

This is a global player original podcast.

Michael Shanks, Scottish Labour Party, 17,840 people.

CHEERING AND APPLAUSE

I declare that Michael Shanks is elected to serve in the United Kingdom Parliament as a member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West constituency.

CHEERING

The sound you're hearing there is the cheer, the din of revival,
of what looked like an old political corpse given new life.

Since 2015, when the SNP delivered a body blow to the Labour Party
in becoming the party of Scotland,

sweeping away all of its old fortresses across the central belt,
the sort of seats in which the Labour Party was quite literally born.
Labour has lived the daily humiliation of being little more
than irrelevance in Scottish politics.

The SNP, aside from a brief wobble in the 2017 general election,
have looked invincible.

They spoke not only for independence,
but almost a whole of the social democratic left,
the poll star of Scottish politics.

After the Rutherglen and Hamilton West result last night,
they have started, once again, to look vulnerable.

It could make the task of a Labour majority government all the easier.

We're going to be discussing that on today's show.

What it means for Scotland, the Union and the general election.

But before we do, there's something else.

Sometimes in journalism, in the media, in the Westminster Hot House,
there is a tendency to just move from one thing to the other,
to not internalise what has just passed to miss the real story.

This week, Rishi Sunak tore up a £45 billion project
that had enjoyed cross-party support for 15 years.

It was supposed to transform our economic geography,
a staple of our national strategic direction for that time.

And just like that, with the stroke of a pen, it was gone.

For the arbitrary timetable of a conference speech.

In the days since, we've seen what it's been replaced with, unravel.

You could argue it's the biggest government failure of the last 15 years,
if not longer.

So here's a question, the £45 billion question.

Why aren't we angrier about HS2?

It's Lewis here. Welcome to the newsagents.

Let's just look again at this issue of HS2.

We all know it needs cross-party agreement
to make this important infrastructure scheme go ahead.

And what a pathetic spectacle we've seen this week.

One minute there for it, then there against it,
and the leader of the opposition, too weak to make a decision.
So today, Mr Speaker,
the Cabinet has given high-speed reign.
We are going to get this done.
Phase 2 alone is a £21 billion investment,
and will support at least 60,000 jobs.
It's the most important investment in the North for a century.
The reality is that HS2 is a vital investment.
It's essential capacity,
and it will change the economic geography of the country.
HS2 was a very rare thing.
It was a policy which had sustained
not just across five Prime Ministers, Labour and Tory,
through all the volatility of these Conservative years
where Prime Ministers and endless transport secretaries
have veered from idea to idea, from philosophy to philosophy.
All of them brought into it because they could see what it might do.
Yet there's been something very strange about the way HS2
has done it.
Yet there's been something very strange about the way HS2
has been talked about and covered this week,
since the cancellation of the Northern leg
by Rishi Sunak in his conference speech.
It's almost like it were the weather,
something beyond our control,
beyond the government's control in terms of its costs.
And sure, there were things which have added
to its spiralling costs, like inflation.
But this isn't a natural phenomenon.
It's a human project.
It's had human failings.
And the particular set of humans ultimately in charge
has been this government.
If it's failed, it's because they've failed.
And here's what should worry us.
What the problem is with just saying,
oh well, that's that, and moving on.
Without learning from these mistakes,
this could all happen again,
whenever we try and build anything again.
HS2 has been plagued by poor management,
by the absurdities of the planning system,
of the occasional tyranny of the constituency link system,

which incentivises MPs to think only of the narrow and local,
rather than the broad and national.
None of that is going to change.
And no one is proposing that it changes.
And there's something else too,
which I have to say has been bugging me.
Listen to the way the Prime Minister announced the change this week.
HS2 is the ultimate example of the old consensus.
And so I am ending this long-running saga.
I am cancelling the rest of the HS2 project.
The Prime Minister tried to suggest that this massive shift
in the future of our national life and future infrastructure
was an example of a kind of new politics.
But in fact, as we've seen in the last 48 hours,
what he did was an example of the old politics,
of a politician thinking about the headline.
It was classic Westminster.
The thing which was the new politics
was the cross-party consensus of HS2 itself,
lasting for as long as it did.
And another way in which this was classic old politics,
classic Westminster,
is the way that it's unraveled.
It's almost been like a budget.
Let's go through some of the detail in terms of
what the Prime Minister said would replace HS2,
what the money would be spent on instead.
So for example, the Northern Echo reported this week
how documents published on Wednesday
had said that the Leemside Line in Northumberland would be reopened.
But then, mysteriously,
all reference to the line
appeared to have been removed by Thursday
in an apparent U-turn.
Transport Minister Richard Holden said on Thursday
the government was, in fact, only committed
to looking into Leemside.
Then there was confusion over announcements
that suggested the government was promising
to extend the Manchester Metro link to Manchester Airport,
a route that was, in fact,
completed nine years ago.
The Department for Transport then had to clarify
the line would just be extended to a second terminal,

though there were still questions as to why anyone would need or want it to do so when the airport buildings are already virtually next to each other.

Then if we think about what the whole set of announcements was called, the Prime Minister hailed it as this.

Our new network north.

This is the right way to drive growth and spread opportunity across our country to level up.

With our new network north, you will be able to get from Manchester to the new station in Bradford in 30 minutes. Sheffield in 42 minutes.

And to Hull in 84 minutes on a fully electrified line.

APPLAUSE

Network north, he said.

But as we could see from the documents in the hours and days after, it's not a network and a lot of it isn't even in the north or midlands.

Indeed, Henry Murison, the Chief Executive of the Northern Powerhouse Partnership, said the decision to scrap the Leemside Line promise made the whole network north scheme a fairytale and accused the government of misleading the public.

And what about the one thing which made it look like it wouldn't be a total embarrassment that the line would link to central London?

A reminder of what the Prime Minister said.

Given how far along construction is, we will complete the line from Birmingham to Houston.

While officials have since admitted, since the conference speech, that none of the private investment required for the Houston section has in fact been secured, so we could still be in a position where we've invested tens of billions in a line which extends from Birmingham to west London only, a line no one asked for, a monument to British decline if ever there were one.

And by the way, go through the small print.

Some of the infrastructure projects on the list are in Scotland.

The Westminster government doesn't even have the executive authority to make these projects happen. It can just send the money to the Scottish government and hope for the best.

As I say, an example of the old politics.

A date in search of an announcement, a speech in need of a theme, and Whitehall having to scramble around trying to make the best of it.

Kath Haddon from the Institute for Government, like many Whitehall observers, has been in some despair. It really frustrates me.

I mean, it's true that we do need new politics, and some of the stuff that he's talking about, particularly around long-term decision-making, is a big problem.

There's too much chopping and changing of policies, there's too much chopping and changing of ministers, and that's been particularly true in the last six years, because we have seen four different Prime Ministers and so much change within our governments and therefore of the policies that they're pursuing.

But I don't think that the way in which he's gone about this decision kind of shows full understanding of what the problems are behind that and frustrates the public that he is doing something differently.

You could have gone a different way.

It's not the same sort of political opportunity to launch a major review of the HS2 second leg and go through some proper analysis and involve the public in that conversation and so forth.

That stuff all takes time and is frustrating, and if you're wanting to come out with an eye-catching conference announcement, then of course you want to keep it to a small number of people. But the way in which it's announced just kind of reinforces this idea that politicians just chop and change policies all the time, and for the public it just means that things that are promised don't get delivered.

So he's not really managed to show us that he's going to do things differently if that is what is vexing him and what he wants to change. This also true, isn't it?

I mean, you could see some of that

in terms of what happened immediately afterwards, right?
When it became clear that that long list
that the Prime Minister announced of all the things
that he would be spending the money,
so-called from HS2 on instead of the actual project,
it turned out that some of it had already been done.
It turned out some of it had already been committed to.
It turned out some of it didn't even exist.
And then when we saw the map,
you could see that it wasn't really a kind of integrated strategic plan,
a long-term plan.
It was lots of little things just sort of cobbled together.
So in a way, wasn't that exactly opposite
of what the Prime Minister was talking about?
It was actually classic Westminster, wasn't it?
It is, and it's exasperating, to be honest.
I mean, we all know that politicians do this.
They re-announce things and pretend that they're new,
or they announce things that are sort of already in train.
But I mean, anyone who understands government
knows how these things end up working out.
There will have been some work done in the run-up to this.
We saw officials arriving with documents talking about HS2.
We know, therefore, that conversations have been going on
for at least a few weeks.
But at some point, it just ends up going into this bunker of number 10,
and you end up with a document like the one they produced for Network North,
which just smacks of something
that has been cobbled together at the last minute.
And as soon as it hits reality, and the department,
the people who are actually experts on it,
who have been working on it for some years,
start to point out all the problems of all of this.
I mean, you know, everyone from the outside
who knows that, you know, a tram already exists here,
or this project has been going on since 2010,
everyone was able to spot that so soon,
and it just ends up looking shambolic.
And if what you wanted to do was show
that you want to govern differently,
that isn't the best way to convey it,
certainly to the people that are then trying to implement it for you,
let alone to the public.
Yes, I think the way in which this decision was made,

and it's the problem of doing something like this at conference,
because you can't have the officials around you.
You are ending up with special advisors in a hotel room
at the conference venue
who are pulling together something at the last minute,
and it's not a good way to do a major infrastructure decision.
What do you think in terms of kind of how this has been covered,
and in terms of what it says, the HS2 cancellation
and the fact that the cost had overrun so much
about British governance itself,
in the sense that I've been struck the way
that we've been talking about this this week.
It's almost as if it's been like the weather.
It's like, oh, well, this thing has just overrun,
and cost has come really expensive,
but of course there are reasons for that.
Some of it is beyond the government's control, inflation and so on,
but some of it is because of the way we do infrastructure in this country.
And isn't the danger that, frankly,
if we just sort of move on very, very quickly from this,
that actually, whether it's a small infrastructure project
or if the British state ever tries to do
a big infrastructure project again,
this will happen all over again.
Yeah, I honestly do think we need a proper look
at how infrastructure in particular,
but major projects more generally are going,
because, you know, Sunak, again,
was kind of pushing against his predecessors,
but one of the things that the Cameron government introduced
was a greater focus on major projects.
We have the Major Projects Authority,
we have the Infrastructure Commission,
and they've now been operating for some years.
There's a good argument to be made
that we've upskilled a lot of civil servants,
and perhaps some aspects of how we do major projects have improved.
And maybe there are a lot of other projects out there
that we can show that, you know,
do suggest that the UK is capable of doing this,
and HS2 is a particular outlier,
but we really need to understand that.
There is a particularly unique project.
It is one that has been beset by a lot of political disruptions.

You know, huge interest from all sorts of constituency MPs about that, but that's the nature of doing big infrastructure projects through parliamentary democracy.

You've got to be able to balance the business case with then what the public think about it.

So, yeah, I do think we need to make sure that we're interrogating HS2 properly and what happened, what went wrong, but we don't just need to see it as just this government.

It is a problem of how churning politicians affects major projects about how, as I say, parliamentary democracy and the concerns rightly that people will have about how this affects their particular constituency, how that affects major projects.

So, it's much bigger than just this decision, but I think we know you're a more rational look at it and not just a sort of knee-jerk reaction just based on the current circumstances.

More broadly, what we've done in scrapping HS2 is exchange a strategy, whatever its flaws, however expensive, to create growth through essentially linking and making whole the three big conurbations, the economic zones of England, into one, into instead what we've had endless amounts of over the years, Whitehall throwing pots of money at little projects that have no particular coherence to them at all. It isn't strategic, but it is political.

Better to give something for Tory MPs to put on their leaflets than something which might benefit a future government and future voters decades hence.

And the worry is, without learning any of the lessons of HS2, now the bandwagon is already just moving on, half of these will end up in the Maya as well.

That is all a choice Sunak has made and that is fine.

That's politics, that's his prerogative, but it seems a bit rich to dress it up as something new, let alone something for the long term.

Sometimes you just have to see beyond the spin.

Now, we'll be back with analysis on the sensational Scottish by-election just after this.

This is The News Agents.

They blew the doors off.

It was an incredible swing, an incredible result.

I think vindication of the positive campaign,

vindication of the change that we brought about in the Labour Party,
people wanting to come out and vote for a changed Labour Party.
We accept that victory humbly
and I just want to say thank you to everybody who did vote Labour
for the faith and trust they put in us
and we will repay that faith and trust
with the change that I know they desperately want to see.
Keir Starmer is a very happy man this weekend.
He has every reason to be.
The Labour Party has scored another by-election win
and this one is personal for the Labour Party.
Right smack bang in the middle of Labour's old heartlands
in the central belt of Scotland.
The rather Glen and Hamilton West by-election constituency
just outside Glasgow has produced the best by-election result
for Labour in Scotland in history.
They didn't just win, they smashed it.
A swing of over 20% from the SNP.
Now, this was fought in auspicious circumstances.
The previous SNP MP Margaret Ferrier had lost her seat
after she had been found egregiously breaking lockdown rules
by taking the train to London
and having just tested positive for COVID-19.
It's come in the wake of the Sturgeon resignation
but even so, this was beyond Labour's expectations.
It has dared the party on the eve of its conference to dream
that the 40 or so seats it lost to the SNP in 2015
could be back within its grasp.
That it can denude the SNP of one of its most powerful arguments
to Scottish voters.
That Labour doesn't have a hope in seat after seat
and if you don't like the Tories,
that they're the only show in town.
The SNP, First Minister Hamza Youssef
and of course the Union.
At times like this, we turn to our old friend,
Scottish political journalist and writer Alan Little.
Alan, it was a remarkable result, wasn't it?
Labour now doubled their MPs obviously for a very low base.
Is Labour back in Scotland?
Oh, definitely.
It's very hard to read it any other way.
What's very interesting about this
is that it defied even the opinion polls.

Understated Labour's performance
and it seems to suggest that a lot of SNP natural voters
didn't turn up, they didn't vote
and that reflects a deep malaise
within the SNP supporting communities
and within the party itself.
This is a party that is now bitterly divided against itself,
is not inspiring confidence
in the prospects of independence anytime soon
and they've paid the electoral price for it
and it does seem like one of those pivotal moments
when the electoral allegiances realign.
It's been a remarkable transformation
in such a short period of time, hasn't it?
Because if you go back just to say
the Adrian Shotz by-election,
part of Scotland which is not entirely dissimilar to rather Glenn,
the SNP held their own
and there was only a modest Labour revival
and yet in the space of a year,
Labour are adding what, getting a 20% swing.
Yeah, that's partly down I think to Anna Sarwar
who's clearly a much more impressive leader
than anybody who's led Scottish Labour for a long time
and is really cutting through to the public
and his partnership with Kiestarma seems very solid as well
so that's clearly had a breakthrough with the public
but it's also about this parlous state
of the Scottish National Party
since Nicola Sturgeon stepped down.
Hamza use of clearly lacks Nicola Sturgeon's electoral appeal,
this will certainly raise questions
about the long-term viability of his leadership
but it is a by-election, we have to remember that as well
and even Labour members are not saying
that this will necessarily translate into a similar swing
at a general election
but it does seem that there will be a fairly large number
of Scottish Labour MPs on Kiestarma's benches
after the next election
but the interesting thing about them is
for the first time we will have Labour MPs in Scotland
whose future electability will depend upon them
being able to appeal to pro-independence supporters

because although support for the SNP appears to have collapsed for now
support for independence itself has not
it's still sitting around the 50% mark somewhere
3 or 4 points shy of the 50% mark
so half the country still supports independence
why not necessarily being prepared to vote for the SNP
at the general election or in by-election
so I think the challenge for Labour will be to find a way
of engaging with the independence project,
the independence aspiration
that is not simply contemptuous dismissal
of what they call narrow nationalism
because they will need to find a way to speak to
pro-independence supporters who are lending them their votes
in order to eject an unpopular conservative government from power
and it's also true to say isn't it that the Scottish Labour Party
is feeling more comfortable in emphasising
it's more left-wing social democratic credentials
than perhaps the party is doing south of the border under Stammer
yeah it's interesting that the Labour candidate
the victorious Labour candidate
distanced himself from some of Kiestarma's policy
saying that that was appropriate in a devolved state
but Labour's problem in Scotland remains what it always has been
in order to appeal to electors in England
especially middle class and middle English electors
Kiestarma is tacking to the right
he's reoccupying the centre ground
and that enables the SNP and this is what they're doing this morning
to characterise Labour as shadowing the Tory party
as promising to uphold unpopular Tory policies
well it didn't work yesterday in Rutherglen
to try to outflank Labour on the left
and it remains to be seen whether that SNP tactic will work
at a general election
but in the short term and perhaps a short to medium term
a revival for Scottish Labour in any significant way
can only bolster the union can't it
in the sense that one of the SNP's most powerful weapons
in recent years has been
its ability to essentially say, particularly in Westminster
that they speak virtually for the whole of Scotland
when they had 56 out of 59 seats
they seemed to essentially epitomise

the whole of Scottish political opinion
and that carried such legitimacy and such weight
if Scottish Labour can return with 20, 30 seats
perhaps more they won't be able to do that anymore
No and they never did speak for the whole of Scotland
because they never won a majority of the popular vote
and a clear majority still remained
in most opinion polls in favour of the union
but you're absolutely right
in the short term, short to medium term
of course this result and a Labour return in Scotland
will strengthen the union
but the independence question in the longer term
will not go away and this is highly speculative
but I'll do it anyway
if you look ahead if there's a Labour government
after the next general election
look ahead to the period when the shine comes off
that Labour government
as it inevitably will in the course of time
where the Scottish voters return then
will they go to the Conservatives?
I very much doubt it
the Conservatives haven't won an election in Scotland
since the mid-1950s
so the independence project is asleep for now
nobody expects an independence referendum
any time soon, not even in the SNP
and there are interesting voices in the SNP now
saying let's take our foot off the gas
let's bide our time
let's try to work constructively
with an incoming Keir Starmer government
to reform the whole of the UK
along the terms that Gordon Brown has been arguing for
build up state capacity in Scotland
so that in the future
in the longer term
maybe 10 or 15 years from now
we will be in a better position
to make the independence case
and by which time
age demographics will have played a part
in shifting the ground towards independence

so that's the kind of thinking that's going on
under the surface now in the SNP
and that adds to the general perception
that the independence project
has gone away for now
there's no prospect of independence anytime soon
so I think that's the context within which
many pro-independence voters
are turning out and putting their faith in the Labour Party
Alan, thanks so much
fascinating, thank you
Cheers, Liz
Well the same politics you need skill and you do
but what you need most is luck
Keir Starmer is proving to be a very lucky general
his opponents falling in every direction
Right, as I say
we are packing our bags at newsagents HQ
for another conference heading to Liverpool for Labour
and when we come back
we will be talking to one of their stalwarts
and the latest in our extended political interview series
the MP, Dawn Butler
about where Labour is
where the country is on race
and multiculturalism
and our own political journey
and why it involves a lime green suit
stay with us
This is The Newsagents
Well we're joined on the newsagents now
by someone who is a politician
but isn't afraid to stand out
by our own estimation
to tell you how it is to speak in her own voice
she's also repeatedly made history
only the third black woman elected to parliament
as late as 2005
losing her seat in Brent's central in 2010
to return in 2015
in the last days of Gordon Brown's government
she became the first elected black woman ever
in 2009 to speak from the dispatch box
of the House of Commons as a minister

having been the first black female whip
since then she served on Jeremy Corbyn's front bench
run for deputy leader of the party in 2020
and most recently found fame of course
for telling Boris Johnson to his face
that he was a liar in the commons
and then got thrown out of the commons herself
for a day

I suppose yeah let's just start with that
I mean it was quite the moment
that was back in 2021 wasn't it
what led you to decide to do that?
Thanks for that introduction by the way
It was quite an update
It was building up you know
like every week I was watching
it was the demise of our democracy
ultimately this was the prime minister
standing up every week at the dispatch box
not just talking about PMQs
I'm talking about other times as well
and he would just blatantly say whatever
came to the top of his head
whether it was true or not
and then he'd get away with it
and even when I came back to Parliament
and I would raise points of order
and I would say the prime minister said
X when really it's Y
can he come back and correct the record
as the ministerial code says he should
and obviously the speaker cannot
insist that a minister comes back
to the house to correct the record
and so I did everything I could
and I just thought sod it
I'm done with this
because I'm part of that system
like if I've always been taught
if you know better do better
and just to explain to people
the reason you got thrown out
is because in the House of Commons
you are not allowed to call another member alive

that is one of the rules
so you have to come up with
sort of ingenious ways
let's just listen to it
just to remind people
the prime minister said we have severed
the link between infection
and serious disease and death
not only is this not true
Madam Deputy Speaker
but it is dangerous
and it's dangerous to lie in the pandemic
and I'm disappointed
that the prime minister
has not come to the House
to correct the record
and to correct the fact
that he has lied to this House
and the country
over and over again
I'm sure that the member
will reflect on her words
just saying perhaps correct the record
Madam Deputy Speaker
what would you rather
a weakened leg or a severed leg
you know at the end of the day
the prime minister has lied
to this House time and time again
and it's funny that we get in trouble
in this place for calling out the lie
rather than the person lying
order order order
order
can you please
please reflect on your words
and withdraw your remarks
Madam Deputy Speaker
I've reflected on my words
and somebody needs to tell the truth
in this House that the prime minister has lied
under the power given me by standing order
number 43
I order the member to withdraw immediately

from the House
for the remainder of the day sitting
it makes me smile
because I can also hear
there's a lot of heckling
and she's a disgrace
she needs to have got the Tory MPs
she's a disgrace
she needs to withdraw
you know and I was actually quite nervous
right because
you knew what you were going to do
I knew what I was going to do
and I didn't expect
the more the Deputy Speaker
asked me to withdraw
the stronger I got in my response
because like well actually no
I am right
and I'm not going to withdraw this
normally when that happens
MPs do withdraw it right
they say something and then they go
out of deference to you
Mr Speaker or Madam Speaker or whatever
I withdraw it but you didn't
no
because it had gone too far
like that week
Tory MPs try to influence
a judge's decision
on one of their fellow MPs
that was charged with sexual assault
and they try to influence the judge
and they got fined
like a day
wage out of parliament
I thought this is ridiculous
this is all topsy-turvy
and we're talking about
our democracy
it's not the playground
of the rich and the privileged
it's a democracy

that affects all of us in society
because your sort of basic point was to say
it's okay for him to lie
but it's not okay for me to say
that he's lying
how ridiculous is that right
and two years later
he was found guilty
by the privileges committee
in parliament of lying
so if he hadn't resigned
he would have then
been forced to leave parliament
for lying
so it took two years
and that was a really slow grind
of our political system
we all thought that to happen
but ultimately
I was right he was lying
and if our democracy
cannot call out lies
we are in deep, deep
trouble because
we are filled with fake news right now
they estimate
that by next year
80% of the content
that you see on social media
will be AI generated
so we have to have something
to that is truthful
and of course Boris Johnson has always maintained
that he hadn't lied but as you say
the privileges committee made their verdict
two years later and in that sense
you can say that you were vindicated
because they ended up agreeing with you
what was the reaction to at the time though
not just we heard from Tory MPs
but from your own side
it was interesting because
I did it for my own conscience
I didn't expect it to go viral

but I've written about it in my book
It's a beautiful life
and
I was kind of abandoned
by the party
and I was really quite a shock to me
because I thought everybody
can see that
Boris Johnson is a liar
and because I was brave enough
to call it out and take the punishment
I thought that would kind of be
appreciated
you said they abandoned you
in what way did they abandon you
in silence
there was no
I had actually had a few Tory MPs
sort of say
well done, like on the quiet
they were fed up of what was happening
within their party and I think you see that
you've just come back from
Tory conference
I think you will see that there's
a few Tory members
who are just like I don't like what's happening
in my party and I want it to stop
and there's a few MPs like that
but yeah I didn't have any
communication
and the sort of story or the theme
of not being believed is actually
something that comes up quite a bit in your book
which I want to talk about but you're probably
just given this is what we try and do with this section
of the show go back to the beginning
and talk a little bit about before you even went into politics
what was it
in your early life that made you think you might want to go into politics
growing up was it political
you grew up in East London was it very political
it wasn't political in
the

parliamentary sense of the word
but it was political
in terms of how we
interacted how we lived our lives
I think my first political lesson
from my dad
was when thatcher the milk
snatcher when we weren't
giving milk anymore
at school and I was over the moon
because I hated that milk
you could have become a Tory
it was disgusting I was like
chuffed and
my dad was like that's not the point
that milk could have been the only
kind of milk that other kids could have
your parents run a bakery didn't they
butler's bakery
lovely ring right
and so that was kind of my
first sort of political lesson but it wasn't really
political-political I mean I joined the Labour Party
in my teens
because my parents had said that it was the Labour Party
that made them feel welcome
but I didn't see Parliament
as a kind of place because it was sort of full
of really sort of dry old white men
really
and that kind of was my back
what was it like
going into Parliament
I kind of thought when I did it
so when I was elected I thought
great I'm an MP
I'm elected let's go in there
and do what I need to do
and represent my constituents
and be the voice of young people
which is what I promised in my maiden speech
and I naively
thought
that Parliament although there was this huge

difference between me
and like a lot of MP
and you felt that
yeah but I still thought fundamentally
we're all kind of there for the right reasons
and I wasn't expecting
to face some of the stuff
that I faced
when I was there like I wasn't expecting
that I had to cope with
racism and sexism
and all of that
what sort of thing did you encounter
well like I talk about
the time when I got into the lift
and
some MP said this lift isn't really for cleaners
assumed I was a cleaner
and I had to say look there's nothing wrong
with being a cleaner
but I'm not a cleaner I'm a member of Parliament
and they were just staring at me
and I'm just thinking there was
two black MPs right
Diane Abbott and myself
they would always call me Diane
they would call you Diane
completely different
both black women but completely different
different ages different height different everything
and I was just thinking this is mad
this is ridiculous I had to put up with that
on top of
doing the job of being an MP
did you think I don't want to do this
or I can't bear being here or did it anger you
what did it make you think
first of all which might sound strange to some people
some people will understand this
I set with myself
for not thinking that I was going to face that
being only two black women
in a white dominated space
it was quite naive of me

to think that I'm not going to suffer
any racism or discrimination
just because I'm in the mother
of all parliaments right when I look back
of it it was quite naive
but you're always constantly
fighting so you know I talk about
the David Heathcote Amory
situation
what happened though
I was taking my team out for lunch
because it was one of their birthdays
and you know they used to call my team the united colours
of Benetton you know I had like
a Muslim person working for me had a hijab
and I had all different people working for me
and he physically stopped me
from walking
onto the terrace to
sit down and he's like where do you think
you're going and I said we're going to have our lunch
and he's like who are you
oh who are you
you know then he was like this place is going to
reckon ruin they're letting anyone in nowadays
and if you read what he's
like he's exact words what he said
afterwards is like
she took advance they always
feel that it was really
because he has claimed sins in regards to that hasn't he
he said that he just didn't recognise you
so he was just trying to stop
what is it it's not his job to recognise me
do you understand
what makes him think that he needs to
recognise me I didn't recognise him
let's be honest probably if I had been walking onto it
would he have stopped you because
he didn't recognise you probably not
if he thought that I wasn't I didn't belong there
he could have gone and got the people
whose job it is to recognise us like the doorkeepers
or the police so it's like what

made him think that he had the right
to do that before we move on
since we've been talking about being you were
the one of the only two women a black woman
MPs and Diane but was another
since we mentioned her what do you make of how
she's being treated by the Labour Party at the moment
I think it needs to be resolved
quickly she's not currently in the
she's not currently got the whip back
I think it needs to be resolved
I think that
Diane was the first elected black female MP
and I actually think it would be quite fitting if
she ends up in the lords
because we need to have more MPs in the lords
if we're ever going to abolish it the more
the Tories pile on
you know their supporters
we need to counterbalance that
that's my view do you think she's being treated badly
I think that
as a Labour Party
we should have a system
that is transparent
and
efficient and as
speedy as possible it should be fair
I mean I was a trade union official
I'm very much in favour
of fair systems and I think
having something drag on for too long
is not healthy
one of the big themes of our debate in a
society at the moment is this idea around structural racism
and as you know that there are people
particularly in the Conservative Party
often people colour themselves
when it's coming about in the arc or so Ella Braverman
and she's soon like herself
very much reject that
principle and reject that idea
and they say that it reduces people
it reduces people to the colour of their skin

from your book you disagree
and you've written about for example
saying that there's a certain group of white men
who constantly try and put me in my place
who constantly try to push me back and say
further they don't want the system to change
because the system works for them
the way it should
do you think that that is getting
any better at all and could you
talk a little bit about why you think
the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary
and others are wrong when they reject
the idea of structural racism, systemic racism
okay that's like
a huge couple of questions
so I think probably
almost everybody
everybody listening to this podcast
will know somebody
who's in a managerial position
who shouldn't be there
and you think how on earth did they get there
you know I call them accidental managers
you know the ones that get there
not by merit but metroxy
the people that get there that shouldn't be there
that are not really
equipped to be there
but they make it there they're well connected
and everybody
most people I speak to have a story
or something they know even people that they've trained
that have then been promoted
over them and
that is problematic and that is
structural and that is where
like recruits like
and you have this perpetual circle where you don't
see the value in what
other people bring to the table
because you don't recognise it
and so in that respect
it's not

kind of getting better but what is
changing is that we're having conversations
around it so we're talking about it
and we're kind of exposing it
a little more and making it
sort of clearer to what's happening
so I feel
that's
like the quick answer to it
in regards
to the likes
of the Tory party
the
United Nations have said if you take for example
their report that they produced that showed
that there was no
structural racism or institutional racism
the United Nations have said
that you know that report is
essentially nonsense
and have said that what they're trying to do
is they are trying to normalise
white supremacy. This was the report that came
out which effectively the government produced
which debunked the idea of
structural racism.
And so the thing is this, there are always going
to be people
who will use
the system to their own
advantage and will say
things that will help them
but not help the cause.
How do you explain though that
do you think the Labour Party ought to be a bit
embarrassed sometimes that it has been
less successful in promoting
people of colour to the very top jobs
and when you look at the Tory cabinet now
in terms of, I mean there was a point when
trust came in that it was
the two, the four, they weren't there very long
admittedly, but the four big
jobs were all either women or people of colour

Sunak's there, Braverman's there
I mean do you think that the Labour Party
why do you think they're better at
at the very least getting people to the top
maybe not having more ethnic minority MPs
and so on overall, but they're more comfortable
in getting people to the top.
But that's not the point I should say
at the moment, so the point is this
and I talk about this in my book, if you've got
two women
one has suffered domestic
abuse and is battered
and bruised and is talking about
domestic violence and the other one
has never had any problems
in a relationship and the one
that's never had any problems says that
domestic abuse doesn't exist
why would you believe
the woman that says domestic abuse doesn't exist
over the woman
that's battered and bruised and says that
domestic violence is a problem.
So you think that people like Sunak and others
haven't experienced it themselves
but they don't recognise that it does exist
nonetheless, but they've partly
because of their class or whatever it is.
The point is it suits
them to elevate
that notion
right, but that doesn't solve the problem
so if we want to solve the problem
of racism we've got to deal with it
we want to solve the problem of
domestic violence or domestic abuse
where a woman is killed
every three days
we have to talk about it
and resolve it, you can't just say
because somebody said it doesn't exist
and say okay, cool, that's fine
because it's not true.

There's been a whole debate at the Conservative Party conference this week
about
in a weird way between
Sunak and his own home secretary
Sunak has said that we should
laud the British model of multiculturalism
that it's been a success story
So while the Brahmin in her speech warned
about this hurricane that was coming
and that she warned
that the model has basically failed
and these two quite different positions
they're not, but they are. And what do you think?
A, when you hear the language, but also when you hear that
debate, what do you think? Who's right?
You know what, it's all a game
to them. I think this is what we've got
to kind of appreciate right now
Right now you're in the
dying throes
of the end of
failure of 13 years
of the Tory government, right? This government
is dying and so
what they're trying to do
is they're trying to create headlines, right?
And Soella's trying to create
headlines because
she wants to be seen as the
successor to Sunak
Right? And so is Badenok
So they're all on this battle
ground trying to be
as
offensive as they possibly can be
They're trying to appeal to
a certain group of
people. The same thing is happening
in America. But what I say about this is
like I, in a way, it's like a futile
discussion to get into
because let them back it out
themselves. That's their game. They're playing a game
but my real concern

is
they're making things
less safe for all of us
Right? You start
whipping up this
hate speech
and getting people angry
and riled about things
They won't be able to control
what happens. These rebel razors
you know, when you do that
you won't be able to control that
and they're making the country less safe.
So it is up to us
not to engage
in hate speech
but to talk about the
success of our country
to talk about what works
to be inclusive
To have inclusive language
I do think she's guilty
of hate speech
and I think we have to have
inclusive language
and it's not about
tolerating people
it's about accepting people
That's how you make a better society
and ultimately
we should all want to have a better
society. Are you happy with
the way everything's going in the Labour Party?
Labour Party conference next week
still very far ahead in the polls
I think Keir Starmer's doing a good job. Are you happy?
Well, who would not be happy with
being ahead in the polls?
There's always a brown loafer about something
even the Labour Party can manage to make that into a
disaster.
If we weren't ahead in the polls
and we got this
I was trying to think of a word that doesn't

include swearing
Please swear you can do it
Honestly, John Soap and Emily Maitley swear enough
in the studio at dawn so you can do it.
You could have told me that in the beginning
I've been holding a lot of it back
but you know, they're a shower shy at this government
and so we should be ahead in the polls
and we should feel
that we can be bolder.
You know, I feel that as a Labour Party
we've got to appeal
to the public. We've got to say to them
look, vote for us
and this is the difference we will make
in government.
This is the difference that we will make to the
country. This is the difference
that we will make to your lives.
You will have a better
standard of living
under a Labour Government.
Everybody is kind of included
and there's nothing wrong with that.
There's nothing wrong with giving people hope
and I feel we need to do more of that.
I know you're a good friend with Sadiq
so you're going to want him to win next year
but at some point you'd like to be Mayor of London.
Yes. Yes, I would.
Although Sadiq has told us
I think he'd like to do ten terms or something
so I mean that might...
That would throw a spanner in the works
I'd have to kind of lock him up or something
like lock him away but
if he wants to do ten terms
I will support him and obviously
my ambition will change.
You were diagnosed with breast cancer
has that changed your politics
and how you think about politics?
Has it changed my politics?
Not really but I suppose it's changed

in a way
cancer has changed me
not kind of changed my politics, changed me a bit
because I thought I was dying
so when you think you're dying
you just...
kind of perspective on life
and maybe in a way
it's made me a bit more fearless
I don't know
I wouldn't have written the book
if I hadn't gone through my cancer journey
because that was my down time
and in that down time I had to do something
because my mind was just racing
but I was very ill
so I couldn't walk
and so that was my down time
so I wouldn't have done the book without...
And you call it a purpose for life
that purpose
to sort of drive you on
where do you think that comes from?
Again, in terms of driving politics
because it would be so easy, politics is a tough life
I know a lot of people listening to this
like I'm not much sympathy for politicians
but it's a tough old life
what drives you in terms of the purpose
and in terms of staying in politics?
What do you want to achieve still?
I think it is change
it kind of says like
kumbayarish
but I really want
society to be better
I want everyone to like
be invested in
having a better world
you know, I feel that
my purpose is to make sure
that those people coming behind me
especially sort of
black women don't have to go through

what I went through
so I've knocked down those barriers
that won't be rebuilt for them
so I want to make sure that that happens
so that in a way is my purpose
and legacy
and to change things like to make sure that our democracy
is solid
I mean, you know
what Boris Johnson did do
really effectively is show up
all of the gaps
and the cracks in our democracy
the fact that our democracy cannot sustain
somebody who lies
and has no care for the rules
so that means we've got a strength in the rules
of democracy
so that, as I feel, is my job to do that
Well Dawn, I better let you go
because of course you've got to prepare for Jamaican night
your famous Jamaican night party
on Sunday night at conference
of course I'm coming
of course I am
and my favourite party of the conference every year
I love that, thank you so much
and it's great because it's just a people powered party
I'm going to bring my own lime coloured suit
I love it, I love it, I'm going to hold you to that
I'm going to hold you to that
Come on now, Dawn, thanks so much for coming in
Cheers
Right, that is it from us for this week
remember you can catch up on all our shows
from the week on Global Player
and send us story tips and feedback
to newsagents.global.com
John, Emily and I are off to get a ferry across the Mersey
for Labour Party Conference and en route
we're going to do a big shop at ASDA
to buy as many steaks as possible before the meat tax comes in
on newsagents Gabriel Radis, Laura Fitzpatrick
Georgia Foxwell, Will Gibson-Smith

Alex Barnett and Rory Simon, our editor
is Tom Hughes, it's presented by John Sopel
Emily Matles and me, Lewis Goodall
will see you in Liverpool on Monday
have a lovely weekend
The newsagents with Emily Matles
John Sopel and Lewis Goodall
This has been a Global Player
original podcast and a Persephoneka production