

[Transcript] The News Agents / How does Israel get its hostages back?

This is a global player original podcast.

Without apology, we're going to play you a father's voice.

It's deeply distressing, but it's about the subject that we're tackling today, which is the hostages in Gaza.

And this is one man, one father, talking about his daughter, Emily.

She was either dead or in Gaza.

And if you know anything about what they do to people in Gaza, that is worse than death.

And today, Thomas Hand, who was there speaking to CNN, found out that his eight-year-old daughter had in fact been killed.

And his reaction is, I don't know what word to describe it.

They just said, we found Emily, she's dead, and I went, yes.

I went, yes, I'm smiled because that is the best news of the possibilities that I knew.

It was the best possibility that I was hoping for, death was a blessing, an absolute blessing.

It was an expression of unbearable grief born out of the best love.

So today, on the news agents, we're going to talk about those 150 or so people being held hostage around Gaza.

What it means for Gazans as they come under attack, what it means for Israelis as they try to free their hostages.

Welcome to the news agents.

The news agents.

It's John.

It's Emily.

And the situation in Gaza has to be where we start today, which is under siege with emergency supplies, water, electricity, more or less cut off, and Israel saying, you're not going to get these vital services back until you free our hostages.

Airstrikes have continued and you have Hamas saying, we're going to start executing publicly your hostages if you hit our buildings.

It is the most horrendous impasse.

And I think we should hear now from someone whose mother, an 85 year old woman, was taken from her bed.

Sharon Lifchitz has been giving a news conference in London where she lives.

This is what she said a short time ago.

I mean, you have to be a special sort of person to take an 85 year old woman out of her bed, don't you?

She really, you know, these are frail people.

When the video's first surfaced, there was a video and a very elderly woman on a kind of rickshaw being taken around Gaza in her nightie.

And I looked at it and I thought, oh my God, I don't know this woman.

She's from another kibbutz, you know?

She's not someone I know.

Only of course she was.

She was my mother's friend, Yaffa, Yaffa Adal, you know?

We together have experienced something that is so horrific we cannot contemplate.

But we have a job to do now and I am concentrating, all of us are concentrating on the job at

[Transcript] The News Agents / How does Israel get its hostages back?

hand and the job is in the face of all of this, bring these people back home.
There's mothers waiting for the children.
These are my friends, children.
These mothers are me.
I'm asking on their behalf, not on my behalf.
There's no I here.
There's we.
I keep looking at this number.
It's 150, 150 hostages and it actually sort of doesn't sink in because, I mean, I'm not saying there is any right number of hostage taking, of course there isn't, but you occasionally hear about one or two.
You hear about soldiers being abducted.
You hear about the fight to get one person back.
And now we're looking at the kind of numbers that remind me of the hostage takings of the 1970s, the sort of raid on in Tebi, where entire aircraft were basically hijacked and made to land at the terrorist wills and you never knew what would happen.
But I mean, even then, all those people were together.
They were all together in one place.
And I actually, I keep on sort of not quite being able to register.
There is a sense of disbelief when you hear of all the nationalities of all the ages of all the places that they ripped people from, whether it was their beds or their homes or their sleepovers and took them away.
And I think that probably does explain a little that very first clip we played of the father who cannot imagine anything worse than an eight year old ripped away from her family and taken to somewhere where they only mean harm.
And I guess what we need to discuss a little bit is what, if anything, would make murderers, would make terrorists change their mind because we know it's not going to be compassion, right? They're not suddenly going to have an awakening, a sort of damocene conversion.
It's only something that will act to help their cause, whatever that causes.
And I think that's where we are now.
There will be hostage negotiators, there will be families, there will be politicians, there will be entire states trying to work out what Hamas does.
And there will be people who are nervously looking at Israel, who, as you said, is attempting to start this ground war now saying, hang on, don't do it, don't go in there.
That's going to be the deaths of our loved ones as well.
All the governments involved in that as well, sort of presumably putting pressure on Israel to go carefully here because they don't know what they're destroying.
I mean, you are in a position now where there are no good options.
There's nothing easy.
There's nothing that, as you say, Emily, the damocene conversion where Hamas says, oh, I'm terribly sorry we did all this big mistake.
Yeah, here they are, the 150 people back, and here's a ribbon and bow and a box of chocolates to say,
we're sorry.

[Transcript] The News Agents / How does Israel get its hostages back?

Yeah, that's not going to happen.

It is beyond awful the situation that they're in.

There are no good military options.

I mean, it looks like Israeli is massing forces and artillery on the border and heavy weaponry to launch a land invasion into what could become a quagmire.

And it's very uncertain that it will lead to the liberation of those hostages.

And therefore, you have to look at who might have leverage in this situation over Hamas.

And that is very hard to see.

Sure, Iran, maybe, but Iran is not going to do a thing to help free the hostages because presumably Iran had been in on the original plan and given it the go ahead because Iran funds Hamas to such a large extent.

I guess the only players potentially are Qatar, where the head of Hamas is said to be based, and also Turkey, which is a very big regional player as well, that they might be able to produce some form of swap whereby Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails are exchanged for these 150.

But I wonder more profoundly and more disturbingly whether actually Hamas wanted to terrorize Israel.

It did it incredibly successfully with this operation on Saturday.

By taking 150 hostages, you extend that sense of terror, of shock, of insecurity, of vulnerability.

And there's also the provocation theory, which William Haig writes about really well, actually, which is that, I think he describes it as a howl of rage, that Hamas is basically standing there with the hands, saying, come on then, come on, let's see what you want to do.

And the angrier it can make Israel, the more extreme the response will be, the more unsettled the Middle East will become, the less likely there will be any sort of deal-making or peace or normalization of relationships.

And so this is the point at which Israel itself has to go, am I being led down this dark alley?

Is this exactly what is? It's a trap.

And we know that Israel have extraordinary military might.

But I guess the question that Haig raises now is, have you thought this through?

This is the chess game.

Where is your political end to this?

Because it's not really, it's not really just to destroy 2 million people living in Gaza.

That's not going to help anyone.

I mean, it's certainly not going to help the Gazans, but it's not going to help politically Israel find its footing with the allies it so desperately needs now either.

So where is this game being played?

And at the moment, if you think that Hamas is trying to say to Israel, come on, let's see how cross you are.

Let's see how angry you are.

Let's see how much destruction you can do.

Israel also has to hold back and think about what their strategy is.

There's another piece of this that really interests me,

[Transcript] The News Agents / How does Israel get its hostages back?

which is the role of the US in all of this.

And Anthony Blinken, the US Secretary of State, America's top diplomat, is in Israel today. He is there alongside Netanyahu.

And we'll play a clip of that in just a moment.

But for public consumption, it's all about America absolutely stands by Israel's side.

But America will have considerations in all of this as well.

I'm sure they've relieved that a government of national unity has been formed and that people from other parties are being brought into the government as well.

But I think America will be looking at this in a regional context of the danger of the whole of the Middle East being engulfed in a war with Iran and that draws everybody in.

And that is the wider picture that America probably won't talk much about.

But today, Blinken and Netanyahu were standing shoulder to shoulder Israel and America side by side.

If you'll permit me personal aside, I come before you not only as the United States Secretary of State, but also as a Jew.

My grandfather, Maurice Blinken, fled pogroms in Russia.

My stepfather, Samuel Pizarre, survived concentration camps, Auschwitz, Dachau, Mydonok.

So Prime Minister, I understand on a personal level the harrowing echoes that Hamas' massacres carry for Israeli Jews, indeed, for Jews everywhere.

And Tony Blinken talking about the political questions this raises.

And interesting, yesterday you mentioned the need for a Good Friday Agreement.

Now, obviously, back in 1997, 1998, that was all about finding the political will to get the parties around the table. What has happened in the Middle East recently is a sidestepping, if you like, of political tensions to work on something that they all agree about, which is trade, technology, answers to AI. And it's extraordinary how the Abraham Accords, which were, you know, curiously sort of brokered by Trump in that time, have actually brought these normalising relations between Israel, between several Arab states to do with technology, to do with trade.

I think the UAE looks set for 10 billion pounds of bilateral trade with Israel in the next five years. And on the table, as we mentioned a couple of days ago, is this putative deal with Saudi as well. So this is how they've tried to get everyone together. They've said, okay, we'll leave the politics aside. We're not going to talk about that stuff. It's too dirty. It's too difficult. It's too grubby. But do we all agree that we'd like to share more information? Do we like to agree we'd all like to do a bit more on technology? Yes, we do. And it's as soon as Saudi comes to the table, as soon as this starts looking like a really prosperous part of the world that the terrorists kick it all up. But then you have a situation where Gaza is miserable. It is overcrowded. There are poor facilities. There are people living in terribly overcrowded conditions. Now, in fear of their lives, as these bombs rain down from Israeli fighter planes overhead, they felt they were being left out of this. Of course. You know, the Gulf states were thinking, cock, can't wait to get new bar, cock. Not just by Israel and the Israeli government, but by Arab states as well. Yeah, they were forgotten. They were forgotten. And this is the howl of rage that there has been. And that is why, if Israel does go in with land forces, you might wipe out the leadership of Hamas, but you're going to have a whole heap of radicalized youngsters whose fury and rage against the state of Israel will be as intense as anything that was there when Hamas was in charge. And that is the sort of desperate hopelessness of the situation

[Transcript] The News Agents / How does Israel get its hostages back?

and complicated as we've been talking about by these 150 hostages. Let's speak now to Rachel Briggs. She's been a hostage negotiator. Her uncle was a hostage. She works at Chatham House, and she has been involved in some of this desperately difficult work over 25 years. And it's good to have you with us on the news, agents. Thank you so much. I mean, the scale of this hostage taking is, I suppose, like nothing we've really seen before. It's really extraordinary. Mass hostage takings are not entirely unprecedented, but they are highly, highly unusual because, as you can imagine, they're really difficult to pull off. So there have been mass hostage takings before. We think of the theater siege in Moscow in 2002, the Japanese Embassy in Lima in 96, when Saddam Hussein took hundreds of hostages during the first Gulf War as a human shield, for example. So there are precedent in that regard. What is highly unusual in this case is the mass nature of it, combined with the fact that it's a multinational hostage group. They have been taken into a war zone. Of course, many of the hostages, unfortunately, may well have been injured en route to their place of captivity. And as we're seeing play out, hour by hour, tensions and emotions are an absolute boiling point at every side of this equation. So in the 25 years that I have been in and around hostage situations, I simply don't remember one that's as complicated as this. Rachel, it seems to me that we always try to get inside the hostage takers mind. I'm wondering whether that just seems an utterly futile exercise in this case. I mean, if you start from the point that they are murderous and terrorists, then is there any point trying to work out what this is about other than publicity? Yeah, I mean, it's an interesting question, isn't it? There is a point in the sense that they will have taken them for a reason. What that reason is may evolve as we go through the situation, of course. I mean, in the first instance, it would be a logical sort of calculus on their part that taking this number of hostages would firstly be helpful in demonstrating their sheer audacity, their power, their ability to sort of pull something off that shouldn't have been possible. Secondly, they have quite a helpful human shield within Gaza. They will certainly have been thinking about that. I would anticipate that they would see the potential here for using the hostages as some form of bargaining chip. Hamas has already said, every time you bomb without warning, we are threatening that we will murder a hostage. And what those sort of bargaining positions might be as we go forward will change day by day. But it sounds like you think that they do want to release the hostages, then. Would you give families that kind of hope? I think we have to start from that basis. Yeah, I mean, holding 150 hostages is also a very difficult endeavor, particularly in any circumstance, but particularly with what is going on here. And I'm the first to say that these hostages find themselves in an incredibly perilous situation. And having been a family member of a hostage and having supported many, many, many dozens of families, it's so important to be honest about the situation. But what I would add is that it is critical to always maintain hope. I've also seen hostages walk out of scenarios that we all thought was almost impossible. And in fact, a good friend of mine and a mentor of mine, Terry Waite, who was held for five years, his family were told a year or two into his captivity. Categorically, he has been murdered. And of course, he emerged from the side of a plane at Bryce Norton a few years later. So very perilous. But there is reason for hope. There is reason for hope. And most hostage takers do want to end up sort of releasing them at some point down the line. Yeah, the other side of this that we haven't spoken about,

which is not just whether there will be a deal that Hamas wants to strike with Israel to release them. It's hard to see quite what the contours of that would be. But the other aspect of this is who has got leverage over Hamas aside from Iran? And can they be prevailed upon to act as sort of honest brokers in this? I mean, we hear that the leader of Hamas is in Qatar. I mean, presumably the Qataris could be playing a role in some of this.

That's what negotiators are always looking for in this in this instance.

Who might be able to open the door of Sleva? Who can get people around the table and who's got some influence? I think one of the positive signs that we've seen over the last almost week now, extraordinarily, is that there are signs that conversations are starting. So the Qataris said very quickly over the weekend that they were starting to negotiate to at least try and get the women and the children out. I mean, unspeakable that children are going through this horrific experience. We've heard today that Turkey has said it is trying to use some leverage. And indeed, the Red Cross has stepped forward as well offering both humanitarian support, of course, but also the option of its table being used. So I see that as a really positive sign. And I would feel very sure that the negotiating team behind the scenes in Israel will be very closely trying to figure out who has got an in, who can open the door and who can ultimately get Hamas around the table. Just given the horror of what has unfolded, the concert goes 260 dead, the Kibbutz mothers children wiped out. Isn't it just perfectly possible that what Hamas are doing is extending the horror with no intention of release, no intention of letting these people go. This is just a kind of another piece of salt in the wound that Israelis are feeling right now. Listen, I mean, I think, you know, as I said, this is an absolutely unprecedented situation. And I think we have to face the reality that anything is possible. History gives us some guidance as to what the future might look like. But ultimately, it doesn't give us the full road map. So, you know, we can't rule that out as a possibility. We just have to hope that there's a shred of humanity and that there's something worth dealing for to get these entirely innocent human beings back with their families and healing as soon as possible.

Rachel, you spoke about your own experience. Your uncle was taken hostage.

Just take us through what you would be doing now as a family. When you said you wanted people to be honest with you, how much communication do you want to have? How many of the details do you want to have? What did you need when that was you? Yeah. And obviously every family is different and how they choose to cope will be right for them. I'll tell you about how it felt for me.

And I've seen this with other families is initially you start off almost with a sense of disbelief. How on earth could this happen to a family like mine? It's so unusual, even given the extremities of this instance, it's generally unusual anyway. So, you know, the number of families I've spoken to who've said literally this phrase, I feel like I'm in a Hollywood movie and, you know, my feet aren't touching the ground right now. So I think in those early days, there will be just this sense of disbelief almost like you're living in a cotton wall bubble that, you know, you can't really touch reality. As you said, Emily, the information pieces is really key. That was especially important for me. You know, I wanted to know what's happening, what might happen, what's happened previously, how do you think this is going to run? And I've always found in my experience that, you know, families aren't stupid. They know that their family member is in a very difficult situation. You have to, if you are the information giver, you have to approach people as adults and be really honest and realistic with them about what the chances are, what has happened previously and so on. So, but families will be clinging on

for any information they can get. And of course, these situations are so frustrating in that regard because on the one hand, there is so little information. And on the other hand, there is no shortage of information, which is rumour, incorrect, conspiracy theories. This is obviously a totally different example. But when we used to do these sort of courses, you know, hostile environment courses that talk you through what could happen in those situations. I remember this phrase they used to us, which is you have to try and be the grey man, i.e. be the person that no one notices, that just sort of gets under the covers almost without standing out. When you're talking to hostages themselves, when you're trying to convey how they should act, what is the advice you give them about their behaviour? Yeah, I mean, it's a good piece of advice you've had. It's firstly about trying to survive. And that's a particularly pertinent piece of advice given the situation in Gaza right now. It's about trying to mentally survive, hold on to a sense of yourself, which we sort of sound so fluffy and silly in these situations, doesn't it? But actually, the hostages I've seen who've coped best are those who have managed to make sense of their situation, reconcile themselves to the reality. It really sort of sets them up for strength that they will need to both survive captivity, but then survive survival as well, because it's a long old job to recovery. So yeah, the grey man is a good analogy here. And as I said, tensions are an absolute boiling point. So the last thing you want to do is lose your call and risk provoking something from your captors. Rachel, grateful to you. Thank you so much. Rachel Briggs there. Thank you. This is the news agents.

There have long been reports about prison overcrowding, and you sort of take it in your stride and think, well, yeah, okay, but they'll find room for everybody. But there was this little gem that we missed at the Conservative Party conference. I don't think we could have been paying attention

or something like that. But Alex Chalk, the justice secretary in his speech, revealed this, and it didn't get much pickup. Have a listen. We're expanding and refurbishing existing prisons and hiring thousands more prison officers. And I can tell you today, conference, that we also intend to look at the Norwegian example and explore renting overseas capacity. We are actually going

to rent prisons in other countries to house our own criminals because we haven't got room. Well, the story thickens because we now know, we think we know, that judges have been told not to jail rapists as the prisons are too full. And the reason that we know that is because Catherine Baxie broke that story in the times and she can join us now. Just Catherine, spell this out for us, because it sounds like something you kind of make up. No, well, as you say, it sounds almost inconceivable, but it's an indication of the state that the justice is in at the minute, that the prisons are so full that judges have been told not to send people who are on bail to prison, so as not to add to the prison population, which is at capacity. So it's just when they're on bail, right? I mean, I guess the point of putting people behind bars is because you think that they could still be a danger to the public. And what the government's message seems to be sending out is like, even if they are potential fugitive rapists, we just can't deal with that, right? Well, yeah, I mean, people who are charged with murder and crimes like that, who haven't been convicted, are generally sent to prison on remand waiting for their trial. People who are charged with things like that, what the judges have told us they're concerned about, people who are charged with things like historic rape, the rape of a child or rape of a grown-up person or other serious sexual assault, where these things happened

[Transcript] The News Agents / How does Israel get its hostages back?

a several years ago, and sometimes the defendants are quite elderly, so they are not in prison, they're on bail before their trials. But then the judges said they're concerned that when these people, if and when these people are convicted by a jury found guilty, the judge will tend not to be able to sentence them to a custodial term, that they will have to delay that and send the convicted rapists back out into the community on bail until there comes a time when the prisons have enough room for them to be sentenced. So this would be convicted, this would actually be convicted rapists, yes. Yeah, oh my god. What's so extraordinary about this is that even at a time when there is such criticism of how few people are actually convicted of rape, that you could then have a situation where those that are convicted are still out there and therefore the woman who has been raped and has been a victim, doesn't get any satisfaction from seeing the person that has carried this out being sentenced and serving time inside and feeling safe. Well one of the judges who spoke to us, they said they were so concerned, what happened if this person that appears before them is convicted and then they send them back into the community and they could come across the victim, the victim may come across them and the victim is going to think what on earth is going on, this person was convicted the other day by a jury, why are they still at large? You wouldn't want to be a victim with a convicted rapist still potentially on your doorstep, right? Well exactly and the government talks tough and say we want to try more people and convict more and give them longer sentences, but then the whole thing is made a complete mockery

of by the fact there's nowhere to send, the prisons are too full to send anybody to prison.

Catherine you were told this by judges, what was the reaction when you put this to the government departments, whether I presume it was the justice department?

Yeah well they didn't deny it, they sent some form of comment and there's been a minister doing the rounds today who hasn't denied it and just keeps banging on about safety and how safety is paramount. And are the judges up in arms? I mean presumably that's how you know. Some of them are because they've told us there haven't been any public comments by the senior judiciary or maybe they will say something in due course, I don't know. And Catherine we know that before the Supreme Court at the moment is the whole issue of whether you can send asylum seekers to Rwanda and what will happen there, what is the legal position? We heard that clip of Alex Chalk there saying well we might rent prison places overseas, can you just send off your prisoners who've been convicted under the British legal system to serve their sentence in Estonia or Norway or Latvia or wherever it happens to be. I know I would have to consent, you can't just send people overseas like that, I mean it's a particular state of affairs, if our asylum processing is going to be sent to Rwanda prisoners are going to be sent to Estonia or Norway, the whole thing is just ludicrous. So do you get the impression but listening to Alex Chalk from that speech, it sounds like this is something they're considering, you haven't heard whether there is work going on saying what price will you give us for 100 prison places in your prison with a view. Well it's difficult to say because you don't know whether the government is saying these things to try and create a headline or make it look as though they're doing something. And they come up with these ludicrous ideas sending people overseas when there are much simpler ways of dealing with it. This problem of overcrowded prisons is not something that's crept up on the government overnight, they've been aware of the problem growing for ages, it's an entirely natural and foreseeable consequence of A, the lack of funding which means you don't have enough courts, you don't have enough judges, so the trials can't get on,

[Transcript] The News Agents / How does Israel get its hostages back?

so the remand population is growing, but also with a ratcheting up of sentencing over the years, so the prisons become full of both unconvicted and convicted prisoners who are having longer Catherine listen thank you so much and well done on breaking this story because it is an extraordinary tale and I guess it shows the clash between a party and government that wants to show it's tough on crime and tough on criminals and therefore lock them up and yet a situation where you just don't have the capacity and there is tight spending rounds and there isn't the money to create the capacity that you need to meet the demand to be tough on crime yeah I mean look there is no doubt when you look at the numbers we have reached prison capacity the population is set to pass a hundred thousand in prison by 2025 that's a huge huge number huge threshold to cross but I guess the question is we can't build people houses right we can't even let young people own their own homes or or live in houses so the idea that we would sort of bypass the building of houses to build more prisons seems crazy I guess the question is are the people that are sitting in prisons rapists who potentially right could actually go out and and do harm in the community are they murderers who could actually go out and do harm the community or are they a whole series of people suffering from social mental health problems deep rooted family problems deep rooted community problems where there is very little sense to see them locked up when I was in Australia recently and jet lagged we watched on TV inside the world's toughest prisons which was a kind of you

know factual program just kind of thing my boys would love yeah kind of mildly entertaining break and I thought you know what I don't fancy any of those prisons overseas thank you very much and I can't believe that there'll be many British prisoners who would fancy oh yeah always wanted to get an Estonian stamp in my passport I'll go to Estonia to go to prison you probably wouldn't get the stamp because I'm imagining they do something like they do with rendition where you don't technically leave the UK they just designate a boat with a prison on it somewhere in the Estonian sea I don't know but we're getting a bit granular now on a big macro problem which is oh my god are we really telling judges that you can't send convicted rapists to prison what a mess

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and before we go Lewis Goodall is here that's too few to give my full name or just in case he's been doing that he's been going Emily Maitlis Lewis Goodall no I have not you'll cross with me no no I'm just I'm just sick of how matey we are fanboy chum Lewis Goodall was in Liverpool I mean we had a lot of attention but as nothing compared to our boy band hero Lewis Goodall the David Beckham of the newsagents you want to be careful how you wear that yeah not as many tats

not yet not inked up enough I was thinking about getting one of our faces just on my back like the coffee like the coffee so the SMP have got their conference starting this weekend and what a cork are it's getting off to yeah well when we were talking last week about what it couldn't be better for the Labour Party better backdrop that they'd won in rather Glen obviously that means someone lost and that was the SMP that's bad enough and then today certainly to I think anyone who hasn't been watching the kind of intra SMP politics within the Westminster group of the SMP very very closely who would that have been none of our listeners I'm sure but the sort of shock news that one of their own MPs Lisa Cameron who is the MP for East Kilbride has defected crossed the floor which is pretty rare in the Commons to the Conservative Party the Conservative and Union Party yeah I mean I can't actually think of I mean certainly in recent history this is not

this is not happens and she's attributing her decision to her treatment from colleagues in reaction to her speaking out she says in support of the harassment victim of fellow SMP MP Patrick Grady she said this I do not feel able to continue what I have experienced as a toxic and bullying SMP Westminster group which resulted in my requiring counselling for a period of 12 months

in parliament and caused significant deterioration in my health and well-being as assessed by my GP including the need for antidepressants she said being in the SMP has been bad for my health and she said that the person who has supported her most in this time has again perhaps for people surprised been the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and so she has crossed the floor and joined the Tory benches I mean we should add perhaps that she was like this has come on a day when she was facing deselections from her own seat yes and she was also yeah she was slightly out of step I think on bigger issues as well like abortion she spoke after an abortion debate and she clearly felt more aligned with the Conservatives I guess in the SMP position but I love the line from Ian Murray who's Labour Scottish Secretary today who's kind of twisted the whole 2015 election campaign

on its head and he's just said it's clearer than ever vote SMP get Tory which was a sort of gift really for Labour she hasn't gone to Labour she's gone to the Conservatives all that rhetoric around oh if Labour win they'll just do a deal with the SMP now it's completely sort of falling apart and he's trying to turn that one around I do think what's so interesting in Scotland at the moment is the sort of disjunction between support for independence which sort of largely remains unaffected and support for the SMP which is really falling sharp and this will underline further oh my god they're all rats in a sack it's not a united party what's wrong with them what's wrong at Westminster I bet you the SMP MPs are glad to see the back of her in some ways but it comes at a price where it looks like your party is falling apart is dysfunctional there's a lot of bad blood around and that's just the last thing you need and they can't deselect her so they've essentially lost that seat until the next election yeah and look the people in the East Kilbride might have a particular sort of set of surprise right because they vote by I think 46 percent for an SMP MP the Conservatives come a distant third compared to that and now they've got a Conservative MP and obviously particularly crossing the floor is rare and it throws up questions anyway I suppose it throws up big questions who is your favourite floor crosser my favourite floor crosser well I suppose Churchill did it twice yeah who was the person in St Helens it was Sean Williams no no Sean Woodward sorry Sean Woodward Sean Woodward he was I think he did it twice no no oh yeah he defected to Labour in 2001 and then he was he was the MP for Whitney that's how Cameron ended up

in his seat because he left Whitney but then obviously he wasn't going to get elected as a Labour MP and he ended up in St Helens and he was nicknamed the only Labour MP with a butler okay I stayed at his house Sarsden house after I'd written a bug for the Blair he had someone over from America a very prominent Democrat politician Linda and I were invited to go and spend the weekend at Sean Woodward's place and Linda said I think I'm going to be really jealous of his house and I said I think it's going to be so far beyond anything that we could ever think about he married Camilla Sainsbury and inherited I mean they had a fortune and they had this house with a chapel a lake with a Grecian temple at the end and there was a butler and so it was true the apocryphal story about him being a Labour MP with a butler was true oh yeah there was the butler in the house and on Sunday morning Linda said I'd really love a cup of tea so I said I'll

[Transcript] The News Agents / How does Israel get its hostages back?

go find a kitchen and I went to I found the kitchen eventually it took me bloody ages to find the kitchen and there is the butler saying ah tea for two there was a pot of tea silver service china cups and saucers remember his name good butler's name someone they were out but you know I'm making that up all right someone at university when I was at university told me that I had a good butler's name it's what Oxford was like at that time good all it was the most extraordinary

weekend well I didn't think this is where we'd end up but it's it's it's lovely to be here sure if you're listening we love a bit of that but yeah look it's rare and the point is is that it's particularly weird obviously in the context of Scottish politics because when the fundamental question is the constitutional question about whether you are a unionist or you believe in independence and this was obviously a person who at least up until the 2019 election was telling voters that she wanted there to be an independent scotland she's now joined the conservative and unionist party who is very much against Scottish independence it does open the door I mean interestingly

and for another day to the question of whether there could be a independence party that is not linked to the smp well it's alba there's alba yeah no it is and that is as the smp gather for their conference nabadi this weekend it is we've just been to the labour conference and you know by common

agreement that was the best conference they've had in some years this is going to be the worst the smp have had for many years because even actually even after in 2014-15 after they'd lost the independence referendum conversely that gave them that kind of political adrenaline shot in the arm which led to their taking 56 out of 59 seats in the subsequent general you can regroup you can have a failure and then regroup suddenly they feel like they are on the slide and yusuf is going to have to try and come up with an answer the question what is the strategy here as you were saying john when for the first time really the question of independence is being decoupled from the smp is a movement how do you re-couple it and how do you regroup ahead of what is anticipated to be a tough general election and then a tough hollywood election after that where of course they have been in office since 2007 we'll be back tomorrow except of course we won't just but just do this way but we'll say that anyway it's all right that comes here don't worry about it becks becks golden balls good all oh and now here we go now we're talking the news agents with emily mattress john sope and lewis goodall this has been a global player original podcast and a persophonica production