

[Transcript] The News Agents / Lords, Ladies, and Boris Johnson's honour

I've got some news of my own. After much soul-searching, I've decided not to stand as an MP at the next general election. I love my constituents and I've loved serving them and it's been such an honour for the best part of two decades of my life. I'm now off. My gosh, I've just said it out loud, there's no going back now.

That was Nadine Dorris, former culture secretary under Boris Johnson, announcing in February that she was standing down as an MP. You know that thing you sometimes do where you've lined up a new job but you don't want to tell your employer that you've already got a new post lined up for you? Well, it seems that Nadine Dorris had.

That sort of job where you have to wear a lot of ermine and your name changes and you get called lady. Baroness as well. Yeah, one of those.

Right, so we think we might have learnt from Stephen Swinford at the times that Boris Johnson's choicest picks for his honours list will get the go ahead because Rishi Sunak is now prepared to sign them through. All very deserving men and women, no doubt. Well, maybe a bit of doubt. Welcome to the News Agents.

The News Agents. It's John. It's Emily.

And it's Lewis. And we are in Agents HQ, which is the new name of the podcast just to abbreviate on three letters. We are at News Agents HQ. Well, Three Letters is a very good place to start because we're going to be discussing the kind of letters that come after your names if you're a friend of Boris Johnson. It might be an OBE or a CBE or a knighthood dam, that's not three letters, but we're discussing. And we're also going to be discussing Caroline Lucas's decision to leave Parliament to stop being a green MP. She's had enough and she thinks there's more to be done outside. So we'll be speaking to her. But let's go back to the three letters than the breaking news that I can reveal that Lewis, Emily, and I don't seem to be on Boris Johnson's Honour's list. I haven't had a letter of view.

Should we tell him?

Oh, yeah.

Oh, you have got something awkward.

It's just me who hasn't got anything.

Yeah, yeah.

But what I love about this story is it goes right to the heart. Let's put the Honour system on one side for a moment. Let's put all the letters on one side for a moment and see what it actually tells us about the relations at the heart of government between the current Prime Minister and the one to before Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak, because it sounds as if from what we're reading, and this is secondhand, it's not having spoken to Sunak himself, but it sounds as if he has been sitting on this problem for a couple of months now going, Oh my God, do I reject Boris Johnson's rather long? It's not as long as we originally thought it was, but it's about 50 names on there, including his dad. And do I say no? Do I reject it? Or do I kind of do, as it were, the decent or at least the conservatively traditional thing and say, every Prime Minister goes out with a list, I'll take it on the chin, even though it's going to cost him some potentially awkward by elections that will be his first, really, I mean, apart from a very safe labour by election, which he never expected to gain, these will be challenging seats for Rishi Sunak to see fought over. One of the people on the list, you know, stalwart ally of Boris Johnson, Alex Sharma, who headed up COP26 for him as well as being in his cabinet, is said to be on the verge of receiving a

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peerage. Now that was set up a very difficult by election in Reading for Rishi Sunak. That is a seat that Labour will be targeting with every bit of resources that is at their disposal, because it will show it's a classic sort of seat, it's been conservative since 2010, labour in the Lear and Brown years. And if they can take it, there will be the sort of seat which will show that there will be one on their way to get them into this.

About 4,000, isn't it? So it's completely doable.

It's so doable. And if Labour can't take it, then frankly, there will be huge, huge questions for a stalwart. But I think if they don't take it, then frankly, the polls are so way off that we've all just got to sort of pack up and go home, because it wouldn't make any sense. And this is just an unnecessary, I mean, for Sunak, who is trying to put out so many fires, this is an unnecessary set of battles he's going to have to fight. And I'll just say to Emily, on something you said just now about like, oh, this is something that every Prime Minister does, we should just remind people that this is actually a resurrection of a tradition. I mean, actually, under Blair and Brown, they didn't have any resignation on this list. It was something that they put to one side, partly perhaps inspired by the fact that, you know, if you go way back into history, you know, famously Harold Wilson, his so-called lavender list, because it was said to be written on lavender newspaper, completely besmirched. Harold Wilson's reputation, he was putting his cronies, party donors and house of law.

I think it was lavender writing paper. I don't think you get lavender newspaper.

It was lavender writing paper.

It was just a slip of the tongue that you've unnecessarily picked up on.

Let's say lavender newspaper. This is what I get when I needle Emily Maitlis, just a tiny little bit on something she says. She goes straight for the jugular, the full Prince Andrew treatment here on the news agent.

Anyway, but the point is, she's the Marcia Falkander of this podcast, always quite my old Marcia Falkander of course.

She was the assistant secretary.

She was Harold Wilson's principal secretary.

Who wrote down the thing on the, oh, if I'm not mistaken, on the paper.

On the lavender paper.

Yeah.

Oh, who Harold Wilson was deeply frightened of, of course. But anyway, leaving all that to once, I mean, I could talk about Harold Wilson trivia all day, as you know, but I'm not going to do so.

You do.

I do.

I do.

When we end this, Lewis is just on a loop.

Oh my God, this is going to be a three-hour episode of the news agents.

Anyway, my point is, is that prime ministers don't have to do this. This is just a corruption of the system. It is part of the system that prime minister is going to exercise, but they don't have to do it. Cameron did it. May did it to a lesser extent. Boris Johnson is doing it and we're told that this truss is going to end up doing it. She's basically going

to be giving out a knighthood or a peerage for every day she was in office. It makes a complete mockery of our political system and the honor system, and it should just be bloody well done away with.

But also the other thing that is really terrible about it is the creation of all these new life peers. There are already too bloody many people in the House of Lords, and what they wanted to do, the Tory party grandees wanted to do, was to manage it so that you wouldn't have to force a by-election. You would become a peerage in a year and a half time when the general election is called. So you are just massaging politics to suit your own ends. And I think the kind of appointments commission came back and said, no, no, no, no.

When hasn't that been done?

But for once, the appointments commission said, no, you can't do that. If you are going to appoint these people, you can't defer them becoming a peer until after the next general election, because that would just be absolutely corrupt.

Well, I think what happens is two are staying and two are...

Well, we don't know for definite whether those other two will get peerages. And of course the other, we haven't mentioned in this discussion, but we heard in our introduction, of course is NADs, Nadine Doris.

I mean, the thing is the House of Lords is bigger than the House of Commons. I mean, if you just think about that, we have more unelected members of our legislature than elected members. And we're now basically going to have a little swap where we're going to expand the unelected membership even more, because two are going to be leaving the House of Commons to go in the Lords and be replaced by MPs.

It's just absurd. The question is, is why SUNAC has exceeded to it? And I think he's been sat on it for a while. And obviously there are pros and cons with continuing to sit on it. I think he's probably just concluded that there is already such an element of factionalism within the Tory party, of there's always such a belief within the Johnsonites that, you know, this is a guy and SUNAC's people are out to get him, that to continue to defer it or to ignore it altogether, to actually say, no, I'm not going to do this, would be a further provocation.

And so he's just decided to just roll over.

He doesn't want to be the bad guy. But don't forget, I mean, the rot's set in, it depends where you want to start looking at rot. But this isn't just a parting shot from Boris Johnson, because right the way through his tenure, he was bringing in peers who he thought would rebalance the House. And this was when the Brexit bill was in real difficulty, when we'd had the article 50 question in Parliament, which was whether, you know, Parliament should be able to vote first on the right to trigger it. And there was a sense, I think, from Johnson and many other Brexiteers that the House of Lords wasn't Brexite enough. So he was actually pushing people in there to try and rebalance what he thought was an upper house, an upper chamber that was blocking what he was trying to do.

So when you talk about the sense of the honour and the prestige and the well done dad, you've finally made it, I don't know why you've got this wonderful award, but well done you and the brother, I think it's worth recognising just the hard, cold politics of trying to get the Lords not to block the stuff that you're doing.

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And also the other bit about it, which again, you just think it stinks, is the gifts and awards that are going to people who have given you money. And that in return for money, you can almost buy a peerage. And that is just the corruption of our political system. In America, you do have an open transactionalism, that if you want to become the ambassador in London or Paris or Berlin, you will have tended to have given a lot of money to the campaigns who have ever the winning president is, whether it's Democrat or Republican. That is the way the terms of trade, if you like, or you will get appointed to the Kennedy Art Centre because you have been a big party don't know. There are baubles that you give to the people who've raised money. Yet we pretend that this is some kind of meritocracy and that these are people who've got massive contributions to make.

We'll do it again.

And that you will put on their citation that they have been a philanthropist or they have been this or they've been that. And you think, no, you've got it because you gave money to this particular leader.

As of 2021, all but one of the Conservative Party's last 16 treasurers have miraculously enough done enough to end up in the House of Lords. It's 22 biggest donors have ended up in the House of Lords. And as John says, we all have to go through this merry dance to pretend that they would, even without this stuff, have just through their own merit ended up there. It just is absurd.

I mean, there is a process and there is a committee, the House of Lords appointment committee, which can block these appointments. They've done so once, as far as I'm aware, in recent history. And that was a recommendation of Peter Crudus, who was again, a very big Conservative donor. And when their recommendation that they blocked it went back to Boris Johnson,

he said, thank you very much and made him a Lord anyway. So you have to wonder about the role they play or don't play in any kind of invigilating sort of role. And what is Peter Crudus doing now? He's reinvigorating the Boris Johnson comeback tool, right? Because as that showed, ultimately, they're toothless. The way the system works, if the Prime Minister wants it, then they can just override them. And it is a structural problem. It's probably one of the reasons that, you know, we should just get away from having a system which essentially just rewards patronage with lifelong, not like five years or 10 years or 15s, lifelong membership of the national legislature.

And I'm now going to seamlessly segue from that discussion to say that we will be talking to Caroline Lucas, who is an MP from the Green Party who is standing down because she partly is so sick of the parliamentary system and the way it works and works against smaller parties. We'll be back in a moment.

Welcome back. Over the past few weeks, you might have noticed we have kept a chronicle of all those MPs from the Conservative Party who are retiring. And today woke up to the news that another MP was retiring, but not a Tory and not a Labour MP, but the only green MP in Westminster, Caroline Lucas, who went into Parliament in the 2010 election and has been this kind of bright light, if you want to describe it as that. Bright green light.

Bright green light. Thank you. That was very helpful. Arius Borealis.

That's her nickname. Yeah. And she has announced that she is quitting Parliament. And it's kind of interesting the reasons that she's giving for kind of saying, well, you know what, I've done

all I can. She's the first green MP, not just now, but ever. And if they don't retain that seat and they don't take any off Labour, then she might be the last green MP as well. And I think the point that I was fascinated by was when she started in 2010, presumably she thought by 2023, she'd have a whole army or at least, you know, a cricket team of other green MPs. And yet no one has broken through. So either that speaks to, as she would say, the system, or else it speaks to the fact that there aren't enough green MPs of her stature that can actually break through. So we wanted to understand from Caroline Lucas herself, once you sort of put the nicely flowery letter to one side, what were the real reasons going on that she decided she wouldn't be standing again? Well, I must say, I feel quite emotional about it as well. It really has been the honour of my life to have represented Brighton Pavilion for the last 13 years. You know, I remember on election day, you know, going to people and saying, you know, you've put your faith in a new kind of politics, the politics of hope above the politics of fear. And 16,238 people did that, which was just extraordinary. But to be honest, I've come to the conclusion that as the sole MP for my party, having to cover every single front bench portfolio from, you know, benefits through to Brexit and everything in between, it just means that I can't focus as much as I'd like personally to do on the issues of climate and nature, which are the things that really drive me, that motivate me, that are the biggest threats that we face right now. And so it was a sense of, you know, doing that for 13 years. And before that, obviously, being in the European Parliament for around 11 years. So in total, by the time I stand down, I would have been on the sort of front line for 25 years, which is quite a long time. So I think it's about taking a bit of a step back, breathing deeply and then working out how still to bring about change. And I don't want to leave public life if I can find a way of still contributing, but in a way that I can be more laser focused, I guess, on on climate and nature. It was seminal when you won in 2010. But 13 years on, can I ask you honestly, did you still think that you would be the only green MP? Is that why you're going? Because there hasn't been anyone behind you. There hasn't been anyone to fill the ranks. It's not why I'm going directly, no, but it's certainly, I mean, if you ask me, you know, did I expect more greens to have been elected by now? Yes, of course I did. Did I imagine that we would still be dealing with such an archaic, undemocratic, unfair voting system? No, I thought that by now we would have changed that. And if I look at the next general election after the one that I won in 2010, the next one was in 2015, over a million people voted green. And if we'd had a system of proportional representation, we would have had probably at least another 20 green MPs alongside me, which clearly would have been transformational. And so it has been a hard slog. I've shown myself that we can win under first pass the post. But yeah, it's been hard being on my own. But I feel confident that the greens are going from strength to strength. I think that we will get more greens elected at the next election. So that's not directly why I'm standing down. But certainly, when I think about the number of things that are always going on in Parliament at one time, honestly, the thing I find hardest is just trying to work out which of the six priorities I should be doing at any given time, because I can't cover them all. Caroline, on the podcast the other week, we had a spokesperson from Just Stop Oil, and I think I was being rather harrumping and saying, you look, your tactics are alienating people, I miss you's wrong, etc, etc. And I'm just wondering, listening to you, whether you think it is easier

to get more stuff done being a protester outside than being an MP inside where you are dealing with a lot of social work issues of housing and all that sort of stuff with constituents.

And as you say, covering every single issue that is being legislated upon.

I think you absolutely need both. I think change happens when you've got pressure coming from the outside, but you also need people on the inside to be using the platform, the extraordinary platform that being a member of Parliament gives you. So I'm certainly not saying that this is a way of kind of turning my back on parliamentary politics, but I do think that it is that interplay, if you like, between people absolutely taking peaceful direct action where necessary, but also you do need the people on the inside. And I have been that person on the inside trying to make sure that those voices are heard, bringing Greta Thunberg, for example, to Parliament, getting people around a table with the other political party leaders, providing a platform for that. So I think you need both.

In some ways, it seems odd that this is the election that you won't be standing in because you've been through essentially 13 years of Conservative government. I don't know whether you felt that you were a thorn in the side or enough of a thorn in the side on environmental policy. According to focal data and the kind of polls that are coming through now, it looks like Labour are on for a win, either a dead cert, a hard win or something that is a combined force win. Why wouldn't you want to be in the middle of that if you think that this is the next five years when you actually could affect change? Because there are some amazing other people in the Green Party who are stepping up to do exactly that. I have no doubt that we will keep this Brighton Pavilion seat green. I have no doubt about that. And I also have every reason to believe that we'll win more greens in terms of our seats in Bristol Central, Caledonia, in Waveney Valley, Adrian Ramsey, seats in the Herefordshire and so on.

If Labour said, we'd ask you to step aside because we think this is something that could really help put Labour in the driving seat as the Green Party would not agree to that.

We wouldn't agree to stand down because we feel that the greens are bringing something unique to the table and we're also putting pressure on those other parties. I'm not sure that, for example, Kirsten Dahmer would have taken the position that he has, for example, on saying at the moment, let's hope he doesn't change his mind, about saying no to any more new oil and gas licenses. I think one of the reasons he took that decision was precisely because there are greens snapping at his heels in councils up and down the country. We have just had our best local election results ever. 700 councillors now. We are the largest group on 10 different councils. We are in administration in over 30 councils. That, I think, is concentrating the minds of the other parties. So part of our role is to push them to be more progressive and bold.

And part of the role, I think, that we have is to bring things to the table that simply weren't on the agenda before. Nobody was talking about stopping fracking when I was first arrested in 2014 in Parliament. But that debate wasn't there. Whereas seven or eight years later, there is now a majority in Parliament that would recognise that fracking is not the right way forward. No one was talking about not pursuing coal for a power source back then when I was opposing coal. And now that's become mainstream. So there are different ways of making a difference.

And I think having greens, even just one green, I'd like more, but even just one green in Parliament makes a difference. So I'm certainly not saying that that's not a way forward. All I'm simply saying is after 25 years, you know, I'm just, I would just like the time to step back

a little bit and to breathe on a personal level. I totally understand the reasons and I'm sure Parliament is exhausting. And this may seem a really trivial point to bear with me. I'm sure if I went out of the news agent studio into Leicester Square and said, how many famous greens can you name me? They'd say Caroline Lucas and then go, ooh, does it matter not to have a clear figurehead, which the Green Party presumably won't have when you step down? Well, listen, one of the reasons that I stood down from being leader was precisely to give more space to a fantastic generation of greens who are coming through. And so first of all, I think people might well name Sean Berry, who was a leader for a while after myself. They might well now look at Carla Denier and Adrian Ramsey now increasingly on people's TV screens on question time, any questions, whatever. So I think that we have to make space for more greens. If it really were the case that the be all in the end all of Green Party politics was Caroline Lucas, we'd be in a mess. That's not good. We know we need a diversity of voices and of people out there. And that's what I think we're getting now. Whenever a politician, you'll forgive me, Caroline, says it's about time, you know, for a bit of me. We just have to ask the Nicola Sturgeon question, you know, there won't be a blue forensic tent in your garden next week, will there? Have you bought a camper van? Absolutely not. And I'm not expecting a blue tent in my garden. This is genuinely what I say it is that is about what gets me out of bed in the morning and that sense of that fact that we are facing such big issues when it comes to environment and nature and climate. And I want to work out a

way that I personally can really focus on that rather than being drawn in so many different directions as is inevitable. Well, we wish you well. Caroline Lucas, thank you so much. Thanks for joining us. Thank you. Thank you. Lewis is back with us. I mean, one of the things she was talking about was just how rotten the electoral system is and how that is a big reason why, you know, they got a million votes at the last election. They've got one MP in one area because it's first passed the post. Do you think there's any possibility that if Keir Starmer got a majority at the next election, he would go down the route of some form of PR? No, I don't. I think the Labour Party national policy position on that is clear. There is a possibility that if there were to be a hung parliament that we might be talking about something different. And that would be the price of doing business? Potentially with the Lib Dems and others, yeah. And there has been, look, there has been a lot of discussion over the course of the last, you know, 13 years where the progressive side of politics has obviously lost again and again and again about what structurally you can do in the system to ensure that this doesn't happen again. And when and if there were to be another progressive left of centre Labour government, that they could do something that would lock the Conservatives out for longer. And look, you know, there is no doubt on one level, this is a weird argument, because there is one party which has won from first pass the post for a century and that is a Conservative party. It was in office for 66 of the 100 years of the 20th century. It's been in office for 13 years of this century. It never has a majority of the vote or anything close to it. And generally speaking, if you look down a lot of elections, you can see what you might say is a non-conservative at least majority in the electorate. But the thing is, is that the stumbling block always is the Labour Party. Because although that is all true, what does first pass the post also guarantee the Labour Party? Well, it guarantees them second place, which isn't much in a majoritarian system in a first pass the post system. But whenever, as you know, John, whenever the Labour Party on the very few occasions that it finally manages to get a sniff of office, it is always

these discussions before hand as there was in the 1980s and the 1990s about moving to PR. And as soon as it gets there, it disappears completely. Because of course you're then in.

Famously, the 97 offer to Paddy Ashton was, you know, if we need you, we'll talk PR. In the end, the majority was so overwhelming for Blair, he didn't. And I seem to remember, am I right in this? You'll know this, that Cherie Blair was the one saying to Paddy Ashton, don't forget the promise,

don't forget the promise and putting a bit of pressure on the Lib Dems to make sure that he saw it through. But it didn't happen. It didn't happen. There were a few people around Blair at that time who wanted it to happen. And you know, remember Roy Jenkins had played a big part in supporting Blair up to 97 and people like that had obviously wanted it. But the funny thing about when we talk about the 97 government is that Blair had this huge majority, which you would have thought gave him power to do absolutely anything. And in terms of legislation through parliament, it did, except for PR. That was the one thing he didn't, because he'd got such a huge majority. There was no way he could sell that to the Labour Party. They say, we're ruling, we're not going to start bloody sharing power now. As he did with devolution, of course. I mean, even more famously, he gave away power when he had it and might have sort of rude the day. And there is, I mean, you know, he, Jenkins went away at that time, former Labour Home Secretary and SDP leader, he went away and he had had this commission and he came up with this system called

AV Plus. People might remember this. And Blair, very quietly said, thank you very much, love Jenkins. One, the full report will take under advisement. 13 years later, absolutely nothing had happened. Gordon Brown at the very fag end of the Labour government at that

time, then sort of toys with the idea. But of course, by then it's too late. And part of the reason for that is that the Labour Party, for all of us, you know, it is a progressive party and so on, it can be deeply conservative constitutionally always has. And there are lots of people within the Labour Party who fear and still fear that if you were to move down that system, then when I say that it guarantees the Labour Party second place, it also guarantees Labour, the current system, being the biggest party on the non-conservative side of politics. And the fear is that as we've seen across Europe over the last 10 years, that traditional social democratic parties have suffered and withered and been replaced by more radical leftist forces. And there are lots of more conservative figures with a small seat within the Labour Party who fear that exactly the same thing would happen to them. So when Caroline Lucas complains about the electoral system, it's not just the Tories that are an impediment to the Greens making progress in this. The Labour Party as well are not going to kind of, you know, suddenly make way. Because the Labour Party would

recognise that there'd be a huge growth in the number of Greens that would be represented in Parliament like you have in Germany. Well, indeed. And actually, I think one of the things we kind of miss now, we've left the EU, it has had a huge effect on the viability of smaller parties. It has reinforced the two-party system. Why do I say that? Because we have lost the only real national vehicle outside of the Scottish and Welsh Parliaments for smaller parties to get a toehold in the system, because we've lost access to the European Parliament. The European Parliament had a party-less proportional system, so you easily had parties like UKIP itself, but also the Greens who are lesser extended Lib Dems and others, Brexit party later, able

to do very well out of these systems and then they get national coverage and so on. I would say, in the Lewis Goodall School of Thought, it is also a bit of a chimera, because UKIP... I'm glad this is called a chimera. The word chimera, the newsagents' chimera. Dictionary corner, calling it... That's the merch sort of, isn't it? But the UKIP party did fantastically well within the European Parliament. They had a whole army, do you remember they used to sit there and stuff like that. People's army. Was that jump? My point is, when it came to a general election here, we'd all seen what happened in Europe and we assumed that they were going to do better than they ever did, so we never actually got an elected UKIP MP who hadn't actually crossed the floor. Yeah, we should say that as well. I mean, leaving PR to one side, the Green Party are doing well, even within first-past-the-post elections. I mean, it is fair enough to say that in local government terms now, we do have in England increasingly a five-party system. The Greens are challenging, particularly the Conservatives, at local government level all across the country. We saw this in the last set of local elections. You know, they won places like Midsuffoc and so on. They now have 766 councillors across England and Wales. They had won 240 seats at the local elections, so they are increasingly a real force. The question, the problem, it always comes at a national level where first-past-the-post is punishing and it will be very interesting to see what happens itself in Brighton Pavilion. To what extent this was a seat, I mean, it's just one seat, so it won't hugely matter, but if there's a hung parliament, every seat matters, to what extent this has now become a personal vote for Lucas herself and to what extent the Greens are embedded locally, because two things about that. One, the Greens locally on Brighton Council have gone backwards because there have been quite a few controversies in how they run that council over the years, but also I think it's fair to say that this is a real loss for the Greens because Lucas has been and is, by far and away, their most effective political performer from the Green Party in England and Wales. And well-liked, actually, cross-party. Well, like, good communicator, noticeable, someone who can get attention within the press and so on, and there just hasn't been. I mean, she's talked about as a great next-generation coming through. There hasn't been... There will be Labour at their heels. They've got Peter Kyle, who's a very good performer for Labour in Brighton and Hove, right? So, presumably, Labour is not going to sit there going, oh, no, they must leave Brighton Green. They'll go after it. Oh, big time. Labour will be after that. And if you look... I mean, again, the other problem for them, we've first passed the post, at a national parliamentary level for the Greens, is if you look down their list of targets for the next election, I mean, there's two things about them. The swings needed are enormous. So, even their top target, Bristol West, which has a Labour majority of over 28,000, needs a swing of 18.6%. The Isle of Wight Conservatives, 20% swing. Quite a few Scottish ones that need over 20, 22% swing. But a lot of the target seats, places like Bristol West or, you know, Edinburgh South or Hampstead and Kilburn, a lot of these are Labour seats. So, their argument would be, well, you need a strong Green contingent in order to force a Labour Party to go in an environmentalist direction. But of course, that is just at the expense, and this is the punishing thing about first pass the post, that is just at the expense of the non-conservative side of the argument. And ultimately, most Greens and most of the Green voters would prefer there to be all other things

being equal, a non-conservative government. And this is why first pass the post benefits Labour, because it forces people to make that accommodation in lots of seats where people would much rather

vote with their heart and vote Green, but they have to vote with their head and vote Labour. We'll be back after the break.

Welcome back. You might have noticed that this bloke has been in court for a couple of days this week, a guy called Harry, and seems to have got quite a bit of media attention. And we don't want to go through exactly what it was, the evidence that Prince Harry gave or didn't give, or the shortcomings were much more interested in how the media has covered it, particularly the British media, because the British media sort of does have a dog in this fight.

Not sort of. They are all dogs. And they are all in the fight. And they are trying to cover a story as if they were objectively reporting on something that, quite frankly, could end up costing them millions. And I think that's where it gets really interesting, because the kind of stories we're reading now are saying things like, oh, Chelsea Davy was front and centre of the trial, but where is she now? And if you go back to the evidence that Harry was giving, it was about how the papers, as he saw it, had destroyed his relationship with her because she didn't like being hounded and asked questions about where she was now. And so somehow there is this sort of double reality distance between what's going on in court and who he's blaming and what's happening the next day when you read it. There's no escape, right? There's no escape these twisted narratives, because there was even then a piece in the Daily Mail basically saying, on the Chelsea Davy thing, basically saying, oh, well, he seems to talk about her a lot, doesn't she? Doesn't talk about her a lot? No, no wonder. Still fancies her. Still fancies her. Doesn't talk about Meghan very much, does he?

Oh, god, you know, there was just no escape from this sort of twisted logic. Of course he's talking about her. That's the whole point of the trial. That's the trial. You answer questions. And if he's talking about Meghan, it's like, what a conniving bitch. Oh, she's clearly got her finger on him now. I mean, what could the guy say? I think the other thing that's interesting in terms of the media coverage is the blurring of news and comment. Look, when you go to journalism school, you know, and you're writing a news story, you set out the facts as they are, and the top line of it is perhaps the most important fact of all. This is from the Times newspaper yesterday, a bastion of good journalism. And it says, the Duke of Sussex struggled to justify his phone hacking claims and breached royal convention yesterday. Now, if you're saying that he struggled to justify his phone hacking claims, that is comment. That is not a factual first line of a news report. That's fine for the comment pages. If you're the commentator and you're saying, I thought he was rubbish, say he was rubbish there. I'm going to argue with that, actually, because I think that you can see somebody, if somebody struggles in court, I think that could be court reporting. I mean, what people often say is when a court reporter comes outside that you say to them, can you give us the color of what happened today? And if somebody was visibly shaking, if their voice was wobbling, or if they couldn't find the words, I think you would say they were clearly struggling. You would never say that on a court report, because then you're giving commentary.

In America, you would absolutely do that because there are no contempt of court rules whatsoever. So you do get the post-match analysis, like you would a football game, after the day three of ex-person on the stand. In the UK, you wouldn't do that. You would say that

he said this, or he held back tears, and that's because that's factual. But if you wouldn't say...

All back tears is the same, isn't it? No, that's just an objective report on what they were...

Well, you don't really know somebody's holding back tears.

When you're saying they struggle to make their case, you are commenting.

Okay, that's different to struggling to speak.

The other thing about this is, I mean, the absurdity of the last few days for me, you know, whatever you think about Harry, is the fact that every network is having to employ these weird Harry lookalikes to read out his testimony. This guy had to get this weird Harry lookalike, this guy with a ginger beard, whatever, to read out what he was saying, just to try and illuminate. But in a way, this is the whole point, right? The press are still completely the arbiters of this stuff, because there are no television cameras in court. I mean, I'm someone who thinks that they should be televised. But, you know, they are still... Harry is still ultimately beholden in this theatre, the court of law of all others. It is still the press because they are the ones who have access to the court. He's gone to court because he thinks this is the one of the few arenas which can really, truly impartially get his story out there and establish the facts.

But in a weird way, and maybe that's how it will turn out in terms of the verdict.

But certainly in terms of getting to the verdict, this is actually one of those arenas where the power of the press is still at its strongest because there is no ability for any of us to actually view what is happening in court day after day. It's entirely curated by the press.

Arguably, if all they've got, even in their coverage, is vitriol, then they are kind of making the point in their coverage that he has just made in court. Not about the technicalities, I should say, about phone hacking, but about his relationship, his whole family's relationship with the press and who's in charge and who has the power there.

I don't think Prince Harry will be displeased by what has unfolded over the past two days.

He has been able to make a case that has travelled the world because of the extraordinary nature of a member of the royal family taking the stand in the royal courts of justice.

Maitland, are you here tomorrow?

No.

I mean, neither.

Go on, make up something that's funnier than what John is actually doing tomorrow.

That is your task, Lewis.

What are you actually doing tomorrow?

He's on the Grand Canal with a gondola.

You're actually doing that?

Yes.

Oh, for God's sake.

Yeah, he's stoning you along.

What am I supposed to do?

I don't know.

Every week you manage to surpass it.

It's just unbelievable.

I'm sorry.

I should be in Area 51.

I will be back tomorrow.

[Transcript] The News Agents / Lords, Ladies, and Boris Johnson's honour

Bye.

Bye.

Bye-bye.