

[Transcript] Leading / David Miliband: The Age of Impunity

Welcome to another episode of The Restless Politics, leading with me, Alistair Campbell.
And with me, Rory Stewart.

And Rory, tell us where you are and who you're with and that way, well, people know who our guest is because it's advertised when they click on, but why don't you just tell us where you are?

Yeah, this is something that's taken us a long time to realise.

We've been doing this mystery trail where we'd be like, I'm sitting in Manhattan with a good-looking chap in a blue shirt, and then eventually 15 minutes later, we tell them what they can already read on the description of the podcast, which is that I'm sitting with your friend, David Miliband, who did a surprise appearance, turning up like some unbearded Father Christmas to deliver presents to your house.

He did, at Christmas, yeah, yeah, because David, I should declare an interest, David is a very close friend.

It doesn't mean I won't give him a hard time.

At least until the end of this podcast, yeah.

Yeah, yeah, we could, no, we won't follow over that.

Former Foreign Secretary, now running a major international charity based in the States, which we will talk about because he and Rory are sort of basically in the same field now, aren't you?

We are.

He's the new insurgent, isn't that what your claim is?

He's a challenger brand to the establishment, yeah.

I like the sort of mini-milly.

I think we're trying to change lives together.

We're doing it together.

It's a partnership.

It's like you and him in number 10.

It's now me and David.

Yeah, well, that feels like a very, very long time ago.

We'll maybe talk about that a bit later.

The three questions I'm most often asked about you are as follows.

Question one is people say, do you think Labour picked the wrong milliband?

Question two, that's not the hardest question you've ever been asked, but anyway, go on to number two, yeah.

Oh, God, you get the arrogance straight away there.

He didn't say yes, but anyway.

Question two, do you think, Alistair, that David Milliband will ever come back to British politics?

And question three, I get asked quite a lot is, what's David Milliband up to these days?

So you can pick those questions in any order you like.

Well, number three is the place to start.

It suggests that I'm not doing my job very well if people don't know what I'm doing, but I'm the CEO of the International Rescue Committee, which is an extraordinary organisation. It was founded by Albert Einstein in the 1930s, who was a refugee in New York.

And we were a \$400 million humanitarian aid organisation.

We're now a \$1.4 billion humanitarian aid organisation with 3% of the total humanitarian sector, but we do about 35% of all the impact evaluations.

So we think of ourselves as the thought leaders of the humanitarian sector.

And the tragedy of my 10 years here is that we're needed more than ever.

The humanitarian needs have more or less tripled in the last 10 years.

And we're an organisation that works with a specific focus.

We help people whose lives are shattered by conflict and disaster to survive, recover and gain control of their lives.

And so we're not a general anti-poverty organisation around the world.

We're about the victims of war.

In that sense, I'm working on the failures of politics.

I spent 20 years in politics trying to make politics work.

I'm now dealing with the greatest political failures.

There are 54 civil wars going on around the world, and we're trying to clean up some of the mess.

People in all of those countries that have a civil war going on now, would you have people there right now?

Yes.

So we've got 8,000 people working for us in Afghanistan, 3,500 of them women, 60% of the services restarted.

And one of the things that I find most inspiring about the IRC is that we can trace from the war zone in Somalia or in Syria or in Ukraine to the internal displacement, because people move first of all within their own country, to the refugee hosting states.

So we help, we work in Bangladesh with Myanmar refugees, we work in Jordan and Lebanon and Iraq with Syrian refugees, to the end of the story for the lucky few, which is to restart their lives in places like the US or Germany, and we work on that too.

And so we work across the arc of crisis, and we have about 22,000 employees and a further 20,000 day staff, incentive workers.

So we're working in 280 field sites around the world.

In a way, this begins to get to your question.

I spent time in politics where the great thrill is that you can see the big picture, but the danger is that you lose sight of the ground level.

The great thing about working in an NGO is that you're confronted every day with the ground level, but the danger is that you lose the big picture.

And my job in the IRC is really to try and make sure that we're diligent about the focus on each of the individuals we're helping, 31 million last year, but we're also serious about thinking about some of the systemic problems that are driving people's lives to destruction.

Can I take us back for a second, back to, I suppose, your childhood and your family and where you came from.

Give us a sense of how you grew up, what your parents did, where you grew up, what your values were growing up.

Well, there is a link to the previous question.

When I came to apply for the job at the IRC, I said there were three reasons why I was applying for the job.

The first was I thought that the humanitarian issues the IRC was meant to address are some of the most difficult problems in global politics.

How do you teach education under the Taliban in Afghanistan?

How do you get medical aid into Syria?

Secondly, I said I thought the IRC was a bit of a sleeping giant.

But thirdly, I said both my parents were refugees.

And so there's a, in a way, a closing of the circle that the experience of my parents, my dad was born in Belgium, he fled to the UK in 1940, Jewish family in, from Brussels.

My mom, Jewish family in Chesterhove in Poland, she spent the war in hiding in Poland. She lost her father in a concentration camp.

She was refugee, a child refugee at the age of 12 in the UK in 1946.

So my family story, in a way, with different times, different religion mirrors many of the circumstances that people are facing around the world today.

Tell us a bit about your mother.

My mother's still alive.

She is a remote, a person in a way, born of the trauma that she grew up with.

So she was born in 1934, so she was six when, five, six when the war broke out.

She came from a reasonably well-to-do family.

They were in business, they were in linen business.

And she showed enormous strength to survive the war with her mother and her sister.

But the truth is she never really wanted to talk about it.

It's very, very difficult to talk about it.

We only found out three or four years ago, five years ago now, that the actual place where her father was killed in a concentration camp in southwestern Germany.

And she came to a commemoration there, but even then it was very, very hard to access that part of her memory.

And so while my dad could reflect on arriving in Britain in 1940, going to Acton Technical College, getting into the LSE, learning English, he didn't speak English, he spoke French and Yiddish and arrived, learned English, qualified for the LSE, went to the LSE, which was in Cambridge at the time, spent a year in Cambridge.

And was he much older than you?

How old was he when you were born?

He was 42 when I was born.

He could tell a war story of joining the Navy in 1942 and spending three years in the Royal Navy and learning how to be a Brit, really, which he became.

Later, David became the man who hated Britain.

Yeah.

Patshah the Daily Mail.

Rubbish, obviously.

Let's give David an opportunity to explain the comments.

No, well, I'll explain because when Ed was lead of the Lowe Party, the Daily Mail and its vileness and viciousness decided that there was a great piece to be written about, David

and Ed's dad as being some sort of terrible Marxist, anti-patriotic, etc., etc., it was a truly horrible piece.

But your father was an academic?

He was an academic, yeah.

He was a student of a man called Harold Leskey, who you probably know at the LSE, and Leskey died while my dad was a graduate student, and my dad was invited to take on his graduate politics seminar.

But the point I was saying is that for my dad, the war was obviously horrific in what he saw and what he lost 43 members of his family up to the Nazis.

But there were elements of it that he could talk about, whereas I think for my mother, it wasn't that it was unmentionable at all, but she never wanted to go there in terms of talking about it.

Obviously, one of the obvious questions is, given that you almost became Prime Minister and your brother almost became Prime Minister, it's quite unusual to have a family that generates two people with that degree of ambition, public profile, success, and it's almost like the Kennedy family or something.

Hardly.

Hardly.

What is it about your family, do you think, looking back on it, that created the environment for you and your brother Ed to become these very prominent politicians?

Well, a couple of things strike me, and I don't know if they answer your question.

The first is that we were not brought up to think how lucky we are not to be caught up in fascism and war.

I think our parents tried to give us the normality that they never had, which I think created an incredible sense of security.

And I suppose the second thing is that we were told that if you've got an opinion, you should express it, but you should also expect it to be challenged, which was quite a good environment to grow up in.

I have to say, did we spend our time discussing dialectical materialism?

No.

We spent our time discussing, I was passionate about football, my dad was not passionate about football, but one of the great things about him is that he wasn't a particularly patient person, but when it came to his children, he was infinitely patient.

We spent four years living in Leeds.

There's this whole thing, I know you grew up in North London, actually from the age of eight till 12, we lived in Leeds, outside Leeds actually.

My dad was teaching at Leeds University, and every Saturday morning, he took me to playing gold for the school football team, and my memory of him is that, not some debate about fascism.

So he gave you both immense confidence.

I think that he taught us, as I reflect on it, to be, expect to be challenged, but to be ready to express a view.

By the way, my mother is not short of expressing a view either.

So it was very much all for having the argument.

Did he think that you, and even Ed, who's probably positioned a little bit to the left of you, not much, but did your dad think you were a bit sort of, you know, new Labour sell-out in terms of your politics?

Not sell-out, but yes.

I mean, he, you know, he'd been a member of the Labour Party in the 50s.

He spoke at the Labour Party conference, I think in 55 or 56.

He was in and around the Bevanites.

Look, he was a Marxist who was never a communist, and so he had this interesting independent left positioning.

And he hated Stalinism, was a huge critic of that, but also thought capitalism was degraded by its injustices and its inequalities.

And so, of course, he thought that we were sort of massively more moderate, if you like, or social democratic than he was.

But here's the thing.

I always think I was 21 in 1986, he was 21 in 1945.

I'd grown up in a middle-class household, he'd been forced to flee, he'd lost 43 members of his family, we're actually going to celebrate this in an extraordinary way in a month's time.

The Catholic family who lived south of Brussels, who sheltered my grandmother and my aunt, plus 17 other members of the family for three years during the course of the war, they're being admitted to Yad Vashem in a special ceremony in a few weeks' time.

Those two contrasting first 21 years explain a lot about how you think about the world.

Are you two sitting in New York at the moment?

I'm imagining that Donald Trump is all over the airwaves and all over the front pages.

We're actually surprised you're not criticising us for not actually having him on the show.

I'm not sure I want him.

I don't want to see him.

I don't want to see him play his game.

If Donald Trump, if you're listening, we don't want you on.

Hillary on the other hand and Joe Biden, we would happily take them.

Actually, even DeSantis, I think, would be reasonably interesting, even though he seems pretty ghastly to me.

But David, you, in fact, you and Rory, very, very kindly, read drafts of my book, which is coming out soon, in which I quote, at length, Madeleine Albright, and her book, *Fascism A Warning*, and you talked about your father and mother, as it were, fleeing, escaping fascism.

I mean, how much do you feel we are on the edge around the world that fascism is making something of a return?

And I'd like you to link that to the very interesting speech you made a while back, a big long article you wrote a while back about what you call the age of impunity.

I think that the march of impunity is a fact of the modern geopolitics.

There are fewer democracies than there were at any time since 1986.

Only 25% of the world lives in what Freedom House calls a democracy.

But there's a bigger thing going on, which is the abuse of power.

Democracy is one form of accountability.

It's not the only form of accountability.

And what we are seeing around the world in the conflict zones where IRC works, but also across economic and environmental spheres, we are seeing the march of the abuse of power, the march of impunity.

And impunity is simple to define.

It's the exercise of power without accountability.

And it's worst forms, it's crimes without punishment.

It's the old idea that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

And my argument is that this march of impunity is a central feature of social and political life around the world today, of which the retreat of democracy is a part.

I've just been involved with a project called the Atlas of Impunity, which maps every country in the world on five indices of impunity.

Conflict, human rights, governance, the economy, economic exploitation, both of workers, but also of the seizure of assets by governments.

And then, fifthly, environmental impunity, because I think what we're doing to the planet is an example of impunity for the very simple reason that the planet has no votes and future generations have no votes.

And I think this lens for understanding the multiple crises that are going on around the world, the lens being the inequalities of power that are so great that they allow for impunity, I think that is the central feature.

And just to come back to what you say, fascism is a terrible political example of the extreme end of that.

But I think that it's right to call out the abuses of power that are so profound everywhere.

I don't, myself, think that we should confuse fascism in its 1930s version had racism built into its heart.

There's a longer argument about the extent to which they're related.

It's odd, isn't it, this development of impunity and the sense that during your life, we've gone from an extraordinary period of optimism from, I don't know, 1989 through to 2004-5 towards a situation now of increasing impunity, collapse in democratic standards, human rights. But it's odd.

I mean, why has this happened?

You would have thought that the world, as it got ever more prosperous, ever more healthy, ever more educated, would have had ever more accountability as citizens became increasingly empowered.

What's going on?

I mean, as a listener to your podcast, I know that you're fans of Moisa's naeem.

She's the man who argues that populism, polarization and post-truth are not new, but they've been accelerated into a new and virulent form by the rise of the digital economy.

I think there's a lot in that.

I think the second thing that strikes me is that if you think about global politics today, geopolitics, there are two things going on.

One is that you've got rival economic systems to the market economy, or at least rival political economies.

That's what a multipolar world means.

And the second thing that you've got going on is global risks galloping forward at a remarkable rate, health risks, nuclear risks, environmental risks.

And what I see is the globalization of risk, but the localization of resilience.

People are trying to insulate themselves from global risk by acting locally.

And that's fed this quote-unquote out-of-control sense.

Bring back control was an important part of the claim for autocrats all over the world.

One of the things that you are talking about there, which I think is very interesting, is the question of how technology is changing things.

And if I can do a little shout-out to Google.org, which has just been funding the non-profit

I work with, give directly doing anticipatory action work in Mozambique, in other words, using their satellite data and their information to identify before the cyclone hits where the need will be in allowing us to do cash transfers to extreme poor for him.

It seems to be an example of the potential for technology to cut in the other direction, for technology not simply to be the force that leads to impunity or increased risk, but also technology as a way of managing risk, particularly in climate.

I totally agree.

And what you saw for the first 10 years after 2000 was a sense that democratization would be powered by the digital economy, that somehow the autocrats of the world who are trying to keep our information would be as little king canoes of the 21st century.

In fact, the technology has become the enabler of state control.

And when you play anticipatory action, I play anticipatory cash in the Sahel, where we've done a research project on one side of the valley, there's cash after the floods.

The other side of the valley, there's cash before the floods, anticipatory cash.

And actually, people use that cash very, very well.

So I think there is a, and we've used it exactly as you say, we've used predictive analytics to try and get ready for that.

So yes, there is a lot of potential for that, but not if we're only working at the ultra local level.

If you're not willing to think about it at a global level, we're running up a downward escalator.

I spoke to someone today who was saying, look, just think about that phrase, nationally determined contributions.

Those are the commitments that countries are making to fight the climate crisis, came out of the Paris Agreement, which we all welcomed.

He said, look, that's almost the definition of the absence of global coordination, nationally determined commitments.

Where's the cohesion?

So one of the things that Moise's name says, it said in that book and has said elsewhere is that the thing that has really surprised him is the extent to which the United Kingdom fell victim to 3P politics, populism, polarization and post truth.

And he argued that he thought that Jeremy Corbyn was in part sort of a populist leader who was very, very briefly there.

And most obviously that Boris Johnson and Brexit were, he thought, products of the same

approach.

So having been centrally involved in British politics and now looking at it for the last decade from afar, but sort of dipping in and out, what's your take on that as analysis of our politics?

Well, this is painful beyond, beyond measure, really.

I mean, I remember in the foreign office in 2007, 2008, we were passing the Europe bill, the Lisbon Treaty, and they said, Minister, we just want to point out that there's special provision being made that countries can leave the EU.

And you know, it's been set up in a particular way.

You know, once a country gives notice of its intention to leave, it's only got two years to do it.

So all the cards will be held by the European Union.

And I said, yeah, but no one's going to take advantage of that.

I mean, so obviously no one would trigger the exit from the EU and give away all of their negotiating leverage.

They said, yeah, but you know, it just shows the European Union's ready to so and we passed the Lisbon Treaty.

Naim is right to say the UK's, to all intents and purposes, had more stability, more checks and balances on the abuse of power built in.

I always argued against a referendum.

I mean, William Higgs was leading for the Tories at the time.

He was arguing for a referendum in the 2007 to 2010 parliament.

And I always quoted Mrs. Thatcher, referendums are for dictators and for demagogues.

We succumbed to that because of the, it feels like the fragmenting role of Nigel Farage on the Tory vote.

And we've paid the price of it.

Now it was a particular concentration of circumstances by 2016 that you had a Corbyn-led Labour Party very iffy about the EU and the Tories thinking that they could swan through the referendum because of what happened in Scotland.

But it just shows you every, even the most stable countries with the strongest institutions that protect against the abuse of power are vulnerable to it.

Do you think we, new Labour, have to take any responsibility for the circumstances that led to that?

I mean, one of them, I guess, is that we didn't foresee it.

Yes, we do.

I mean, essentially, I was saying I was blind to that, point one.

Point two, there's no question that we were very alert to pensioner poverty in the run-up to our time in government.

We were very alert to child poverty.

We didn't get the squeezed middle well.

I would also say, I mean, you've been over this, but the 2004 decision about free movement of the accession aid countries and all of the evidence anecdotal, but also data shows that that played into it.

So, yes, you can't be in government for 13 years and then not take responsibility, a

share of responsibility for what comes after, which is, of course, an important point going forward since the Tories have now been in for 13 years.

But of course, there is a balance sheet on our time in government.

There are positives.

I think they far outweigh the negatives, but there are negatives too.

All right, David, Rory, we'll be back in a second.

Let's just take a quick break.

The International Rescue Committee helps people affected by humanitarian crises in over 40 countries worldwide.

In the last year alone, the IRC responded to more than 24 crises across the globe, including Ukraine, Pakistan, and most recently, Syria.

When a crisis strikes, the IRC responds quickly and stays as long as we are needed.

But as a charity, we rely on donations to make this happen.

IRC delivers lasting solutions, providing healthcare, safe spaces to help children learn, and empowering people to become self-reliant.

A gift of just £18 could provide a baby kit filled with essentials like clothing and nappies.

Please donate to the International Rescue Committee today at [rescue.org slash t-r-i-p](https://rescue.org/t-r-i-p).

Can I bring you back to the given that you've raised it, your time in government and your entry into the government.

What was your first memory of Alasdair Campbell?

What sort of frightening character, swearing, looks.

What role did he occupy?

What was your sense of what he was doing?

My dad died on the 21st of May 1994, which was just nine days after John Smith.

In the immediate aftermath of John Smith's death, the only person I spoke to was Tony, actually.

We were in our own period of mourning.

And so I joined the nascent Blair team soon thereafter at the beginning of June.

Alasdair had not yet been seduced into full membership of the team.

It took us some holiday in France to do that.

But I remember, I don't know if it's a first meeting, but I remember a meeting in Tony's garden where Alasdair said, should we tell him about the thing?

Tony said, well, yeah, we'd better.

And the thing was, the Clause 4 thing.

So I would guess this was end of August 1994.

The team was being formed.

In a way, we were forged in those first three months by Tony's absolute determination to do something really momentous, by the way in which Alasdair, he stepped into the role of counsellor and advocate in a quite brilliant way.

And over the next three years, I saw him, Jonathan Powell joined us, and had this.

It wasn't disarming humility, but it had this remarkable humility and then did amazing things.

Angie, Hunter, Sally Morgan, and myself, we were essentially the team.

And I was the youngest member of that team.

So did I look up to people at Alasdair?

Yes, I did.

And did I learn an incredible amount from them?

Yes.

What did you learn about Alasdair?

What do you think his skill set is?

What did you learn from watching him?

I learned about extraordinary capacity for hard work.

I learned always to carry a notebook around because you've got to write things down.

I learned that you can never tell a story enough times and never find enough different ways of telling the same story.

But what I learned above all was that you should never be afraid of your principles in politics, but you should also recognize your place in politics.

He had principles that he brought to every bit of advice that he gave to Tony, but he wasn't the decision maker.

He was the servant of the decision maker.

And I think it's a remarkable thing about him, actually, that he's here, so it's slightly on to talk about him in this way.

But I think that's a remarkable part of his strength of character isn't just the obvious things.

It's the things he believes he never parks at the door, but he also knew what role he was playing and the loyalty to the superordinate goal, the mission of not just having a Labour government, but a Labour government that transformed the country, just drove him every step of the way.

You wrote me a long email about what to say and answer this question.

To a contrary, I had no idea that Rory was going to go down this route, and I'm sitting here.

As you know, I'm not great at taking compliments, I tend to throw back abuse.

It's nice to have been able to say that.

One thing I noticed with Alistair is that he seems to get more left-wing all the time.

And often the ways that he will talk to me about international affairs or about welfare or about criminal justice or about strikes would seem to make him quite to the left of the new Labour project.

I think that's a misreading, actually.

I think that the new Labour project today would be more left-wing than the new Labour project in 1997.

That's the point.

We live in a far more unequal age, and so inequality in society and politics and economy produces a different reaction in politics, that's a better way of putting it.

And so I think that he's always been an egalitarian to his absolute core.

If that makes you left-wing, he's left-wing.

And he's always been looking for ways of putting that into practice, so does that make you a pragmatist?

Yes, I guess it does.

But I think that the times today are more polarised, we've discussed that, and the structural inequalities that confront modern industrialised societies demand a different response.

I think there's one other thing to say.

The things that we did are like the minimum wage, mean that you don't have to do them again.

Once you've got the minimum wage after 100 years of trying, you then build on it.

And it's less sexy to build on the minimum wage than it is to introduce it.

So what do you think you regret from that period that you didn't achieve?

Renewal.

We closed the shutters when we needed to open the shutters.

And that was the tragedy is maybe too strong a word, but the tragedy of the Tony Gordon transition is that precisely the time when we needed to be opening the shutters to new ideas, we got defensive.

I've been involved in, maybe it's worth saying that before 1994, I was working at the Institute for Public Policy Research.

Yeah, by the way, that is the first time I knew you was when you were doing the Social Justice Commission.

Right.

So the Social Justice Commission would have been set up by John Smith.

I'd met Tony only three or four times, and then he asked me to go and work for him.

There was very much a sense that we weren't just building a big tent, we were opening all the flaps.

We were diagnosing big problems, we had our own thinking, but we wanted anyone's ideas. And perhaps inevitably, but certainly regrettably, that didn't happen in the later stages of government.

And that's how you end up looking like you were yesterday's story rather than tomorrow's story.

And when you talked about renewal, do you think, this will be quite a painful question as well, but do you think that our obsession with the TBGB and Gordon taking over meant that we and I would put myself in this category didn't think enough or didn't act enough to open the door, possible door of leadership post Tony actually fall into the generation below?

I mean, Gordon was a sort of colossus in the literal and figurative sense at the time.

And so he was always miles above everyone else, both within the cabinet and then more widely.

And so I think there was a certain inevitability.

I don't think it was inevitable that his premiership should have felt so constrained.

And a glimmer of what was possible was shown in the biggest thing he did, which was to respond to the financial crisis, which was open the flaps, we're in a crisis, anyone with an idea, we want to make sure we harness it.

But across the fields of domestic and international policy, we didn't do enough of that.

And I think we paid the price of it.

Do you regret, I mean, on the financial crisis, do you regret not of having taken the measures

before 2008 to anticipate how unbalanced the British economy was towards the financial sector, try to think about regulation, try to think about the seeds of inequality, which we're developing and got worse after 2010, but we're definitely driven by what happened. Yeah, definitely.

I mean, I think I'd start in a slightly different place.

The growth rate, 97 to 2007 is double the level of what it is 2012 to 2023, but more to build stronger local economies in constituencies like the one I represented in South Shields. Definitely.

An industrial policy that really positioned us for the digital revolution, definitely.

Skills policy that really enable people to climb the ladder, definitely.

On the public spending side and the regulatory side, I mean, I'm influenced by Alistair Darling on this, who was a chancellor, as you know, you know, the financial crisis came from the U.S. Northern Rock had been absorbed, that wasn't a system crisis.

So I think the regulatory one I'm less persuaded about.

And of course, we responded, we had adequate reserves to respond.

Now, if you talk to someone like Andres Velasco, who was here last week, he was the Chilean foreign minister at the time, they massively built up their reserves.

But that didn't save them from later troubles.

So I think it's important to see it in the round.

I mentioned the three things that people say.

There's a fourth thing that sometimes people say, whenever you pop up on the Today program or Sky News, when you do one of your interviews about sort of, you know, the stuff that you're doing in the state of the world.

And that is sort of relates to the early questions.

There is a sense with an awful lot of people that there's something that you bring and could bring to politics that is missing.

So I'm you having sort of blown smoke up my backside, I'll now reciprocate somewhat.

And I do wonder, so it's 10 years that you've been away now, one, how you look at our politics, how much you look at our politics, whether you follow it as closely as you used to.

And secondly, whether you don't think you're still pretty young, whether you don't think there's a there's a time and a place to come back.

Well, I want to hold on to the idea that you think I'm still young.

That's definitely being 57 is much harder than being 47.

I can tell you that I do follow it carefully because I care a lot.

I'm a British citizen who thinks that the country is really struggling at the moment.

And I always I did learn from you message discipline.

And so I what I say privately as well as publicly is that my professional choices have got to be about where I think I can make most difference consistent with my responsibilities to my family, which are which are big.

And I take that very seriously.

And I do worry a lot about the country.

I think what Keir has done to put labor in position where it can win is a striking achievement, really, really striking achievement.

And he's different from you or I in all sorts of ways, but I'm struck quite how methodical

he is.

Maybe it's one aspect of the legal training.

You know, he starts with where he is and he's just methodical step by step by step by step.

The three part journey that he talks about got to detoxify.

And by the way, he's right to say, I've got to keep on detoxifying.

The Tories have got to be taken on.

You can never stop taking on your opponents because not least because they've changed.

And he's now not facing Johnson Trust, he's facing a different a different challenge.

It's less of a wrecking ball in government.

And then thirdly, building the positive agenda.

And people say, well, where were you at the same time in the 1995-96?

I think that's the wrong comparison.

The great danger is that we're in a 1970s situation, not a 1990s situation.

And the answer to that is for labor to be the kind of methodical putting in place of a program that's adequate to the times and adequate to the opponents that we face.

So I don't remember where that answer started.

The question was about whether you saw a place yourself.

And I answered that by saying, look, I always ask myself, where can I make the most difference?

I feel incredibly lucky to have been able to spend the last nine and a half years, just to be absolutely accurate, leading a remarkable group of people here who every day teach me things about the way to achieve change and that that's been a real privilege.

I owe it to them to be 1,000% really on that.

And so I turn up very much on my job.

And so I don't want to give a false impression of how much time I'm spending.

Do I read the British newspapers?

Yes, I do.

Not all of them.

But nobody's going to hold it against you after nearly 10 years if you were to come back to Britain.

I mean, you've done an amazing job at ISE.

As you say, you've built it from 400 million a year to 1.4 million a year.

You've put in an amazing decade of service.

Presumably, you could come back now with a clear conscience and re-engage in public service in Britain.

Well, I just keep saying the same thing, which is that I've got to make my professional choices about where I can make the most impact, again, consistent with my family commitments, which are real.

But if Kier picked up the phone and said, David, I think we're going to win.

I really think that somebody like you could do a great job in government.

So-and-so is just about to announce that they're stepping down from the seat with a majority of the so ridiculous, this unusable-what would you say?

I made a decision before I came into this interview that nothing I can ever say is going to make Kier's job more difficult.

We all have a responsibility, those of us who are party members or party supporters,

not to make his job more difficult.

And I am not going to make his job more difficult.

Okay, I'm going to let you off the hook by moving on to back onto international development.

So I've just come from seeing Darren Walker at the Ford Foundation, one of the things that he said. I hope you asked him to give some more funds to the IOC.

To give you an example, Alistair and listeners, we're sitting here on 42nd Street, Manhattan. 42nd Street? Oh, wow.

42nd and Lexington.

You can hear the police sirens outside, presumably as the Donald makes his way down to the Lowe Manhattan courthouse. One of the things that he said, and he's talking here about what we're trying to do with Give Directly Around Cash, is that one of the problems about giving unconditional cash to the poorest people in the world is that it undermines our sense of power and control, that the whole development infrastructure is based on the idea that United States and Europe keep the power and control. They tell people what to do. They stop them doing things they don't want to do, and that it's very, very difficult to shift development into a position of radical trust.

About 20% of the humanitarian aid sector is now in cash. I think I'm right in saying we're 15% at the IRC, 45% of what we do is health. You can't give health care in cash to state the obvious. I think that when people think about my organization, let me speak from that, we're a single organization, not a federated organization. But the decisions about how and where we program come from the places where we work, where 90% plus percent of the staff are local. Now, for two-thirds of our funding, we have to go to governments, and there you're right. The governments decide that they want to spend in Pakistan on literacy, not in Mali on nutrition. There's a real inequality there. I talk a lot about accountability to clients rather than accountability to donors.

The most radical accountability to clients is not to say, well, 90% of our staff are local, and we listen a lot to local people. The real radical accountability is to give the locals the cash and get out the way.

But if the local people need health care, if the local people need malnutrition treatment...

Who's determining their needs? Them or you?

They are.

If you give them the cash, they can decide.

Maybe a better answer to you would be, say, the first part of our program guide in any circumstances to ask, why not cash? We only program in other areas once we've decided not to do cash. That's what we decided eight years ago. We're very strategy-led. We thought about it very, very hard. Our first responsibility is to ask, will cash do the trick? Why not cash? That's the first question we ask before we offer any other programs, only when we then diagnose other unmet needs or other interventions organized.

We don't talk about building the capacity of local people to deliver. We talk about a marriage of expertise, their expertise about the locality, our expertise as a global organization. How does one keep oneself honest? How does one get to the level of saying, maybe we don't have as much expertise as we think? Maybe it doesn't matter whether you're locally engaged staff or you're international staff. There is still a fundamentally a curious attitude towards the extreme poor.

Well, if you look at our...

If we're really prioritizing their needs, the people in need know their own needs better than other people. And giving them cash is extraordinarily empowering. And even in healthcare, people build clinics, they build hospitals. One of the major things that's stopping the extreme poor accessing those services is that they simply don't have the cash to get to those services. One of the major things that's stopping the extreme poor taking benefit from schools being built is they simply don't have the cash to access those schools.

But Rory, look, let me tell you something I've been dealing with this morning. In South Sudan, the malnutrition rate among kids is about 40% and the reach of the international agencies in treating malnutrition is 20%. And what is the reason? The reason is that a mother with five other kids doesn't want to walk three hours to a clinic to have malnutrition treatment. She actually needs a diagnosis by a community health worker and self-administer Plumpy Nut, which is peanut-based intervention, to actually feed her kid. And we've just done a study in Mali, 27,000 kids, 92% recovery rate. So I'm all for cash, why not cash? But in answer to that mother in South Sudan, it's the wrong answer to say, we'll give you some cash to somehow get across the conflict lines to the health center. We need a different model of health care.

Well, except to push back, right? The benchmark studies on nutrition programs against cash often demonstrate that NGOs are spending an enormous amount of money on nutrition training. The impact of those programs is often much less than people believe and frequently giving cash has better impact on bone density, nutrition, stunting than the nutrition.

Let me volley back. You talk about malnutrition, rightly. I'm talking about malnutrition, which is different. The preventative programs, which you're referring to, cash is very, very effective in preventing kids becoming malnourished. Once they're malnourished, the studies don't show that cash is the answer.

Let me come back to the final thing then, and I'll hand back to Alistair. There is a problem in the development community, which is we can always justify our end jobs. We can always want to talk about our own expertise. It's very, very difficult to objectively step back when we've built an entire industry full of, in your case, 10s of 1,000, 23,000 employees who are proud of their skills, their degrees, their expertise, their knowledge, their jobs, dismantling that system and really questioning whether all those people are necessary, whether we have as much expertise as we think, I think is difficult. I don't think it's something that can just be answered by, here's an extreme example in which we're doing good. I think it's a bigger self-questioning that needs to be addressed.

It's a good challenge and it's one that this sector needs to address over and over and over. The fact that there are now 340 million people in humanitarian need and 700 million people in poverty living on less than \$2 a day shows you that the collective effort is not going in the right direction. Now, we are severely not just mitigating the damage of global poverty. We're also helping people recover from war and conflict and, in some cases, we'd like to do more, get control of their lives. I take the challenge, I think it's a good challenge. I don't agree, though, that there aren't very significant data-based answers that should be available on a much more wide scale than there are at the moment. When something like the Turkey-Syria earthquake, you talked about you getting involved in conflict. Is that the sort of situation where you would immediately get involved?

It's a very good example because we had two colleagues killed in the earthquake because they are part of a 420-person team in the northwest of Syria anyway. They're there because Syria is a conflict zone. We respond to the earthquake. We're doing a significant amount of response to the earthquake, but only because we're there. If the earthquake had been in Jordan, we'd also have been there. If the earthquake had been in Peru, we probably wouldn't have responded because we have entry and exit criteria that prevent the kind of mission creep. That means that you try and go everywhere to do everything because if you try and go everywhere to do everything, you fail. We're pretty strict about where we respond and how we respond.

Who are the best countries in the world at the moment at development and humanitarian support? Would you say that the United Nations tries to do a great job, but it's very, very difficult, not least because some of the reasons we've talked about earlier. Which of the countries that still have a really, really, really strong reputation on this?

Do you mean on the donor side or on the...

I mean, I do mean donor, but I also mean just the commitment that people have to understanding that we have obligations to other countries that are in trouble.

If you measure donor commitment by how much money, you'd say Japan, you'd say Germany. A huge tribute to the US in the Horn of Africa and the humanitarian response is there. The Americans are providing 85% of the money.

Alice used, first of all, the term development. So on the long-term anti-poverty Japan, Germany, on the humanitarian side, the US spend is only about 0.17% of GDP. So if you think about the whole 0.7 debates more, in Somalia, 90% of the aid going there today is American aid. So there is a...

The sheer scale of the economy is a \$22 trillion economy.

And without America, Somalia would be an unbelievable trouble. I mean, Britain has totally left this situation.

I mean, the only reason we've not got...

No.

The only reason there's not a fully fledged famine in East Africa is because of what the Americans with the others have done. But basically, the Americans have stepped up very significantly.

There's a whole different story about refugees, which on another occasion, we should talk about because there's a lot of countries banning refugees at the moment.

Let's bring you back to where we began, which is childhood family politics. What would you say to someone going into politics? In this side, there's a chance to plug Alice's book, which is coming out on...

May the 11th, Rory. Thank you.

May the 11th.

May the 11th.

May the 11th.

It's called, But What Can I Do?

What would you say was the biggest frustration or pain of politics and what was the biggest positive aspect in political life when you look back at it?

The biggest frustration is the pain that it causes for your nearest and dearest. I wouldn't

have been able to survive 10 years, 12 years as an MP, 20 years in and around politics if Louise had not been an absolute rock. That's just huge, I think.

The greatest thing is that you can put your values into practice. I think that if people abandon politics, if people like us, when 20 or 30 years ago, you were a bit younger than I am, think it's off limits. That really is the corrosion of democracy. Alice's book is important to that.

Protecting people in politics from the unbelievable abuse that they seem to get at the moment, that's a massive thing. I had Hillary Clinton agreed to come to do the South Shields Lecture. I do this annual lecture in South Shields. I don't give the lecture though. I organize a lecture at once a year in South Shields.

Hillary came and she had a meeting with a dozen women labor MPs before the event which I was allowed to sit in on. What they needed to talk to her about is how to survive. I think that is a really chilling place to think about the damage and the dangers of politics. You didn't think listeners listening to this saying, the three of us, that if we really wanted to encourage young people to get involved, you, me, Alice, they should be getting back into it rather than sitting around a podcast table.

They might say that, yeah, and they're entitled to say that, but we can also say we've been there and done a bit of that.

Well, I've never done that elected thing. I just couldn't, I mean, well, really, not for me that one.

Being nice to people, yeah.

So listen, my last question, because it's the one that you sort of did really sidestepped. How often do you think to yourself, God, the world would have been different if they'd had picked a different milliband and I could have beaten Cameron and we could have stopped Brexit? Do you think in those terms or not?

No, I don't. I can tell you absolutely clearly that my defense mechanism is not to blame anyone else. It's to take it on myself. And there's absolutely no point in pressing the rewind button and trying to play again and see if you get a different result on the action replay. I really don't do that. And I think I would torture myself if I spent my time, A, doing that, B, blaming Ed, that's an absolute pit if you go into that. And I'm absolutely not focused on that. I'm absolutely not focused on sticking pins in people who didn't vote for me.

That's absolutely hopeless. The only way to come to terms with something like I went through is to say, right, well, you should have done, you should have won by more in this section, more in this section and done better in the trade union section. There's no point in looking backwards. You can say that's my defense mechanism, but it's actually what allows you to really go forward with a sense of self-respect and respect.

Well, look, I have to go out, David, and I can't just sit here talking to you all day. I've got sort of, you know, things to do, I can see your fancy dinner you're going to.

But listen, it's been an absolute joy talking to you as ever. I do genuinely find it difficult to interview people that are sort of really close friends. So it's like, I don't even ever saw the interview at a bit Tony for GQ. It felt weird, but I enjoyed that and got a lot out of it.

I thought it was really lovely. We needed to tease him for more insights into you. I wanted more gossip on you, but I think the gossip is out on him. I'm pretty tight on gossip.

All right, guys. Nice to see you. Take care. Love to Fiona. All right. Lots of love. Bye bye.

So Rory, there we are. David Miliband, former Foreign Secretary, former future Prime Minister. Is he a former future Prime Minister? Do you see any way back?

It didn't sound like he wanted to come back, did he? I mean, he's got this very, very polished phrase that he repeated a couple of times. And a lot of it, I think, seems to be about his family. I think he feels that for his children, they're better off at the moment in New York, and he's able to provide for them better in New York than he was able to in Britain. So I get the sense that that's the major thing, that it's personal reasons that would hold him from coming back at the moment.

I mean, David is one of my closest friends and so is Louise. And in fact, Fiona and I were the referees for their adoptions when they adopted their two children who are now teenagers. And yeah, I think he was on the one hand. He's worked out a line, as it were. He says, look, where I can make the most difference. And there's no doubt he does make a difference

where he is. I mean, I think the job he's done, his charity is extraordinary. And the range and the reach of it is remarkable. But at the same time, you know, you know what it's like having having kids, you've got to you've got to think about their interests and where they're best served. And then I think also with Louise, she's a very, very talented musician. I think when she wants to carry on with with her music, he wants to carry on with public service. I still think by the way, I really do wish that Keir would maybe just pick up a phone to some of those older new labor people, the Milburns and the Davids and just say, you know, is there a way of getting you back? But his assessment of the world and the ability has to kind of explain what's happening in the world is, you know, very, very impressive.

He's got an extraordinarily clear vision of the world. And as you say, he synthesizes very well. He analyzes into very clear categories. You can see also why he's a very strong politician because he develops a very clear line and then he produces it with an enormous amount of energy, much more than me. I mean, I feel by comparison with him that I'm much more sort of ambiguous and much more uncertain. He's got a real clarity of vision about what he pushed back. He pushed back on you a couple of times, didn't he? You were trying to give him the he was trying to explain to you or he can't all be about giving cash directly to people.

Yeah, well, I mean, I do disagree strongly with him on that. And he's got huge producer interest because he's got an immense charity that that doesn't do very much cash yet. And I think if he wasn't put on the spot, he'd admit that they should be doing much more cash and we're going to look to do much more cash with him. But that was another example of him as a very skilled politician. He didn't want to open up the conversation. He punched straight back, came and was very clear, clear, unambiguous views.

Very well trained, Rory. Very well trained.

Very well trained by you. I'm so astonished. David didn't select him. I mean, he was so

punchy, clear, strong. I mean, what was the problem? What why why why in the end did they go with Ed Miliband?

Oh, God, I think I think it was just one of those moments where and the truth is it did lead to Corbyn indirectly with directly in a way. I think it was just that the the sense of fatigue at the new labor thing, which I think, you know, I will go to my grave saying was the most successful period. I hope there is another successful period of labor government, but the most successful period of labor government. But there was a sense of fatigue. And I think that Ed Miliband managed to distance himself from the new labor in particular his association with Gordon in a way that David didn't manage to dissociate himself from new labor vis a vis Tony. And then, of course, the the quirks of the voting system meant that Ed won in the bit where he do the trade union bit where, you know, that final third of the vote that he managed to to get over the line. I mean, David had a majority of members, a majority of MPs. It was that it was a step on the road towards Corbynism. And here's the thing about the Labour Party is that too often, the Labour Party thinks it's kind of we're in this pendulum politics Tory Labour, we're not the Labour Party always has to work harder to get into power. And I think in going for Ed, they maybe went for the easy option. And they all they felt was an easy option. And I just will never know if David would have beaten David Cameron. But if he had, my God, the world would have been different.

He I first came across him when he was the Foreign Secretary in Afghanistan, we met in a very small bedroom that he'd been given in this small house that was the ambassador's house in Kabul, just opposite the old Bulgarian embassy. And I remember being very, very impressed.

So this is back 15 years ago, by how open he was to hearing the problems in Afghanistan. Most politicians, particularly British, were very closed minded at that stage. They felt the decision was made. We were in Afghanistan, this extended even to David Cameron. They didn't want to hear criticism of the troops because they thought it wasn't anything they could do about it. And David Miliband had the confidence to sit there for I guess almost an hour, asking very thoughtful questions about what was happening on the ground, listening to some very bad news, exploring whether we'd made a mistake in the deployment to Helmand. And I thought that that showed real grace on his part.

Well, I think also the fact that he's now done this job with rescue for almost a decade. That is real commitment. That is basically saying, I'm working on a serious project here, which has reached into different parts of the world. And I think also that when he talked about, for example, the whole thing about the age of impunity, that was a kind of, that was a big theme there, that he obviously picks up on and sees as he travels around the world. No, there's no doubt. David is a massive, I think David is a massive loss to British politics. And I wasn't joking, by the way, when I said to him that, you know, the question I get asked all the time, you know, is he, did we pick the wrong Miliband? What's he up to? And is he coming back?

He's also somebody who, when I arrived in Defra, was still very, very popular. He'd been the Secretary of State for Environment, Food, Rural Affairs, and people were really struck by the fact that he made a real effort in his first hundred days to listen and learn before he started making decisions, which is very unusual in a politician.

Well, that's, I think that's enough smoke blown up David Miliband's rear end. I think

[Transcript] Leading / David Miliband: The Age of Impunity

we've done enough of that. Let's just see whether he can knock Brian Cox off the top of the charts.

Oh, well, we'll come back to that in a bit. That's a good, good question.

Okay, Roy, well, that's David Miliband. Enjoy the rest of your trip and see you soon.

Thank you very much and being lovely, being in New York and being face-to-face with David Miliband. Bye-bye.

Bye-bye.