

[Transcript] The News Agents / Are the 'New Conservatives' a help or a headache for Rishi Sunak?

This is a global player original podcast.

You know when you go to the supermarket and you get in more ketchup and you see that Heinz has 57 varieties.

Well it seems that within the Conservative Party they too are trying to create just as many varieties of Conservative almost more groupings now than there are Conservative MPs.

Very spicy.

I'm sure we've left out plenty but we were counting them up and we have got the National Conservatives, Natcons, we've got the Common Sense group, Love Common Sense, we've got the Conservative Democrats group, we've got the Net Zero group, we've got the, oh brand new one today, the new Conservatives.

You've missed out, the ERG.

So how could we have forgotten them?

You're right, we've now got a new one, the new Conservative group.

So just like we had new Labour in the 1990s we've now got new Conservatives.

Yes and they have unveiled a 12 point plan in brackets of which more in a moment and it's about cutting immigration by hundreds of thousands and they think that they are being helpful to Rishi Sunak who didn't think of this.

Welcome to the news agents.

The news agents.

It's John.

It's Emily.

And later in the podcast we're going to be looking at the ruling that has come from the Independent Press Standards Organisation about Jeremy Clarkson's rather trenchant slash appalling article about Meghan Markle and how the body came to the verdict it did and what it means for future adjudications that they might make.

But we are starting with the new Conservatives because how could we not?

They are new and they are shiny new things.

They are talking right now.

They're unveiling their 12 point plan and they are a group of 8, 10 maybe.

We're not sure.

They might include the Deputy Chairman Lee Anderson but nobody quite knows if he's turning up to the talk this afternoon.

But anyway, they are all from the 2017-2019 election intakes and they have gone out to warn the Prime Minister that he is risking eroding public trust if he doesn't adopt their radical action to dramatically reduce immigration.

And their plan is to stop foreign workers coming over here to do the jobs that they think British people are dying to do or could be dying to do if the salaries were better.

It's just that there hasn't been much evidence over the past decade, two decades, that there is this overwhelming desire for young Britons to be fruit pickers or care workers or whatever it happens to be and that is why we have been so heavily dependent on European Labour.

And is it about the salary that is being offered or is it that certain people just don't want to do certain jobs anymore?

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Like if you're in America and you see a garden worker, the chances are that they are going to be Hispanic.

So they've come up with this idea that you can bring down the numbers massively as if that was the easiest thing in the world to do as if Rishi Sunak hadn't probably already thought of it already.

I mean, if you come into this country and you start to analyse what our problems are at the moment, right?

Which is high inflation.

We've talked a lot about high inflation and huge gaps in the workforce.

So we cannot get things done, whether it's filling nurses vacancies, filling doctors vacancies, filling fruit pickers vacancies, filling care home workers, managing to get people who can deliver parts, mechanics to mend things, make secondhand cars, all the rest of it.

We have got a massive shortage of those skills.

We do not have enough people currently in the country to do those jobs, which is why it's much harder to get things done.

It's much slower to get things done and there are huge waiting lists for the NHS.

So the idea that the solution to this is to stop anyone who does want to come in and do those jobs is quite something.

The idea that you tackle inflation by giving everyone massive pay increases as well is an interesting one when the government sees that the number one enemy that it's facing at the moment is the fact that inflation stubbornly sticks at 8.7% and unlike France, Germany, Spain, the United States of America, Britain seems unable to bring down that inflation rate.

Ours is not to criticise but to invite those who are at the centre of this to explain.

So we have Tom Hunt, who is the MP for Ipswich, and he's going to talk us through the economic case that the new Conservatives are making.

Tom, you've set out these very bold ambitions for reducing the numbers of people coming into the country and asylum seekers.

Just let's do it with asylum seekers first.

Who would not be allowed to come in anymore?

So I think in keeping with the government's illegal migration bill, our view would be if you've arrived in our country illegally from France, then under no circumstances should you be able to stay.

So our position on that is absolutely aligned with the government's position.

But we have talked about a cap in the report.

But one of the things we've also said in the report about the cap is if we'd filled that cap or very close to filling that cap on an annual basis, then we would have the ability to go back to Parliament to say, look, actually, there's been a big humanitarian crisis in country A, and there would be the ability to respond to that.

But there would be an annual cap of 20,000.

But how do you measure that?

Because how do you know who's going to be coming in or who will need to come in because of crises wherever they happen to be?

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Well, I mean, we've got the annual cap of 20,000, but it would be up for the government of the day to judge what's a significant enough crisis, and we would be able to respond to it.

The key thing is we want to be generous.

We want to take our fair number of genuine refugees from the areas directly.

We do not want to be taking people who are coming illegally from France and have traveled through multiple safe countries where they refuse to claim asylum.

That isn't our priority.

If you have a cap, you have to prioritise.

Tom, at the moment, do you think we're taking too many people from Ukraine, Afghanistan and Hong Kong?

I think that we've had a scheme for Afghan interpreters.

We've had a scheme on the Ukraine, and particularly what's happened in the Ukraine is something which is incredibly unusual and very tragic, and we've responded to it.

I believe in the right way, and clearly the net migration figure this year of 600 takes that into account, and that's what we said in the report.

But I do think, though, it's right and proper.

But if you do come from Afghanistan, you come here through the correct scheme, you don't come here via France.

If you should apply for asylum in the first safe country you get to.

So how do you get from Afghanistan to London without infringing those rules?

As I say, I think you should apply for asylum in the first safe country you get to.

But there has been a scheme, for example, for Afghan interpreters.

One can argue whether that should be higher or lower, and that's a debate that is fair enough to have.

But I don't think it is appropriate for anyone, whatever their origin country is, to travel through multiple safe countries where they refuse to claim asylum and then make a dangerous crossing to enter our country legally.

But I'm just wondering, what is the route for an Afghan woman who may be fleeing persecution from the Taliban now that virtually all rights have been denied women?

How do you get from Kabul to London if that's where you want to claim asylum?

Well, I think the key thing is, if you're in an unsafe country, getting to a safe country, that's the key fit.

So I don't think there should necessarily be.

If you're in a situation where you're unsafe...

So you don't want them to come here?

You're basically saying you don't want them to come here?

Well, I think if you're fleeing persecution, you should claim for asylum in the first safe country you get to.

We have a scheme.

We've had a scheme for people to come over from Afghanistan, and we have taken a large number of people from Afghanistan as refugees, like we have done from Ukraine, and that's right and proper.

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But we have to have a managed process.

We can't have a situation where you travel through multiple safe European countries and then illegally enter our country.

Tom, we're an island.

That would mean logically that no one would ever claim asylum here, because that would never be the first safe country you would arrive in.

We have skis, and we've taken large numbers of refugees from Hong Kong, from Ukraine, Afghanistan.

We've got a proud record when it comes to our community, but what I am saying, I want us to show generosity, but there needs to be a process.

You've got to manage who's coming in.

And actually, there is a limit.

We've got a situation where there are tens of millions of people across the world who can conceivably get refugee status.

There's a limit to how many we can take, as you say.

We're an island.

Therefore, there needs to be a cap, and if there's a cap, we need to think about how we prioritise.

I have to say, I've three times I've been to the Rohingya refugee camp in Bangladesh, for example, since I've been elected.

I was there in January, I was there in March, and the people I spoke to there were mainly women and children.

And actually, they're not in a position where they can shop between different safe European countries.

They are fleeing persecution.

It's not likely we're going to be able to get back to my marionette time soon safely.

And I happen to think, if we had a managed system in terms of the refugees we take, I happen to think that they would come up higher priority list than principally young single men coming from France.

Coming from the Taliban.

Coming from France.

Many...

If you're coming from France, it's a safe European country.

If you want to get to France, presumably travel through many other safe European countries.

Why aren't they claiming asylum in both countries?

So basically, you prefer everyone that wanted to come to seek asylum in the UK as a refugee to stay in France?

I think you should apply for asylum in the first safe country you get to.

And actually, if they've got to France, they've probably been through many others.

I think, you know, we need...

There's a debate to be had about...

We've already taken a large number of refugees through legal proper schemes that the government has set up.

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You know, if somebody thinks we should increase those schemes or increase the cap, then obviously that's a debate to be had.

But I think this situation, which is completely unmanageable, where you have whoever turns up...

I'll make a point on this.

If we have got...

If it's a limit to how many genuine refugees we can take for every person...

And actually, by the way, a lot of people who come from France come from countries originally, that are safe, like Albania and India, for example.

They're not all...

Not everyone coming from France is...

Just to go back to the original premise about Afghanistan and Ukraine, as you'll know, there isn't an application process for the Afghan resettlement scheme right now.

There is no application process.

So by that logic, essentially, you would be saying, just don't come to the UK, just stay in France.

I think apply for asylum in the first safe country you get to.

I've been very clear on that.

I've been very clear on that.

Apply for asylum in the first safe country you get.

But you can't do that in the UK, because there's no asylum resettlement scheme.

So going back to my earlier question, there is no way an Afghan woman fleeing the Taliban could get asylum in the UK.

But I think the key thing is if you're not safe, is to get to a safe country.

Sure, sure, sure.

But just confirm my point.

You are confirming that there is no way an Afghan woman fleeing persecution would be able to seek asylum in the UK under the way you see it?

Well, I've been quite clear that I think in terms of the open illegal channels, because people often talk about safe and legal channels.

That's often spoken about.

A lot of people who promote those don't talk about a cap.

I think there need to be a cap for a lot of those channels.

So I'm pro-there being, you know, managed routes for genuine refugees.

And I'm absolutely pro that, but it does come with a cap, and there is a limit to how many we can take.

Cap of one.

Let's talk about legal migration, Tom.

Do you think broadly that British workers aren't entering the care profession because it has become too crowded by foreigners?

I would like to see the salaries paid to care workers be a lot higher, in my view.

I think the salaries that care workers get, I think it's too low.

I mean, ultimately, this is about people who are working with vulnerable people, many

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of our loved ones.

And I think the salaries they get should be higher than they currently are.

You'll have thought about that then.

So what is the current salary that you would like to see for care workers?

I think it's difficult for me to say, but at the moment I'd say it's too low.

Why?

Because it's a difficult thing to just pluck out of the sky.

I mean, I think it's fair enough for me to say.

We're not plucking it out.

We've come with a 12-point plan, and one of those points is that you think fewer foreign workers should be in our care home system, and more British workers should.

And you've just told me that they need to be paid more.

So what kind of sum are we talking about?

Look, ultimately, we've got 30,000 young people at the moment studying for a B-tech in health and social care.

We've got a large number of people who are economically inactive.

So in the short term, and then the other thing I'll make absolutely clear is that they're economically inactive because they can't work in care homes.

Do you think they want to work in care homes?

I think if we need to look at the paying conditions of people who work in care homes,

I was in a care home on Friday, for example, and I was pleased to meet a number of my constituents who work in a care home and do a fantastic job.

I think if we need to look at paying conditions and why it is, if we're struggling to attract people into to work in care, that's something we need to do as a country.

Well, of course it is.

But we're asking you because you've got the plan.

What is the amount of money that you think care workers should be paid?

I mean, like, you know, just ballpark.

Are we talking less than 15, less than 20, less than 25 or less than 10 pounds?

I don't know where your head is because we're trying to make the economics work on your plan.

So I mean, I think, you know, if you're working in the health and social care sector, you know, ideally, I think you definitely ought to be earning over 25 grand a year, definitely. And at the moment, you know, most people are earning below that.

If it's above 25, are we talking 50?

Are we talking 26?

Because at the moment, you know that the average working salary is around 26,000, right?

So if you're paying people that, will you get British workers to fill the jobs that they clearly don't want to do right now?

I'm confident that we can take steps to make work in social care a lot more attractive and a lot more viable.

We shouldn't be addicted to cheap labor.

And I feel like when it comes to health and social care, we have, we have become that.

And I think we should change that.

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Now, this is a report with 12 policy proposals about honouring the manifesto pledge that was made. You know, I think you struggle to really find anything above sort of 10 or 15% of population who would support net migration being at 600,000 a year level, but it's currently at this report. It's about trying to respond to that.

You know, and it's coming up with some ideas about the way in which we can do that.

So at the moment, I'm not the government.

Yeah, of course, of course, but you're trying to help the government.

And we're just trying to understand what that means.

You will know that 400,000 people have left the workforce since the pandemic.

You will know that doctors and nurses and teachers are on strike because they're not getting a living wage.

You will know that the government says it can't agree to their demand because of inflation repressions.

So just talk us through how you're going to get 400,000 people back into the workforce without paying them the wage that the current workforce that are in won't work for without creating an inflationary environment.

Just solve that for us.

I think what I'm not going to solve that for is a complex economic question.

You just asked me, OK, we have published a report with 12 suggestions about different ways in which we think we can get net migration to more sustainable levels that the majority of the public would support.

We agree with the Bench MPs who have published this report because our constituents raised it with us time and time again.

I am not a government department.

I do not have teams of civil servants working on these issues.

OK, we've come up with 12 points.

OK, and actually, I think if you look at those...

So they're not costed.

Well, I mean, it could be that one of those 12 points, you know, the government might look at some of them and say, actually, those points, we think we can make work.

Do you think the government just didn't think of this?

Do you think the government was just like, oh, God, that's such a good idea.

We didn't think of raising people's wages to get them into jobs that we can't fill?

I think there's some of the points out of the 12 that we've outlined that are solid and I think could well be adopted by the government.

Do I think all 12 will be?

No, do I think it's possible?

But with one of the 12 points, they might say, actually, we can't do this because of X, Y and Z, you know, and actually, we'd have a positive discussion about that and why maybe can't be deliverable in the short term.

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But ultimately, why are we publishing this report?
We're publishing this report because the vast majority of people in this country think net migration is far too high.
They don't like the addiction to cheap labour
and it's not just to health and care sector, it's been other sectors as well.
I mean, we want to try and make a change.
And you think that Rishi Sunak, your Prime Minister,
and I think you've got Leigh Anderson as well,
who is both the Deputy Party Chairman and also a figure in your group.
Do you think that Rishi Sunak doesn't want to lower migration?
What is your sense?
I think the report makes clear that the Prime Minister wants to lower net migration
and we've actually welcomed in our report many of the steps that have been announced.
For example, with one-year talk master students,
I no longer able to bring dependents to the country.
That's going to be introduced in January.
He's done that.
We've welcomed that.
But if you've read the report, you would have seen that we've advised him going further.
Can I just ask you...
I find it to be one-year restart students as well.
Can I just ask you, isn't this just Brexit?
That loads of people left the workforce,
fruit pickers in East Anglia, not a million miles from your own constituency,
have gone back home, lorry drivers gone back home, care workers gone back home.
And the reason we're having to take so many more in is that, for whatever reason,
British people don't want to pick fruit, they don't want to empty bedpans,
they don't want to do those jobs,
which they think are beneath them.
And that is the basic problem.
So I was a fruit picker myself.
I worked for four months in a radish department
in agricultural processing, farming and defence.
And my job was to sort radishes.
So radishes came by, I take out the bad radishes that go through.
And I pick peas.
Yes, so I had one week in the leak department,
was moved back to a radish department.
But what I would say is, from my memory, I think I was one of only two.
Wait, Tom, you've just said you did that for four months, right?
You did that for four months.
Trying to finish my point.
So I was one of only two people,

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I was one of only two people who were local, who were working in that factory.
Everybody else there wasn't from the local area.
And I think that's a fundamental challenge.
I don't think any jobs...
Well, why didn't you stay in it?
I don't think any job should necessarily be seen as beneath anyone.
And I think that what I remember seeing is,
I spoke to a lot of people who came from other countries
and were working in the agricultural processing sector.
They'd start off just as one of the regular workers.
And within months, they'd be running the line,
they'd be getting more responsibility.
Some of it may start in one place
and may end up in a completely different place
if you climb the rungs of that ladder.
I don't think any job should be beneath anybody else.
And I think that, you know...
And I quite enjoyed my time in the radish department.
But the reason why didn't I stay at the radish department indefinitely,
because I went to do a course in Russian history,
which I was very interested about, you know, and that was that.
So it was only four months in the radish department.
And where Miriam Kate says,
the reason you cannot get people to work in social care or the health service
is that there are too many foreigners.
And if there were fewer foreigners,
then British people would be keener to go and work there.
Is that a fair point?
I think there's things that we can do
when it comes to working in social care.
I value greatly the work that people carry out in social care.
I met some of them on Friday.
I think there's things that...
But if you go back over the history of the health service,
the Windrush generation came in to fill jobs that British people didn't want to do.
That's why there were so many nurses and bus drivers and all the rest of it
that kept our social infrastructure going in the 1960s.
And here we are in 2023.
And we are still dependent on foreign labour,
wherever it may come, to keep those things going.
So I think it's important that...
So this report is outlining a series of plans that are significantly cut net migration.
But I must add, it would still be over 200,000 a year, which is far higher, far higher.

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But I mean, if we look at before sort of 1997,
net migration was running at levels probably less of a tenth of what it is at the moment.
So yes, we have always been open to people to come here.
But the level of net migration at the moment is unparalleled.
And I think in terms of the history, what's happened in the past,
I'd be interested to find if you can find a year in the past
in the last 30 years where it's been at the level it is right now.
Tom, I know you've got speeches to make and all the rest of it.
Will you be seeing Lee Anderson? Is he turning up today?
I don't know. I don't know. I don't know if I'll be seeing Lee Anderson today.
No. Why? I haven't spoken to him today.
Well, I don't know. I'm not constantly talking to Lee Anderson.
I don't know what he's... I assume I'll see him later today. I don't know.
OK, he is still... All I'm asking is he's still part of the group.
Oh, yeah, he's part of a new Conservative group
and he supports what we've published today.
And does Rishi Sunak need more pressure groups?
And isn't it a bit odd that the Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party
is part of a pressure group calling for a major change in government policy?
I wouldn't say we're calling for a major change in government policy.
When you're saying bring net migration from 600,000 to 200,000,
some would say that's a major change.
Well, actually, if you take into account...
We've got the Ukrainian refugees and the Hong Kong refugees.
I mean, it's going to go down significantly anyway,
even if we didn't know that, what was in this report.
So probably it's... I don't think it is pushing for a dramatic change
in the government's approach to migration.
I think that the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary have made clear
that it needs to come down. I think these are some helpful suggestions.
I'm not saying every single one of the 12 suggestions is absolutely bulletproof.
And you won't be able to pick one or two of them apart.
But what I am saying is I'm confident in that support.
I think it's a good contribution to a debate.
And actually, I'm pleased we can have this debate
because we've ended EU free movement.
So we can now talk about what kind of migration system we'd like.
Whereas when we had EU free movement, it was impossible to do that.
We're really grateful for your time, Tom.
Thank you so much, Tom Hunt.
Thank you.
I love that he did four months in radishes, a week in Leeks,
but just didn't work out for him doing Leeks.

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Do you know what? Everyone has to earn their spurs.
If he told me he'd spent a decade picking radishes, I'd be well impressed.
But we've all done those jobs.
I've swept hair, made pizza.
We've all done the jobs where you kind of learn how to do things
that you might not be doing for the rest of your life.
Yeah, I mean, look, you know, I've done pee picking, which is horrible.
You have to fill up the sack and you get paid per sack.
And I thought that the great idea was to put heavy stones in
because you got paid by weight.
You cheat. A little bit.
I used to get people complaining about the way I washed their hair.
What, not enough scalp massage or?
Apparently, I just left all the shampoo in.
It was a terrible, terrible hair.
And soap in their eyes. That's the worst bit.
But anyway, we're digressing.
Well, the point is, I suppose, the headache is not from the soap in your eyes,
but the headache is from Rishi Sunak looking at his party
and various different guys sort of fracturing off into yet another grouping.
Before an election.
Before an election.
And they all say that they're doing it to help him, right?
Something tells me that Rishi Sunak himself has probably thought
about what he needs to do to get down immigration
or what he needs to do to curb inflation
or what he needs to do to sort of get the country running a little bit more easily.
And it's probably not helping to have his deputy party chair telling him what that is loudly.
I do think that the Lee Anderson thing is extraordinary.
He has been appointed deputy chair of the Conservative Party.
So he's got an official position to go out round the country
and bang the drum for Rishi Sunak.
Well, at the same time, he's joined a pressure group
which is telling Rishi Sunak you could lose the next election if you don't do this.
And one of the MPs that is part of this, Miriam Cates, has gone out and said exactly that.
Yeah, but Lee Anderson is a very, very busy man
because he also spends at least one evening of his week
inviting people to eat cat food on his TV show.
You appeared on TV as a cat and some feline feelings.
And now we want to dismiss this as just a play.
If this is going where I think it's going,
and you're about to bring out a plate of whiskers, you can bugger off.
We've got a tin of cat food here.

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I don't know what brand it is, but it looks delicious.
I'm not eating bloody cat. Are you kidding me?
Well, we're going to get it out.
Do we want to see if you're really a cat?
Well, no, I'm not.
I am not. I'm telling you, no, I'm not eating.
You go first and I'll follow.
You shake on that?
You want to shake on that?
Oh, God, I don't know if you're a man of your word.
Well, are you going to try that?
I don't want to. No, I don't want to.
You don't want to do it. I don't want to eat.
Here's the challenge. Here's the challenge.
I don't want to eat ocean fish pate.
He's getting 100 grand a year from that job we hear.
What, from just doing that TV show?
Just from the cat food TV show.
And he's the deputy party chair and he's the MP.
I mean, maybe the solution is to get what?
Every single conservative MP doing at least three jobs.
Three jobs.
And then Britain's labour shortage is solved.
We can kick out all foreigners and it's done and dusted.
We've solved it.
We've solved it in a moment.
We'll be back discussing the Jeremy Clarkson column and Ipsos ruling.
This is the news agents.
Welcome back.
And because Emily Mateless likes a quiz,
we're going to start with a quiz question.
Love a quiz.
But I think some of you might find it a bit easy.
I'm not joining in.
So who wrote that he was, quote,
dreaming of the day when she is made to parade naked
through the streets of every town in Britain, while crowds chant shame
and throw lumps of excrement at her.
Yeah. Yes.
We all got that one and it was Jeremy Clarkson.
And before we go on to talk about that ruling by the press complaints
organization and talk to the chairman of the organization,
I'm going to tell you something really odd, which is that just before

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he went to write that column, literally about half an hour before he sort of headed off, I was having a conversation with him. And we were talking about what it's like being a columnist. And he said, it's quite bizarre, but my readers often give me a hard time. If I change my mind about something, you know, from one week to another. And I said, oh, but I'm always changing my mind. He said, yes, so am I. It makes me happy to hear that. You know, quite often I don't feel that strongly about things. And I went, yes, exactly right. And then we sort of parted ways. And the next thing I knew, I read this like, I would say that was strongly worded. I would go further than that statement, actually. But I don't think you need to guess what I think about the article. You need to hear from the regulator themselves. They've said it was sexist because of its pejorative and prejudicial comments. So this was the column that emerged from a Jeremy Clarkson, who thought he was quite flagmatic quite often. Yeah, I think it's fair to say that for Jeremy Clarkson to say he doesn't have strong opinions reveals a certain lack of self-knowledge because he's something I don't like sweets. Exactly. The one thing about Clarkson is that if he's going to express an opinion, it is going to be trenchant. But on this one, thousands, literally thousands of people complained that he had gone over the top. And this, if you like, has been the first important test of the new regulatory body that emerged out of the Leveson Inquiry into the kind of egregious behavior and excesses of some parts of the press. Post the phone hacking. Post phone hacking that they should be able to hold newspapers to account. And this weekend, we got the adjudication in the Sun newspaper, where they reprinted it on the page where the column had originally appeared saying that they had found Jeremy Clarkson to be sexist. Yeah. And he'd used this word hate for the Duchess of Sussex, Megan, in other words. And he said that it was worse than his loathing for Nicola Sturgeon and worse than Rose West. And when they put the three together, the only thing that these three people had in common was they were all women. So it was the fact that it had been her gender that was put centrally to this piece that had made them agree with the complainants, particularly, I think it was the Falsett Society, who had brought this complaint. And I think it was the first time that they have upheld a complaint that didn't come from the, as it were, the injured party themselves. Yeah. Well, let us talk now to Lord Edward Forks,

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who is the head of Ipso, the Independent Press Standards Organization.
Because he's with us in the studio.
Welcome to you. Are you kind of surprised,
please disappointed with the reaction you've had?
I think there's been, as there inevitably would be, a mixed response.
I think most people have thought that this was a sensible decision.
It's caused there to be quite a lot of discussion about what a regulator does.
And there's some people who think that we strayed into areas
which are matters of taste rather than regulation.
But I think that was to be expected.
You went ahead with this investigation.
Did you speak to Meghan Markle about whether you wanted she wanted this to go forward?
We consulted her representative and we took the fact that she was happy
for it to go forward as one of the factors in determining whether we would go forward.
One of the factors. What were the others?
The other factor is whether we thought that it was a matter of public interest.
We had 26,000-odd complaints.
Whether the issue was one which we thought we had an appropriate representative body.
And those are all the factors that we took into account.
We considered carefully whether we should, because we don't, as a matter of course,
take complaints from groups unless there are unusual circumstances.
So it's really interesting, isn't it, trying to work out the judgment
when there is so much strength of feeling from the public?
I mean, do you think inevitably you are swayed by that?
Is that an important factor?
Yes, I mean, of course, these are matters of opinion, ultimately.
But the editor's code, which is a code which the editors of all newspapers
regulated or not agree upon, sets out various standards,
and including the relevant one, which we considered.
And ultimately, we have to weigh up all sorts of matters
and we try and be as objective as possible.
Everybody's entitled to their view, but we decided on this occasion,
the committee decided that this crossed a line.
So if it had been 10 complaints, not 26,000,
but the 10 complaints were very powerfully argued,
would you have gone ahead?
It's not a numbers game entirely.
The answer is the strength of the argument.
I think the numbers were matters that determine whether or not it was a complaint
to take forward on a representative capacity.
But actually, if there was one person complaining and the complaint was strong,
we would have given it a rigorous analysis.
And just on the 26,000, did you ask how many of them were sun readers?

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No, it doesn't really matter.

They were sun readers, somebody drawn to their attention.

I mean, there were a lot of sun readers.

Some of them would have made no complaint at all.

People complained for all sorts of reasons and very much.

I just wonder what is the force of somebody who is not even reading the newspaper, but just hears about it and feels, I'm very cross and I'm going to complain to it.

So whereas, shouldn't it be the sun readers who are deciding whether this is investigated or not?

Yeah, we don't have a sort of strict standing rule, like they do in judicial review, for example.

But on the other hand, it's been drawn to their attention to use the time on a phrase and whether they're sun readers or not.

I mean, people complain to us all the time because they don't like what is in the newspapers.

That isn't a good reason for finding a breach of the editor's code.

And a large majority of complaints are rejected simply because they don't come within the scope of our jurisdiction.

We don't tend to uphold complaints against columnists, whether we agree or disagree with them.

But we thought, having looked at the editor's code, having stood back from it and analysing it as forensically as we can.

And it's quite a lengthy decision for anybody who wants to read it, that we as a regulator, that Ipso was doing its job by finding on this occasion, that it crossed a line.

It's free press up to a point, isn't it?

Because you're saying you can have strong opinions, but you can't be sexist.

You can have strong opinions and express them strongly.

But if you express them in such a way as prejudicial or pejorative in the terms of the code and the committee concludes that's the case, then we thought there was a breach of the editor's code.

So Fraser Nelson, the spectator editor, wrote over the weekend, I think in the Telegraph, that you shouldn't really be a paraphrase, the arbiter of taste and opinion.

And he wants to pull the spectator out of Ipso.

He's right that we shouldn't be the arbiter of taste or opinion.

That's not our job.

We're regulating in accordance with the editor's code.

I'm sorry that he thinks he wants to pull out from the whole organisation.

I'd be delighted to meet and talk with him.

I think the article you're talking about contain quite a lot of very positive comments about what Ipso had done and what we've achieved.

And he broadly speaking accepts our jurisdiction.

The fact that he may not like one particular decision is disappointing that he then thinks he's going to pull the plug.

I hope that he'll think again about that because it's very important that those who regulate accept decisions.

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Sometimes they won't like them.

What if the Sun hadn't published the apology that you said it had gone over the line?

You said it was sexist and they hadn't put that on page 17 or wherever it was.

We take into account.

I just wonder, I suppose my question is, how much teeth do you have?

Well, I think the teeth we have, we show, which is to make a newspaper publish an adjudication, which I'm sure no newspaper likes, whether they're the editor, the journalist who wrote the article or anybody.

And I think the very fuss that this has caused shows that it was something that was taken seriously by those who may regulate.

That seems to be a good thing.

I expect you're going to ask me, well, why can't we find people?

Why can't you find people?

You do our job now.

You've done the newspaper.

The answer is we can find people, but we only do so when there is a serious and systemic problem that we've identified.

We have a standards team who do that.

And this is an article.

We thought it was a serious breach, but it doesn't of itself indicate a serious and systemic breach.

And also the question of fines.

I mean, there's a danger that if you have large organizations and you find them and look at the utility companies or whatever, they can build that in as part of it.

I'm not sure that actually this is in a more effective way.

I hope actually what'll come from this is that people will realize there is a regulator and those newspapers who are regulated by us, those who read them will say, well, they are regulated.

And if we're looking for news that we can rely on, which complies with the editor's code, it's reassuring to know there is regulation when lots of people get their news from unregulated sources of all sorts, fake news and the like, those who are regulated by it.

So at least know there is somebody watching and as you said, you're going to get it from all sides.

But one of the big questions being asked is this happened last December.

I remember the day very well.

And we are now in July.

So actually all the power of that emotion and that fury and all the rest of it has dissipated.

It took six months to get to this place.

And people turn around and say, why does it so drag its feet?

What were you doing?

Why?

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It's not a bad idea, in a sense, for some of the initial outrage to dissipate.
I mean, ours is a kind of long, some would say rather tedious, but proper process, a rigorous process where we had to go through various steps.
And the sun was entitled as they indeed they demanded a very thorough investigation.
When did they see it first?
They've had a little time to do it.
They were entitled to like months less than that.
But quite some time ago, they were entitled to ask for an independent, separate, legal of evaluation as to whether we'd gone through the right process.
Gosh, they did that.
So you're being judged.
Oh, we're being judged and whether we got the process right.
And now we're being judged in the court of public opinion as to whether we got the decision right.
The sun was entitled to ask for that.
We were told that we had gone through the correct process.
That doesn't mean to say everybody has to agree with our decision.
But it was a decision we came to in good faith after a careful analysis.
Don't forget, it took six months on what it was a serious matter.
Compare that with the court case, which will take many years and a great expense to adjudicate.
I think that's a pretty favorable comparison.
And, you know, OK, it's six months, but it still caused quite a furore.
So it hasn't exactly been able to be buried anywhere.
And you're talking to me about it.
Various people are now aware of Ipso and where they might not have been.
I don't think that's a bad thing.
There is a very big issue that is sort of looming right now in the courts.
It may take months before we know the answer to this one.
But it's Prince Harry taking on the papers.
Now, clearly, this is going through an actual court of trial.
Do you think that the papers are looking in a precarious position right now?
Yeah, I mean, obviously, I can't comment.
You wouldn't expect me to on the particular case.
The judgement's been reserved.
It'll probably be the autumn before it's decided.
The allegations are pretty ancient in terms of press history.
They're before Ipso existed.
They concern a period when probably the press was not going through its finest hour, whatever the judge may or may not decide.
But you're right in the sense that it reminds people that the press can be powerful and it will feed into the debate about the future of the press and regulation, which is going to be a political issue, I'd say, in the

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forthcoming election.

Do you think so? Why?

Well, we're not clear yet what the liberal Democrats and the Labour Party think about press regulation.

But they have in the past suggested that they would like further regulation involvement of the state in some way.

They haven't formulated their policy.

I hope that's not the conclusion they reach.

But I hope that actually that our independence has been established and that the government, whatever colour it is, will decide that it isn't necessarily a break of the state.

How it could have come to you.

Yeah, exactly.

It's a very good point, Emily, because we have an arbitration scheme, which is cheap, but not cheerful in the sense that we have high quality arbitrators who decide these things, costs very little.

It's not used very often.

I mean, I think lawyers who don't get involved very much in this prefer to use the courts route, but I wish people would use it more.

Why didn't he then? Sorry, just anybody's entitled to use it.

I've said before, actually, in the media that I do wish he had.

Well, I mean, it's a matter for him.

I would like to think that we would then be able to show that there are other courses that you can take, alternative dispute resolutions that don't involve going to court.

Right. So that would have been better if he hadn't gone to court.

I'm not criticising him for going to court.

That's his choice.

You know, there may be good reasons for doing it.

He may want to bring it into the public eye, I suspect.

Whereas arbitration would have been much more.

But does it undermine Ipso?

I don't think it undermines Ipso.

We provide a complaints mechanism.

We're not a court.

Ipso exists of its own right and does its job.

The fact that people also go to court is up to them.

You know, we're not there, as it were, to replace court processes.

There is still the law of defamation.

There are various other laws of privacy, contempt and so forth, which exist in order to keep the press in line.

Fascinating. Thank you so much.

Thanks.

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This is The News Agents.

Just before we go.

More cat food?

Close, but no cigar.

But no whiskers.

But no whiskers or kitty cat.

It is about Lee Anderson, who we were all told would be part of the new Conservatives Group and that he would be there at this launch.

We've just seen his name has been taken off the headed note paper if they've got any yet.

So the deputy chair of the Conservative Party,

I would guess, has been slapped around the head a bit and saying,

if you're going to remain as deputy chair of the Conservative Party

and obviously cat food salesman, don't join this group.

I just think a week is a long time in politics,

doesn't have quite the force of an episode is a long time in News Agents.

I think he might have used up one of his nine lives.

We'll see you tomorrow. Bye bye.

Bye for now.

This has been a global player original podcast and a Persephoneka production.