? In the 19th century, it was through you'd be prime minister, and then you cease to be prime minister, you return to the back benches, and then goodness knows what

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happens

again in the future. But more recently, we've had a tradition of John Major leaving politics pretty quickly, Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, David Cameron, now Boris Johnson, there's a sense that people don't say nothing. You've chosen to go back to the back benches. Tell us about the vocation of being a constituency MP. What is it that you enjoy about it? What is it you can do for your constituents? Because I often felt as a constituency MP. I loved my constituency, but I did get frustrated. I didn't have a budget. I wasn't a local councillor. I didn't have direct power over things. Tell us about that relationship and what appeals to you about it.

Well, to me, it is absolutely the fundamental of our political system is the fact that we're all members of parliament. And if I come on, perhaps in more detail to your question, Roy, but if I just tell a story, which I think exemplifies this, and it's when I was home secretary, I was sitting, I was at a meeting, an international meeting, and somebody asked me sitting over coffee. I think it was the American Homeland Security Secretary at the time said to me, what's it like both being home secretary and a member of parliament? And I said, well, today I'm sitting here in Madrid. We're discussing counterterrorism. Tomorrow morning, I will open a community vegetable garden. And they also laugh and so forth. But that's absolutely fundamental because you're there with the grassroots. You are able to talk to people to hear what the decisions that are being made in Westminster actually mean to people. And so to me, it is absolutely fundamental.

Can you make a difference? Yes, you can make a difference. I mean, obviously, in individual cases, you know, somebody comes to you, perhaps their benefits being stopped, you're able to unblock a system for them, housing issues, things like that. You can also make a difference in sort of wider issues in your constituency too. So you can contribute to changing the lives of people in your constituency in a way that's beneficial. So we've all published books this year, which have all fundamentally about what's gone wrong with politics.

Mine tries to be hopeful and encourage people to get stuck in. You're showing that you still believe in politics as the way to make change, whereas Rory's pretty negative about the whole thing. Do you still think that our system of politics is the best way to make change in this country? Or do you think actually, as we quite often argue, Rory probably more voluble than I, the whole system needs to be fundamentally transformed?

I don't think the system needs to be transformed. But I think there are, I mean, you could tinker at the edges, but I don't think it needs to be fundamentally transformed. I mean, what I hope comes out of my book is that actually, it's not just about the system, it's about the people within the system. And it's about attitudes of people within the system. You know, there was a time when a lot of people being elected to be a member of parliament would be content to be a backbench member of parliament, to serve their constituency well, to play their role in parliament, perhaps to be prominent in a select committee to get really interested in a subject and really help sort of move the arguments on that particular issue.

Today, so many people come into politics, want to be a minister, want to be a cabinet minister, want to be, you know, and the constituents is just a stepping stone.

So many people don't go into politics because they see what happens to a lot of politicians, or they just don't like politics at the moment. I mean, do you not worry that we've got a very narrow gene pool of people who want to go into politics?

I think there is an issue there. I mean, I've been involved in the Conservative Party in the past

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when David Cameron was leader, and we produced the A-list, but it was one of the things, we had a little group who were looking at candidates coming through.

I think you were on that one, you're already.

I wasn't on the A-list, no, but I was the beneficiary of the open primary system, which was...

Oh, that was it. That was it.

That was another thing I introduced, yes.

But we used to say to each other, Will, this candidate, do they extend the gene pool?

Do they bring something different into politics?

And I think that's very important because if you have a group of people in parliament who've got the same sort of background, same sort of experiences, then I don't think you'll get decisions that are as good as if that group of people has a diversity of experience, a diversity of background.

So probably not great that when David Cameron was writing his manifesto, every single person on the team went to eat in the parliament, was born, he went to St Paul's. Well, you know, I wouldn't know about going to eat, and because I wouldn't have been allowed to go to eat. I know, exactly.

I'm a girl.

And that's one of the things I've obviously been heavily involved in is women in parliament, and co-founded Women to Win, helping get more Conservative women elected.

I think, you know, it's having women in parliament, but having people from different communities and also from different work backgrounds.

But one of the sad things, actually, is that whereas in 1983, when Patrick McLaughlin came into the House of Commons, there were, as an ex-minor going to the Conservative party, there were over 100 MPs with manual worker blue collar backgrounds.

We now exist in a politics in which the largest single professional group are former special advisers and former local councillors who've been party members from university onwards, and it's a much more middle class, much more professional, much more party dominated parliament than was the case in the 70s and 80s.

It certainly, well, I would not agree with you on the local councillor point, having been a local councillor, I think often actually being a local councillor can be hugely beneficial in terms of experience.

Except, of course, what it does do, says he's pushing back a little bit.

I mean, it is a training in tribal politics.

I mean, local councils are the absolute training ground for people to not really,

I think, yeah, I think it develops.

You're going to get a lot of complaints from councillors this week already.

Well, I'll let you roll.

Well, to me, it's a training ground in a different way.

Because you have the responsibility of dealing with issues within your ward that people raise with you, such as an MP would with a constituency.

You also have the challenge of having to balance the issue with the whole council and policies that the whole council wants to adopt, which may have a negative impact on your ward. Similarly, if you're a member of parliament, sometimes governments want to adopt policies

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that will have a negative impact on your constituency, you have to balance that.

So, I think you get that sort of experience as a local councillor, but I do agree with you about, I'm afraid, the number of special advisers that come into parliament and have no other experience.

So, Nick Timothy shouldn't be replacing Mahancourt.

Well, he's got some other experience, but it's one of the things I do.

I say this publicly.

I say to people when I'm going into schools and colleges and so forth, and people say to me, I'm interested in being an MP.

What should I be doing?

I always say, do something else first.

Because if you've done something else, you've got a wider experience.

And if you then do become a minister, you've probably also actually got experience that is beneficial.

We interviewed Julia Gillard a while back, a wonderful woman.

And I did an event with her after that.

And I said to her, if an 18-year-old woman came to you, young woman came to you today and said, I want to go in politics, can you seriously say to that young woman, this will be a good experience for you?

And Julia gave a very passionate answer as to why she'd say yes.

Julia had a former premise for Australia.

Would you give the same answer?

Would you say to an 18-year-old woman who saw the way that Diane Abbott gets treated, who saw the way often you got treated, Merkel got treated, lots of women politicians who get treated worse than men, would you still say to an 18-year-old young woman, go and do something but then yes, go into politics?

Yes, I would.

Because I just think being in politics is just, you can make such a positive difference to people's lives as a member of parliament.

So I would still say that to that young woman.

But interestingly, you mentioned Julia Gillard because I've had dealings with her since we both stepped down.

She, Australian, Labour, British, Conservative, when we sat down and talked about the treatment of women in politics, we found our experiences were incredibly similar.

So what were those experiences from your perspective as a woman?

There were simple things like, if you're a woman and you exhibit any strength, you're some sort of harridan.

If you exhibit any emotion, oh, it's typical woman, you're a weak thing.

If a man exhibits emotion, then isn't that good?

He's showing his other side.

The man exhibits strength.

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That's, yes, we expect that.

That's very good.

So there are different attitudes to how you approach things.

Have you individually experienced what you would define as misogyny through your career?

I don't feel I did.

I mean, I think, I hate to mention this word in front of you, Alistair, but I think during the Brexit debates and the negotiations, there were a lot of my male colleagues on a particular side, the Brexiteer side, who just wanted me to waltz out of the room, slam the door, beat the table, be aggressive, be macho about it, when actually my experience was painful negotiations was the way to get your answer. But I deliberately, during my time, took the view.

Now, when I was trying to get selected as a candidate, I deliberately said to myself, if I wasn't selected, don't think it's because I'm a woman.

Ask myself, what was the subject I didn't really know much about?

What was the question I didn't answer very well?

Analyze your performance and then improve it for the next time.

Don't just say, oh, well, obviously, I was a woman.

They didn't want me.

I think we should take a break and have a glass of water and everything then we can...

Do you want a coffee tree?

I might have another coffee.

Keep me going through.

Right. So we've come a lot of ground there, but we've only really basically got up to Theresa May's time as Home Secretary.

So there's a lot more to go.

And what we're going to do is come back for a second episode with Theresa May to discuss the first time she met David Cameron, unusual circumstances, lots of stuff that happened to her, to become Prime Minister, then being Prime Minister, difficulties over Brexiteer, her interactions with the likes of Trump, Putin over Salisbury, and the Prime Ministers who preceded and followed her.

That episode will be out next Monday.

However, if you want to hear it right now,

it's already available to members of the Restless Politics Plus.

You can sign up at therestlesspolitics.com or directly through Apple Podcasts, and you can listen straight away.

See you next time.