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Hello, and welcome to another episode of The Rest is Politics with me, Alistair Campbell.

And with me, Rory Stewart. And Alistair, I thought you were going to be sitting in a nightclub in Soho, but you seem to be back at your home.

I'm back home. Yeah, the Soho studio was not tempting enough. I'm doing this from home.

And you are in Malawi and by the sounds of it with not very pleasant weather.

It's an unbelievable tropical thunderstorm. Although when I checked into this hotel, I was told that I'm in the very bedroom in which your friend Tony Blair stays when he comes to Malawi, which makes me feel very privileged. But it is an incredible tropical thunderstorm. I mean, you might be able to hear at the back of the podcast, but the heavens have opened and it is just crashing down. And I hope that doesn't interfere too much with the internet. Now, you wanted to start us off on a number of things. Quick thing though, firstly, which is we managed to sell out Harrogate, which was exciting, very, very exciting. And although apologies to people who didn't get tickets, middle of May, many apologies. Some people got on, I think, one minute after the ticket sales opened and couldn't get tickets. But the good news is, I think that we're going to be doing some other things in other parts of the country.

We will doubtless be doing that. And I think also, the other day, I was up in Scotland at Stirling University, I was doing a lecture, the Andrew John Williamson Memorial lecture, which you had done before. And so had other luminaries such as Joe Grimmond, remember Joe Grimmond? Oh, Joe Grimmond, great liberal figure, yeah.

Yeah, Nicholas Sturgeon, Malcolm Rifkin, Charles Kennedy, George Robertson, Paddy Ashton, Edward

Heath, Geoffrey Howe. You and I are now on that illustrious list. But anyway, the point I was going to make was it was chaired by Jim Nochte, the journalist and broadcaster.

I was sitting next to his wife, the writer, Eleanor Updale at the dinner. And she said she has listened to every episode of our podcast, sometimes more than once. And she enjoys them best when there is no gap. She loved the emergency podcast, and she doesn't like it when we record early. And it's a few days before it comes out. So I think we should tell her that because of your and my logistical issues through the week, we are doing this today, Sunday. So sorry, Ellie, it will be a few days gap. But for that reason, we're going to look at a few timeless things in the second half, including I know Rory, you want to talk about global poverty. And I want to talk about Shamima Begum having watched the BBC documentary this week.

Right. But what we can't avoid starting with is your favourite man, the former health secretary and star of I'm a celebrity, Matt Hancock, who's WhatsApp messages totaling over 100,000 WhatsApp messages. Somebody tried to calculate how many WhatsApp messages that meant he'd sent a day sent during the COVID crisis have now been leaked by his ghostwriter, Isabel Oakshot to the Daily Telegraph. So what was your first sense of them?

My first sense of that was what on earth was he doing trusting Isabel Oakshot with his telephone and all of his WhatsApp messages? Isabel Oakshot, just to remind people, she's a journalist whose track record includes the going to jail of Christopher Hewne when he

was a minister in the coalition cabinet and his wife, Vicky Price, also going to jail. And just to remind people about that very quickly. So Chris Hewne had been speeding and got a penalty notice from a camera and persuaded his wife, Vicky Price, who was the senior civil servant, to take the points for him so he wouldn't lose his licence. Isabel Oakshot revealed the story, Hewne resigned and ended up going to jail for eight months. And then, as you said, Vicky Price herself also ended up going to jail.

Yeah. And she revealed it by essentially being a friend of Vicky Price. She got close to Vicky Price, got the story, away she goes. She also was Kim Darakman when he was ambassador, UK ambassador in America. She did that big story about he saying rather rude things about Donald Trump. And also, what was the other one she did with Michael Ashcroft? I don't think I can repeat this one because I'm very sensitive.

So Kim Darak, who was our ambassador in Washington, she produced these emails that he'd written about Trump. So he had to resign. And then she wrote a book with Michael Ashcroft about David Cameron, which revealed that David Cameron, she claimed had sexually assaulted a pig while at Oxford University. So as you say, Isabel Oakshot has got an enormous number of scoops to her name, but including having effectively forced one cabinet minister to go to jail and the UK ambassador in the United States to have to resign. And this was the person to whom Matt Hancock handed over his WhatsApps with an even stranger thing, which is that she said that she was going to write his whole book for free. And he would have known also that she was an incredibly strong opponent of his lockdown policy and had been criticizing it openly on Twitter for almost three years. So it's a very, very odd decision for him to think that somebody's going to want to work with you for free and not take any advantage at all, particularly when you knew or ought to have known something about her views.

And her modus operandi. And I know we shouldn't necessarily judge people by who their bedtime partners are, but the fact that she's also living with the Richard Tice, the head of reform, the UKIP replacement. I mean, there are so many alarm bells there that if you've got the slightest judgment, I just cannot see how he gets there. So when he comes out and starts saying it's a terrible betrayal of trust, well, yeah, but kind of what did you expect?

I must confess, Rory, I've not bought the Daily Telegraph for decades. I can't remember the last time I was at the Daily Telegraph, but I have, you know, I'm afraid I have gone out the last three or four days that I have put my buddy over the couch as a yes. And it's because partly because I just, you know, yes, it's shocking and there's lots of new stuff in there, but actually, it sort of just confirms what we know, Johnson's hopeless on detail, doesn't really take anything too seriously. All of them just constantly in this sea of never ending messaging about what the line is and who's saying what and who's up and who's down. And it's all anybody who wants to think that this government is just a kind of chaotic shit show, then the Isabel Oak Shot messages, WhatsApp messages definitely shows it. But you know her a bit. I mean, I'll be honest, every dealing I've ever had with her, I wouldn't trust her an inch, but you kind of know a bit better.

I do know her and I'm quite fond of her. She started reporting on Parliament pretty much as I came down into Parliament in 2010. She'd been a correspondent in Edinburgh before, so we had a Scottish connection. I've always found her actually personally dealing with

her partly because we have a kind of friendship has been quite responsible and relatively, I think, honourable in if I say to her, this is something that I'd like you to keep in confidence she does say. She obviously comes from a very, very different political spectrum for me and I'm a remainder. She's a Brexiteer. I was calling for a very, very early lockdown. She was against it, so we come from very different places, but I'm quite fond of her. But I do think even someone like me who's a front of Isabel's would say that she's a very, very tough and ruthless journalist when she wants to be. And I thought it was extraordinary that Matt Hancock wants to do this.

What's the biggest confidence that she is in possession of that you told her, Rory?

Well, I think luckily you don't know because she's discreet.

Oh, well, we know she's not, don't we? One of the things I'm looking forward to though is for us to begin to see a little bit more if we can of these WhatsApp messages going back to February. And it's a total treasure trove for a future historian because if you want to get a sense of the personalities of the key people in Boris Johnson's Downing Street, there's nothing like it. You can see their weird tones of voice. You can see their rivalries. They slag off Gavin Williamson's haircut and where he goes on holiday. They make jokes at the expense of Dominic Cummings. Cummings then makes jokes at the expense of Hancock. In fact, the wonderful thing that we haven't quite yet got, and I think he claims that he's deleted them, hasn't he, is Boris Johnson's own complete store of WhatsApp messages in which I'm sure he's saying opposite things to everybody. I'm sure he's saying to Hancock that Cummings is a whatever and saying the reverse in the other direction. So I'm sorry that we haven't quite got all of Boris Johnson's WhatsApp messages, but what a court it is. And horrifying for somebody like me who was brought up in a more traditional civil service to see how the decision-making is happening because the decision-making ought to be happening around formal cabinet tables. There should be a morning meeting every morning on COVID where the prime minister, the health secretary, and the key scientific advisors are going through the evidence, the daily facts, and the decisions and it should be properly minuted and followed up instead of which what you've got. In August, so this is six months into the COVID disaster, Boris Johnson picking up a copy of the Financial Times saying to everyone, oh, I just read in the Financial Times that actually the mortality rate is only 0.04% and the response is an incredible waste of time. Simon Case, who's the cabinet secretary, meant to be running the entire government, then wastes his time, presumably leaving meetings to do it, to send little sort of creepy messages flattering the prime minister and trying gently to point out that he's wrong. Chief scientific advisor has to come in, the chief medical advisor comes in, the chief of staff comes in, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, basically pointing out that the prime minister six months into COVID still doesn't know the difference between 0.04% and 4%. In other words, he's a factor of 100 times off.

To be fair to Dominic Cummings, he does point out the utter innumeracy of the then prime minister. There is the old flash of humour coming through this thing. I actually think that Hancock has the best line in the whole 100,000 messages of those we've seen so far when he talks about Cummings and says, his insight is as bad as his eyesight. I think that was moderately funny. But I think that what I find incredible is that it's not just that there's the sort of informality and the, as you say, the kind of sicker fancy of some

of the officials and the sort of never ending kind of worry about how things are seen and the sense of crisis and chaos and panic. Also, they ought to at least have part of their mind thinking, anything I say or write or do in the middle of a crisis like this, at some point, maybe required to be put out there for public scrutiny and public examination. You just get the sense of them not being very serious. The more I look at this, though, the happier I am that Tony Blair never had a mobile phone. That was one of the best things we ever did was just to understand there's no such thing as a safe phone call. There's no such thing as a safe message. So just, you know, rely on proper systems.

Well, my goodness. And also the sense that these are all men and it's a very kind of matey, testosterone driven conversation where they're very kind of, they're sort of showing off. They're like kids showing off. They're sort of insulting about teachers, insulting about police officers, insulting about colleagues.

The exchanges between Gavin Williamson, who's then the education secretary and Hancock on the teachers were just awful. A bunch of asses, you know, why don't they ever want to work? It's sort of complete contempt for everybody else. And in the batch that's out today, Hancock complaining about, is it Jeremy Farrow, the scientist? And, you know, this guy can't be we sack him. Can't we get him off the radio? Why does he keep pontificating? It's all this sort of, I don't know, it's just chest beating and it's, it's awful. It's awful.

And I think that what it shows you have the contrast between, if you go back to the blogs and the articles I was writing at the time that they were doing these daily press conferences, and I kept saying, you know, this is an absolute shambles and they don't know how to communicate and there's no sense of strategy. And of course, most of the media were giving them benefit of the doubt, partly because they're a Tory government, we've got a biased Tory media, but also because, you know, people felt what they're in a crisis, give them the benefit of the doubt. I think what this stuff does is just show they don't deserve any benefit of the doubt whatsoever. This was an absolute shambles. And the egos, honestly, you've got this whole thing. So you've got the middle of a pandemic. And Matt Hancock has this long discussion about whether he should get himself photographed in the surf with his shirt off. And another one about, you know, when he's sort of jumping a fence, he's like, fuck, I look good. I mean, just grow up.

It's very weird, isn't it? I'm going to be very interested if they get round to publishing the WhatsApps from February and early March in 2020, because that was the really critical time. That's when COVID first arrived in Britain. And do you remember it had hit Italy two weeks before it hit Britain? So there was every reason for the government to be acting and they were very, very slow to act. And I think we know now that that's because Boris Johnson instinctively wanted in his words to take it on the chin. And that's when they were playing around with ideas like herd immunity and whether you could just let it go through the population before they really took on board. I think that the impact that that would have not just on the elderly, but on the NHS. And it was an amazing revelation for me because I was very, very early out at the end of February saying that we should do an immediate lockdown and try to get ahead of the game before it before it hit us.

And I was so struck. And for some reason, the WhatsApp messages and text messages on my phone from Matt Hancock seem to disappear. But I've recorded some of them and they, you're absolutely right. They show somebody who is incredibly vulnerable and thin skinned criticism.

And I found as you know, at that stage, I wasn't any longer in the cabinet. I wasn't even a member of parliament anymore. But the amount of anxiety they put into trying to fight against me, they tried to rubbish my suggestion that we should wear masks, for example. And I ended up in a weird world where when they should have been concentrating on managing the pandemic, I had the cabinet secretary calling me late on a Sunday evening. I had Chris Witte spending an hour on the phone with me. I had Matt Hancock sending message after message. And I imagine the same probably was true for Jeremy Farah and probably Piers Morgan and probably anybody else that they were worried was interrupting the narrative they were trying to get across.

Well, actually Piers Morgan, his name pops up a few times in these messages, including when he gets COVID. And there's this discussion, an advisor saying to Hancock, send him a nice message and, you know, be the big guy in this debate. I mean, it's just the whole thing is pathetic. And you know, the other thing I think is interesting about this is that, as you said, the telegraph has a very anti lockdown agenda is a below shot. The journalist has a very anti lockdown agenda. But actually, I think as a result of that, they are deliberately missing some of the or downplaying some of the far bigger stories and scandals that are in here.

I think, for example, the fact that Hancock saying that, you know, he and Soonak are obviously at odds the whole time during this period, but him saying that Soonak's eat out to help out strategy is causing a real spike in the places where it's been happening. But we're keeping it out of the media. I think that's a bit of a scandal. And then there's the other thing where he says that, you know, he calls it Soonak's eat out to get the virus out and about strategy. I mean, again, just a sort of glib throwaway line, which I think if you're in a sort of setting of black humor, which you sometimes get in a crisis, fair enough, you'll get a bit of that. But the sense you get of this, these exchanges is that's the sort of manner of these people all the time.

I mean, there's two problems. There's the lack of seriousness from Boris Johnson and his immediate gang around him, sorry, by which I mean the politicians, that the sort of political culture lacking seriousness, a kind of trivializing superficial political culture. And then there's a story of how the British government itself does and doesn't react to crisis and how much certainly in February and March, it's struggling to get onto a crisis footing. There's some brilliant actually, if somebody wants to read it, we'll put it in the newsletter this week, but there's a fantastic sort of slightly tongue in cheek, but quite darkly funny analysis by the ex head of MI5, the security service, or sorry, maybe he's the head of the head of GCHQ. Anyway, one of our great spy chiefs has written an analysis of how crisis handling goes wrong in Britain, taking COVID as his launching pad. And he looks at things you can see in those WhatsApp messages, classic psychological problems, group think, optimism bias, reluctance to take responsibility, hoping the whole problem is going to go away, all of that. I mean, I think as a treasure trove for historians, I think this WhatsApp stuff is incredible because it's as though somebody has almost put a bug into number 10, it's I've never seen anything like it really on a British equivalent to the Watergate tapes. But it's all driven that all of those characteristics that you outlined there, they're driven by Johnson's personality. If you have somebody at the top who's fundamentally unserious, that it means that the serious people like Chris Witte, like Patrick Valance, who seemed

to me to be trying to deal with this in a serious grown up way, but who are ultimately, as you say, beholden to their political masters and probably a bit careful about how they express themselves. But it means that they are struggling all the time. They're essentially always trying to catch up because they're being driven by political considerations.

And we should probably talk a little bit about Keir Starmer and hiring Sue Gray. But I'll tell you one thing, if I was Keir Starmer and serious about running a serious government, if I win the election, I wouldn't have Simon Case anywhere near the damn place. I mean, he comes out of this really badly.

Let's just touch on that briefly, because I know you want to go on to Boris Johnson, misleading parliament over parties. But the other big news at the beginning of the week is that Sue Gray, who was a very, very senior civil servant, led on a lot of the government ethics appointments, was actually somebody who David Cameron and George Osborn were very complimentary about. Theresa May was very complimentary about. She was a really, Sue Gray was a very

central figure in the civil service when I was a minister. And of course, was behind the Sue Gray report, which was this report that exposed Boris Johnson's partying and was actually directly contributed towards his resignation, has now announced that she's going to become Keir Starmer's chief of staff. And there has been a lot of back and forth on that. And I'd be interested in one thing, actually, before we get on to the rights wrongs of it. One of the things that struck me about it is that it was quite poorly timed from Labour's point of view, because it was announced at exactly the moment that this report on Boris Johnson misleading parliament over parties came out, which allowed the Tories to say, oh, well, you know, this shows if Sue Gray is joining Labour, that the whole thing was the Labour stitch up. And even if that was a completely unfair claim, it absorbed quite a lot of media time and attention for a couple of days. Would it not have been better for them to hold back that announcement for another week?

Oh, I don't think they, as it were announced it, I think it was something that just sort of spilled out because enough people knew about it. And obviously, because it was true, they couldn't deny it. So I don't think this was as it were. I don't think this is when they announced it at all. I don't think that was the plan. So I don't know the background to any discussions that Keir has had with Sue Gray. I happen to think it's a very, very smart appointment. Because I think Sue, she's somebody I've known for a long, long time. She's very, very smart. She's incredibly hardworking. She knows how the machine works. She is actually,

I think, somebody of really deep integrity. I really believe that. When she was in charge of the report, and bear in mind, Roy, the only reason she was doing that investigation, I think she was doing it very reluctantly. I don't think she saw it as fair to her, actually, that she was put in the position. But it was because Simon Case had to recuse himself because he was originally going to be the one doing the investigation, had to recuse himself after admitting that he'd been at one of these lockdown parties of which there were clearly many. I can absolutely guarantee Sue Gray wouldn't have been any of them, because I just think she would have known the difference between right and wrong. But my point is that when she was in charge of that process, because I do know her quite well, I was endlessly trying to sort of find out what she was up to, who she was interviewing, who she wasn't,

how bad it was going to be, whether it was the end for Johnson, et cetera. But even with me, that she knows pretty well, and I've worked with very closely all the time when I was in Downey Street, not a peep, that she's just very, very professional, diligent, hardworking. But I think I wonder if one of the reasons why she's decided, ultimately, she is going to try and help Keir Starmer, is because she just reached the end of her tether in terms of dealing with the sort of governance that we've been seeing in these WhatsApp messages and the sort of governance that we're seeing with Johnson. She was having to try to be, Jeremy Haywood having gone, because he was sadly had died, Simon Case, I think, without really not having the respect of the civil service, massive amount of pressure put on Sue. And I think she's probably just decided, look, Keir Starmer looks to me like he might be a serious Prime Minister, and I can hopefully help him.

I sympathize with all of that. And I think anyone would be so revolted and dismayed by working for Boris Johnson's government. I do think, though, that it's tricky.

The timing is awful. There's no doubt about that.

And a very senior civil servant, and civil servants are really supposed to be apolitical.

And I'm surprised. I think she could have wasted and she could almost have been expected to be made the Jeremy Haywood by Keir Starmer when he came in, rather than joining him in a political capacity.

Yeah, but I do think it's, if you remember, when we were in opposition, one of the reasons that Tony Blair hired Jonathan Powell as his Chief of Staff is because he had that direct experience of government. And I think actually that, look, I agree, I think it should be a terrific Cabinet Secretary. But you do need people as well who are not focused on the campaign, but who are actually focused on thinking about the transition to government. Jonathan Powell didn't really get that sucked into the campaign. He was focused on policy and on government, on changes that we wanted to make as soon as we got in.

So I think, I think once this blows over, I'm really hoping that Sue doesn't take fright at all the attention she's getting, because I know she hates being the centre of attention and she'd load that one. Every Tory MP and minister saying, we have to wait for Sue Gray, wait for Sue Gray. It's very funny as well, Rory. I don't know if you've seen any of the clips of Boris Johnson's main fan club members, Jacob Rees-Mogg and Nadine Dorries, who have been sort of, you know, slagging her off and she's this and she's that and what have you. And lots of people have been putting together on social media the clips when they were waiting for Sue Gray, when she was a woman of impeccable integrity and nobody should ever doubt her credentials as a proper civil servant. So I'm afraid what we're seeing is that the Johnson lot just has ever tried to have their cake and eat it.

I'm loving your Jacob Rees-Mogg imitation. I never heard that before. That's particularly, it's very, very good. Yeah. No, that was really good. I was very impressed by that. Listen, very quickly, before we go to the break, tell us a bit about what the Privileges Committee has done on Boris Johnson and Party H. Should we care about it? Is there anything new? What's the story there?

Well, I think, I think what's interesting about it is that because Harriet Harman's chairing it, Chris Bryant recused himself because he's such a very loud critic of Boris Johnson has been for a long time. Harriet Harman's chairing it, but it's Tory dominated,

four Tory MPs, two Labour, I think one SNP. But what's interesting to me is that they've set out really where they are in the process ahead of interviewing Boris Johnson, I think on March the 20th. And what it goes through the whole process is a pretty damning report for Johnson. The fact that people like Bernard Jenkins has put his name to it, I think is quite revealing.

And we're back to our friend Mr. WhatsApp or Mrs. WhatsApp. Lots of WhatsApp messages that they've seen of Johnson's staff basically really struggling to see how they can defend what has happened. There's one that says, you know, this blows a gaping hole in the Prime Minister's defence. They've listed a whole list of incidents and moments where quotes he may have misled Parliament, which is sort of polite code for lied to Parliament, which is the kind of, you know, end of the road for him, if they conclude with that.

So I think it strikes me that's where they're going. Johnson is clearly with these ridiculously being paid for by the taxpayer, these expensive lawyers he's got. He is clearly going to say that unless somebody specifically said to him, and they have the evidence of that, which of course they won't have because it all seems to have been verbal and WhatsApp, you know, this is a breach of the law. This is a breach of the guidelines. But the pictures, the new pictures that have been exposed, you just have to look at them to see that he's breaking the guidelines. So I think he's done for, I think he's finished and the sooner he's out of our lives, the better.

Oh, very good. Well, that's a very encouraging note on which to go to our break.

Welcome back to the Restless Politics with me, Roy Stewart.

And me, Alistair Campbell.

And Alistair is being incredibly patient. I'm seeing more of Alistair than the father, the patient father than I am, that the famous figure that inspired a whole series of comedies in the 1990s, because he's putting up with the fact that I'm speaking from Malawi at the moment where there's a massive tropical thunderstorm going on that keeps knocking out our internet. But that brings me to something that I did want to talk about, which is global poverty. Malawi is one of the very, very poorest countries in the world. And it's a country where despite \$16 billion worth of international development spend on this country in the last 15 years, the percentage of people in extreme poverty has barely moved at all. And in some parts of Africa, Liberia, for example, the number of people in extreme poverty is actually greater than it was a few years ago, percentage of people. And across Africa as a whole, we've gone from 170 million people living in extreme poverty in 1980 to 470 million people living in extreme poverty today. And by extreme poverty, we mean people living below the World Bank poverty line of \$2.15 a day. And in many cases, a long, long way below that. I mean, I came across a woman and the Rwanda Burundi bought her recently on a trip who the only cash she was getting was \$3 a month to live on. The rest of it was just basically begging scraps from her neighbors and trying to e-cat a living from a tiny scrapper ground in front of her house looking after three grandchildren. Now, the reason I'm talking about that isn't though just that I'm in Malawi, it's that I wanted to talk a little bit about why we don't talk more about global poverty. And I wanted to just refer that back, of course, to the great moment of live aid and the moment where that big movement to make poverty history really started. And maybe even since you're the musical one of this duo, bring in some of your memories of that event.

Well, I'd love to do that. As you know, I love music and love to talk about music. But just on them, before we get into that, and we were talking briefly there about the whole, our government's mismanagement of the pandemic, I was reading the other day that the estimation is that people in extreme poverty has risen, the number has risen by 70 million as a result of the pandemic.

It's just horrifying because it's that the economies of many of the poorest countries were dependent on tourism and that collapsed. But there's other things too. It's that people are not just to become more poor, but they couldn't get into hospitals and died in large numbers. And it's also very sadly, many countries, one of them in Uganda, for example, is one of many countries where effectively the schools were basically closed for two years.

So some of the very poorest people in the world who struggle to get education anyway have lost two years of education in the last three years. And the impacts on this are going to be seen, you know, these are long-term impacts to remove from hundreds of millions of people, two years of their education is a very, very serious long-term impact.

Yeah. I'm going to direct anybody who's interested in extreme poverty to what I consider to be one of the best websites in the world. And I discovered, give directly is actually mentioned on it, but the website is ourworldindata.org. I don't know if you're aware of that one.

Yeah.

And you can put any country in the world and I actually because you told me you were going to be in Malawi, I put Malawi in and the figures are incredible. The percentage of people living on less than a dollar a day, 23%, less than \$2.15 a day, 70%, less than \$3.65, 89%, less than \$6.85, 97%, less than \$10 a day, 99.11%, less than \$20 a day, 99.91%. So you're talking about if we talk about inequality between nations as opposed to within nations, the UK figure, the figure for UK on less than \$20 a day is 9.96. You look at somewhere like India, 95% of the people living in India are living on less than \$30 a day. And there's some wonderful, I really do recommend people have a look at this. They've got some incredible graphics and it's a guy called, you may know this guy, Matt Rosa, who's a German guy, but he's at Oxford University, who's put this, been partly responsible for putting this thing together. It's got some of the most extraordinary graphics where you can literally go country by country around the world to see comparable stats on extreme poverty. And it's terrifying because you keep saying Africa is where the really bad stuff is and this absolutely brings that home.

It is, it is. And the big story for people who don't follow this day to day is that there was incredible progress, particularly in China, where 700 or 800 million people have been taken out of extreme poverty since 1980. Huge progress in India. And also in Bangladesh, I mean, when I was born, Bangladesh was referred to openly as the basket case. It was people thought that Bangladesh was never going to be able to get off its feet and actually Bangladesh is well on its way to becoming a middle income country and has made huge progress in reducing poverty. Countries like Morocco, huge progress too. But in sub-Saharan Africa, the situation is very, very bleak across that whole region. Almost half the population, well, 40% of the population is still in extreme poverty. And we're talking here about, you mentioned in Imolaoui that about 70% of people are under \$2.15 a day. \$2.15 is what the World Bank calculates. You really need to meet the most basic basics in your life. Put a bit of food on the table, have some basic shelter, get the most minimal access to education and

health, and 70% of people are not meeting that level here. So I'm keen, you very kindly offer to come with me to Imolaoui. And I'd love to bring you here because one of the reasons I'm so excited about GiveDirectly and the cash movement is that giving people a transfer of cash to get them on their feet is probably the most cost effective, transformatory thing. It's extraordinary. And we talk about cash, but it's not really cash. It's what you do with the cash. It's the way that it transforms suddenly. The kind of house you're living in, your kid's ability to go to school, the food you can put on the table, your ability to invest in a small business and be better off in 12 or 15 years time from a one-time transfer.

The other thing that our world and data does, they have a, as well as having lots of kind of interactive maps and lots and lots and lots of data and more data than you can kind of handle, but it's very, very well presented. But they also have some deep dive essays. It's in one of those that I saw there was a reference to Max Rosa supporting your charity GiveDirectly. But he also makes the big point that ultimately, we do have to help these economies grow. We can't just, it's not just about charity, this we have to help these economies grow.

So just quickly on that one, I mean, I think it's probably about three things. I think it's about governments and corruption, having a governing culture that's really dedicated to development. It's about the right kind of investments in public infrastructure, roads, bridges, dams, schools, hospitals. But it's also about including the extreme poor in that story because some of these countries have had economic growth without really bringing the extreme poor with them. And that I think is where NGOs and cash supporters probably most powerful where international development support can be most powerful is getting the extreme poor into that growth.

So live aid.

Yeah, live aid. Tell us about that.

Well, I covered live aid for the Daily Mirror. July the 13th, 1985. So I would have been what, 28? That was a year. I was probably drinking a lot because it was a year ahead of my kind of massive breakdown. I don't know if journalists do this anymore because they're also sort of digital. But when Fiona and I were young journalists, we have these hundreds of these dozens of these cuttings books and I dug them out. So I don't know if we've got the cameras off, but I'm looking now at the Daily Mirror souvenir issue. We did a whole wrap around. We even got rid of the sports pages, a whole wrap around. It just says the world rocked with love. There's a picture of Mick Jagger and Tina Turner performing. A picture of a young woman at Wembley and a young woman at Philadelphia because I don't know if you remember, there were two live aids started at midday at Wembley in front of 72,000 people. And then a few hours later, the concert then opened at JFK Stadium in Philadelphia and that went until four in the morning our time. And you had most of the big names in rock music. It was actually Boy George's idea, initially. Bob Geldof had put together that amazing Do They Know It's Christmas got loads of stars together and Boy George was performing at Wembley Arena at Christmas time in 1984. And there were a few other stars there and he got a few of them up on stage. And they kind of did the song and then he phoned Bob Geldof and said, Listen, why don't you do this? And Bob Geldof, who I've had a lot of dealings with in lots of different different guys is once he gets

an idea, he just goes for it. You know, I can't pretend to that I've got many actual memories of it. But the ones that I do have, I remember status quo kicking off with rocking all over the world. I remember Paul McCartney having trouble with his microphone. I think he was one of the few who had real sort of tech issues. I remember that, you know, he had Queen. Queen's set, by the way, was voted the best ever live performance in 2005. Years later, it was considered the best ever live performance. Elton John sang with with George Michael. Bob Geldof sang his famous song, you know, don't like Mondays. Queen, I do remember Queen, they were absolutely incredible. Phil Collins did both venues. He played at Wembley. He then got a helicopter to Heathrow. He got on Concorde, landed and got another helicopter to Philadelphia. And he picked up Sher. Sher was on the plane. And she didn't know it was happening. And she took her down and she performed as well. So Phil Collins performed at both. They reckon it raised about 150 million in the immediate aftermath. But I think the big point, as you say, it absolutely put development on the map. And the other guy we should give a big shout out when we talk about Live Aid is the BBC journalist Michael Burke, because it was his report in Ethiopia that set this whole ball rolling. And you know, you talk about events and reports that can change the world, I would argue that Michael Burke's report changed the world. And I think Live Aid did as well. It's amazing, isn't it? And I think credit also to Bono, who's been a huge guiding force in the whole drive on this for 30 years now. Bono performed at Wembley. But at that stage, he wasn't the kind of mega star that he is now. And he wasn't, nor was he the mega figure in the development world that he is now. So Live Aid, again, I think was a really big moment for him. Yeah, it's, I mean, the sad thing is though, that poverty, which was the central issue in the 80s, and was a central issue when you and Tony Blair and Gordon Brown were getting ready for the for the big G8 summit, 2005 Glen Eagles, which was all about debt relief and poverty. And there was a big commission on Africa that was set up. And do you remember the Sustainable Development Goals, which put Sustainable Development Goal number one of the United Nations is about ending extreme poverty. But that has faded out of sight. And for somebody like me, who's working on this, it's very frustrating. And it's partly that there are other very serious crises that we're facing. So climate change, of course, which, but of course, as I keep trying to point out to people, you can't think about climate change separate from poverty. It's tempting to because a lot of the solutions to carbon emissions are not in poor countries, because the poorest countries aren't the big emitters. That's why a lot of the money from the UN is actually being invested in China and Indonesia and more middle income countries. But the people who suffer from it are the extreme poor and climate change is going to add hundreds of millions more people in extreme poverty around the world. And yet the sad thing is it's so often when I talk to people now around the world, they say, Oh, I'm not really interested in poverty anymore. I'm more interested in climate or I'm more interested in artificial intelligence or I'm more interested in global health. And I think it's partly that there's a sort of sense of despair. We've got to restore people's hope. We've got to restore their confidence that it can be tackled. And that's why I'm a real believer in some of the things which are now happening across Africa where we are beginning to demonstrate that we can end extreme poverty in our lifetime. Now, the other thing I'd point to on this Max Rosa's website, this our world and data

is that there is a lot of progress on there. And there's a lot of good news and they do some really interesting case studies over time of how change is made. But look, in the end, this is why political leadership is so important. You know, you mentioned Tony and Gordon, when Tony Blair and Gordon Brown were in office, this issue really, really mattered. And that meant that they took it to other governments as well. And so you need the big countries with political leaders who say, we are going to do this stuff. And that's why you and I both we bang on probably too much about how much we despise Boris Johnson. But one of the reasons is, you know, getting rid of DFID and giving up on the 0.7% of GDP on international aid and development for purely political reasons without any regard to the long term consequence. I just think it's immoral. So I think that you're right that it's gone backwards, but and you're right that it's partly because we've got all these other challenges. So that's why you do need political leaders to step up. And, you know, hopefully, we press to Kirstam and we press David Lamy, hopefully a new Labour government, if we get one, we'll actually take this issue more seriously.

Yeah, on that also, I think there's also something which is to really be blunt with the conscience of the left and say, if you care deeply about inequality in Britain, and I think the progressive movement does care deeply about inequality in Britain, your care, your compassion should not stop at your national borders, you should care deeply deeply about people in extreme poverty all around the world and not see that as a sort of separate issue.

We talked recently to Bernie Sanders, and he was raging about the billionaire class and said, there's no reason for anybody to be so wealthy as a Musk or a Murdoch or a Bezos, whoever it might be. We've just been there talking about the millions and billions of people who are living on incomes that you and I and most people that we know would find unimaginable. And yet we're living alongside or in the same country in the same part of the world as people who could do so much. I mean, to be fair to Bill Gates, I think he does do a lot with his money, but the wealthy of the world could do so much. But ultimately, I think it takes governments to have the guts to say, look, we actually need to start having a much more progressive tax system. We have to start understanding we have responsibilities to each other. And that includes countries that are poorer than ours. Otherwise, we just kind of go round and round and round in circles.

Well, one of the odd things about billionaires, and I do speak to quite a lot of them when I'm trying to fundraise for poverty in Africa, is the number of people who say that they've signed up for this giving pledge. So they signed up to give away the vast majority of their money during their lives, but they're not doing it. They haven't started doing it. They keep putting it off. And they're generating, as you can imagine, if you're worth \$10 billion, you're generating just an interest payments every year, the most colossal sum of money. And yet, they are often saying that the reason they're not spending is they claim that there's nothing out there valuable which can absorb their money. And that's where I think... So they buy Premier League football clubs instead.

Exactly. That actually, in a very straightforward sense, if you can't think of anything else to do with your money, \$500, given to somebody in extreme poverty, can transform their lives. And if you're worth billions, you can do that many, many thousands of times over.

The Live Aid model, by the way, Roy, was ahead of its time because they thought to give directly.

There was lots of people trying to say that lots of it was siphoned off by the Mengistu regime in Ethiopia. But actually, Brian Bader, who was our ambassador for a long period out there, he actually said that the evidence of that was pretty flimsy. So what was great about Live Aid was the combination of the fundraising, very important, but much bigger, I think, was the political message, and also the fact that it was one of the greatest musical events of all time. It was also at the time, the biggest and most complicated outside broadcast that anybody ever tried. And the other, there's a list, there's quite a funny list of the notable absentees, the ones who either couldn't get involved and want to get involved and now regretted it. But Bruce Springsteen, for example, wasn't there. Boy George, even though he played such a role in getting off the ground, he didn't think he was big enough, which I think is really, really sad. Annie Lennox, Cliff Richard. But the four tops were there, Roy. And I'm sure, like me, you're a massive four tops fan.

Well, let's now move on. But one of the things, when we get Bob Geldof on the podcast to talk to him, I'd love to explore a little bit more his claim that this all finished in 2005 with his Live 8 conference and why he thinks that actually the age of rock and roll has ended, the world has changed and why he thinks it's not possible to do that kind of thing again in the same way and have the same impact. But I suspect you wanted to tell us a little bit about Shamima Begum and this BBC documentary that you've been watching. But make sure that you remind readers who Shamima Begum is before you tell us about the BBC documentary.

Well, I reckon most of our listeners will have heard of Shamima Begum. If you haven't seen the BBC documentary by a guy called Josh Baker, I strongly recommend it.

Just before you tell us about documentary, Shamima Begum was a 15 year old in Bethnal Green who went off to join ISIS and she arrived on the Syria-Rahk border. She married an ISIS fighter. She travelled with two other girls from Bethnal Green and she was then found after the defeat of ISIS by a Times journalist called Anthony Lloyd who interviewed her in a refugee camp in Syria or an ISIS detention camp in Syria. And she then had her British citizenship stripped off her by the then Home Secretary, Saadja Javed. And there has then been a series of court cases. The Court of Appeal said that she should get a citizenship back and then the Supreme Court decided that the Home Secretary had acted lawfully. She shouldn't get a citizenship

back. And another thing called SIAC, which is a secret tribunal that looks at terrorists and security cases, has also confirmed that decision. Anyway, you then watched the documentary over to you.

That was a very, very good explanation, far better than I would have done. The final bit to add to that in terms of the process of her case is just this week, Jonathan Hall, who is the QC, the independent reviewer on terrorism legislation. He said that he thinks she should be brought back. Apparently 400 people have come back. There has been no successful attack by what is called a returner. And he also makes the point that women are far less likely to commit acts of terrorism.

Now what I saw in the documentary, and it's a really interesting piece of film because it's very largely based on interviews with her by this guy, Josh Baker, but also with a lot of people involved in the story. It tells the story in a really kind of quite compelling way. Lots of CCTV footage of her departure, interviews with people that were involved at the time. Some politicians involved. Tim Louton is very, very critical of her

and thinks that the government's made the right decision. Interviews with her husband, who's in jail. But the story of her, so she leaves at age 15, as you say, part of that Bangladeshi community in Bethnal Green growing up in Britain with a very different sort of background in terms of her family culture. Not clear really how the radicalization begins, but she gets there. She marries within 10 days. She has three children, all of whom die. There is a very kind of, it's not entirely clear what she actually does for ISIS. Her argument would be that, for example, she's accused of making suicide bomb vests. She denies that completely. She says she was most of the time just kept at home because she became a kind of ISIS bride. Her husband was jailed at one point. He was out as a fighter. He's Dutch, but a convert to Islam. The witnesses at war that I found the most compelling, apart from her, it's an extraordinary interview. And when I say compelling, I mean, it's just you can't take your eyes off her in terms of the way she speaks. She reminded me, well, she brought to mind people that I've seen in different parts of periods of my life, people who've been trained to resist interrogation. She's got a very, very clear way of speaking and you find yourself one minute thinking, oh, I really believe this woman in the next minute you think I'm being manipulated. It's like a kind of, you get drawn into trying to make these judgments. But Anthony Lloyd, the journalist you mentioned, I found him very, very convincing. And I think he reached the conclusion that ultimately, this isn't just a story about her joining ISIS. It's a story of what her life was like in Britain. It's a story of them, what she got up to. But she is actually British, and that she ought to be brought back. And she ought to face British justice. She's obviously admitted that she joined a terrorist organization. She's denied doing some of the things that she's been accused of. But I think that for Sadja Javid, to say that she should essentially spend the rest of her life stateless, the British government argued that she has Bangladeshi status as well, but the Bangladeshi say she doesn't. So, you know, she's stateless. And I just think she should be brought back. And if she's a risk, if she'd obviously go to jail because she's admitted joining a terrorist organization. But I just think that the way she's just left there now to rot, I think is wrong.

Yeah. I mean, it's interesting, isn't it? I mean, I remember it all very, very strongly because I was in government at the time. And I mean, firstly, that whole ISIS phenomenon was beyond imagining. I mean, suddenly out of nowhere, you remember in June 2014, a few ISIS fighters, a few hundred people in pickups defeated three divisions of the Iraqi army. So tens of thousands of men captured Mosul, the second largest city in Iraq, and created a new state between Syria and Iraq. This enormous territory ruled in the most horrifying way. And what I remember thinking at the time was just how diverse these people were who were going to join ISIS. There were poor people from Yemen and Morocco. There were middle-class people from Cardiff. There were people from Denmark. There were people from France. I mean, it was the most incredible collection of people. And it was unbelievably cruel and horrible. You'll remember the rape and the murder of the Yazidi minorities. You'll remember them beheadings, beheadings, the flinging of people who were gay out of buildings. And the sense of these incredibly unpleasant young men and women, many of them European, who were living out a kind of video game lifestyle charging up and down on these large pickup trucks with heavy machine guns and sending weird messages on social media. A lot of this was driven by the way they portrayed themselves on social media. They developed their own music systems.

I mean, it was a completely bizarre phenomenon of which Shamima Begum was clearly a central part. She was very attracted by a lot of this. She's on record saying she didn't regret the bombing in Manchester. And into the middle of this comes this other fascinating character who somebody should be writing much more about. Who's my friend Anthony Lloyd, who I've seen all over the world. I knew him in Afghanistan. I knew him in Iraq. I was with him in Libya. He's an ex-British soldier and he is an incredibly courageous committed journalist. But he's also struggled with mental health issues. He takes risks like I cannot believe. I mean, I saw him in Libya, go down streets on the front lines where no other journalist would go. His whole car being shot up by bullets, barely making it out alive. I mean, he's an extraordinary figure. And we're very lucky that Anthony's still with us the way that he's lived his life over the last few years.

Well, his interview is a very significant, I think, compelling and important part of the program. You sort of see him. He tells a story about how he found her, the conversations that he had. He's kept the tapes of those conversations and they play some of those tapes. But he reaches that conclusion that ultimately she went there as a child and she is British. And lots of people may not want to like to confront that truth. But how she got radicalized and the mistakes that were made, some of them they go into some of the sort of mistakes in terms of what happened at the school because one of her school friends had gone ahead and then letters were sent to these girls and the letters were sent to the girls but of course they didn't get through to the parents and there was no sort of follow up on that. There's all sorts of threads to this. But it's one of those films that I sat and watched and at the end of it, I kind of didn't quite know what I thought. But that's why I found Anthony Lloyd's interview. Ultimately, I think I thought what he ended up thinking which is that she clearly got involved in something she's never got involved in. She had a horrible time when she was there. I mean, basically she got married with this guy, this Dutch guy who was really creepy and she married him, had three children. They're all born. They all went to full birth and they were born as children but then they died including one of them. Three days, was born three days after Anthony Lloyd found her and so it's a horrible story on so many levels and I just think that when you hear him talking about it, he, as you say, a proper journalist who's really gone into it in depth and really thought about it as opposed to the people who make all the noise, the ones that Sadja Javid was probably listening to and Javid, there's an interview where he basically says, look, if you knew what I knew, you wouldn't even think about allowing her back. Well, if that's the case, share it with the public.

Well, I mean, I think we're coming to an end but I mean, I think this is where, if we want to touch this again, where this special tribunal, the SIAC tribunal comes in because they hear secret information which can't be released and they, of course, confirm Sadja Javid's decision. But anyway, thank you and I will make sure when I get back to somewhere where I can watch the BBC. It's very frustrating being abroad. You can't watch these BBC shows. I look forward to watching it very much indeed and look forward to talking soon. I'll see you soon.