

## [Transcript] The News Agents / The climate crisis - is it already out of control?

This is a global player original podcast.

When did summer become a thing of dread?

This golden season for many parts of Europe has become one of fire and flame.

And that's because, as we all know, rising temperatures as a result of climate change make that fire always part of the rhythm of the Mediterranean year, hotter and louder and deadlier.

This week the news agents have been in Spain covering shorter term Spanish politics after its indecisive general election, but also the political question which will dominate the long term future of this country and this region.

What happens to the ovens of Europe if they become furnaces?

On today's episode a special report from the front line of Europe's climate change battle.

Welcome to the news agents.

It's Lewis in Seville.

And it's Emily in news agents HQ and a little bit later we'll be looking at the Nigel Farage Kootz saga because he says the Saki of Alison Rose from the Nat West Bank where she worked for three decades is only the start.

He wants the heads of the rest of the board to roll as the privacy regulator examines whether confidentiality rules were broken.

Now Farage is on a roll.

We worried this story was far more complicated than Mr Farage is making out and might need some proper scrutiny.

So we're returning to it at the end of the show to ask a few pertinent questions.

But first we're going to be dealing with something which ultimately is far more important which is something which is dominating the news every day now which is the effects of climate change in particular on Southern Europe which for obvious reasons is a crucible of that climate change battle.

The news just today obviously we've covered it on the show this week already.

The wildfires in Corfu, in Rhodes, spread to Italy, Sardinia hitting 47 degrees.

Just today here in Spain wildfires have now spread to this country and to Portugal and the Canary Islands in particular.

And if we just take a look at some of the effects of this summer which is still what only about halfway through in Europe alone, France, Greece, Italy, Spain reporting new maximum daytime and overnight station temperature records, wildfires forcing the evacuation of hundreds of residents and tourists on as I say Rhodes, Corfu, etc. causing record July wildfire emissions in Greece and as I say Spain, Portugal now recording wildfires as well and that follows and this is something we're going to get into the special report that I've done from here that follows extremely hot spring here, hot summer as well and month after month and actually year after year of below average or near record lows in terms of rainfall.

Yeah and it's not just limited to Europe, in Africa, Algeria and Tunisia are reporting brand new record breaking temperatures, seven dozen reported casualties due to wildfires we don't often talk about Algeria but that's at the centre of this too.

In China the Sambo weather station recorded a 52.2 degrees centre grade record breaking

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there and large parts of North America, California, Southern Nevada, Arizona are seeing temperatures exceeding 43 degrees. You know all this of course and we know all this and the British public it seems from the polls is firmly behind the need to hear our politicians talking about the need for change, talking about the need for urgency and yet just yesterday we had a certain David Frost, Lord Frost, saying that rising temperatures are likely to be beneficial for Britain as more people die from the cold than the heat and he says that there is a lack of debate on climate change and we should move away from high cost mitigation efforts. Where to start with that debate? Where to start deconstructing the words of someone who thinks that actually if you allow climate change to happen it's all going to go in the one direction that you want it to go in just so it can help your own country. It beggars belief but it goes back to a fundamental tenet which is that we are in the middle still whilst these wildfires and soaring temperatures are raging around us of a culture war and even climate change sits in the middle of all that rhetoric.

Yeah and as we've discussed on the show already this week Britain really hasn't had that kind of political divide up to now but it really feels as if in the last couple of weeks or so that divide, that new cultural political divide is honing into view which is particularly ironic as we've said given everything else that is going on in the world and going on here in Spain and as I said at the top the reason we came to Spain is not just because of the general election but it's because of course this part of Spain, southern Spain and the luthier is really the ground zero certainly of the Spanish fight against climate change and there was a particular place that drew our interest and it's the Donyana National Park which is one of Europe's most astonishing natural habitats and centre of hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of lagoons and over the last year they have at one time or another nearly entirely dried up and people in southern Spain who are used to temperatures of yeah in the summer late 30s maybe 40 now facing down the barrel of at times 45 even higher wondering whether this very special place is going to be habitable in the way that we've known it for future generations.

Here's our special report.

In some parts of Spain it's 44 degrees in the shade, the heat is suffocating.

The speed these fires are spreading is truly frightening, Stella has just been told to leave her property, she's disorientated and fearful of what comes next.

Well over the past few weeks we've been reporting extensively on the heat waves that have hit large areas of Europe, the United States and parts of Asia.

Well now leading scientists have told the BBC they're concerned by the recent run of new climate records being set saying the speed and timing of them is unprecedented.

It's been a long very hot summer in Spain and southern Europe and that followed another long hot spring and another hot long summer before that.

But if climate change is all about the old elements fire and heat it is also about its counterpart, water.

In Spain drought a perennial problem has become a chronic one, reservoirs across the country are low.

In one part of Catalonia water levels are so low that a medieval village flooded when the lake was first created back in the 1960s has re-emerged lending an eeriness to a sun

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baked lake bed.

An eerie is very much the word here, mile after mile of abandoned farmland, now a little more than scrub and we'll get to that.

But Andalusia long dubbed Europe's oven is a centre of this crisis so we drop by to see Professor Carlos Camacho ecologist at the biological institute of Doniana who studies closely the ecosystem of this region and the effect climate change is having upon it.

So this is one of the most threatened regions by climate change because as you know climate change is not uniform across the globe so we are suffering from extreme heat waves and the temperature is rising more rapidly than in other areas and also this area is used to temporal or periodic droughts but they are becoming longer and longer and more severe so that's why climate change is impacting this area more strongly than other areas.

And when you say the temperature is increasing faster than other areas what sort of changes are we talking about?

How rapidly is it increasing?

So predictions are forecasting that we will probably increase for example in Mediterranean area the temperature will increase around five degrees over the next century and that's a lot because that means that not only the average but the extremes temperature are going to be extreme as well.

So five degrees so we could be talking about extremes of how high?

What sort of temperatures?

It's difficult to say but perhaps if we are already over 40-44 degrees maybe it will be common to have 50 degrees some days.

And 50 degrees for human habitation it becomes almost impossible?

I would say so because I have kids and it's difficult for us to go out during the afternoon and the evening we can only go out at night so what I would predict is a change in our natural rhythm and because we will probably become more nocturnal because it's difficult to deal with 45 degrees outside during the afternoon.

As I was talking to Professor you could see this rising anger, concern, worry in his face. Remember this is a civil man born and bred in his shortish life less than half a century he's witnessed and measured the change up close.

And finally there is a lot of talk, this has obviously been a big news story this summer in terms of the extreme heat that we are seeing in Southern Europe.

In the British media you often nonetheless still hear voices saying oh look places like Seville, places like Southern Spain they are always really hot.

This is July they are known as the oven of Europe.

What would you say to that because you have obviously been able to see things change over as you say not the longest period but over quite a long period what do you say to that argument that parts of Southern Europe it's always hot it's just summer?

Yes it's always hot the problem is that as temperature fluctuates then the probability to reach an extreme is high but if the average increases then the extremes are going to increase as well so it's usually hot here warm during most part of the year but now our exposure to very high temperature is more prevalent and is more frequent so that's the problem that you are not killed by the average you are killed by the extreme so when you are hit by the sun for a couple of minutes and under 50 degrees then it's when you are killed

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you are not killed when the average increases a little bit and because the average is increasing extremes are increasing as well in parallel and that's the danger so you cannot deny something that is quite evident and is happening around you all the time if you don't believe in climate change just spend a couple of weeks in summer in southern Spain where temperatures are usually high but now are extreme.

We left the professor we walked back into the baking sun underneath we passed a huge fossil a whale the centerpiece of this university's collection and the professor remarked that it is a reminder that all things in the end come to an end and sometimes he looks at it and knows that it could have no conception of what was to befall it we do we see it and yet we continue more or less as we were.

So we are just arriving to the Donyana national park which is a really famous national park within Spain and ecologically important across Europe, wetlands, real big centre of bird life and normally the crops that they grow around here on the run up to the national park they are tropical is usually full of rice paddies, cotton plantations because that is how hot it normally is here is a step above the rest of Europe or much of the rest of Europe but over the last two years there has been a profound change and as we are driving through we are going through literally miles and miles and miles and miles of what is effectively dead land, unused land, arid land, brown land on what and our drivers just showed me a picture of what it was like even just a couple of years ago what is supposed to be lush green paddy fields and that is simply because the water is running out and they are trying to conserve the water that they have for the national park itself and each year that line that frontier of what is usable and has been retreating and retreating and the water that they do have been conserved and going less and less far each and every time. The driver has just been saying it is just really, really sad to see. You might know Donyana national park it is one of Europe's most important wetlands or that is the theory anyway. It has thousands of lagoons which make it one of the biggest locations for migratory birds on the continent it is twice the size of London but as we drove through we could see the impact of the devastation of drought. Many of them are dried up and that happens to some of them in summer but not all of them. Last year every single one was reduced to a puddle at best 60% are estimated now to have been lost entirely and scientists say that is partly as a result of year after year of below average rainfall something which is afflicting much of southern Europe. It is also driven by local agriculture as well. Normally it is full of lush rice paddies cotton plantations, red fruit, now field after field is grey or brown or yellow all with the detritus of human abandonment. Juan Romero, spokesperson for ecologist in action is based here in Donyana and he became our guide to this now desolate landscape. It is a really creepy sight it's just basically disused row after row after row of what would have been polytunnels with just metal poles and sticks in every direction and it's no longer used because in the last two years alone the land is basically becoming fertile because the water has run out and the water has run out because the droughts have gone on for longer and they've even built these huge, Juan Romero is telling us the fields are dotted with these massive 20 foot wells which the farmers dug illegally actually to try and just keep the land alive for as long as possible and even they have now run dry. And this is where climate change meets humanity again. Donyana is the perfect parable of our overall problem. Climate change itself caused by humanity creates a problem in this case less water and humanity

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in turn makes it worse again because too much agriculture too much fruit production has drained the aquifer basically the water table diverting what little water there is away from the delicate wetland ecosystem. Poor regulation has led farmers to drill for water illegally with little sanction from the authorities and now everyone loses because there's no water for farms and the wetlands are dry. It's a textbook example of how not to respond to climate change and how to mismanage the environment. The WWF is now warning that this cherished and precious habitat is on the verge of collapse. So we've driven a little bit further up the road to a place where the climate crisis meets the migrant crisis and it's just the same in some regards it's row after row field after field of disused poly tunnels abandoned in this case full of decaying rotting blueberry bushes their leaves are deep red but next to it a site which wasn't anywhere else but which reminds me of places I've seen time after time in different parts of the world which is a migrant camp because that's basically what it is box after box cube after cube of shantish rickety bits of plastic and wood and tarpaulin and black plastic bags surrounded by the detritus and to be honest a faint smell of what you'd expect of a place where lots of humans have gathered and they really ought not to be and we're told this is because these are migrants that have been brought over illegally from north africa by farmers looking to make a buck and get them to work the land probably me is is that over the last six months through a year much less of this land surrounding this makeshift camp has become usable workable farmable and these people got nowhere else to go so we're told they're just gonna wait around here until next season and hope beyond hope that the drought gets better it's just a reminder that the climate crisis affects every single level of humanity and inevitably those at the bottom most we got talking to one of the illegal farm workers standing in the middle of the afternoon sun ruin crops around him with a group of others with nothing to do and nowhere to go I've been in Spain for 14 years at the camp for two months and I'm from Mali not only is there no work there's no water for them to drink that water there is in a big pool with a sign on the side in big lettering not for drinking it says it's for the crops to the left our guide Juan Romero is appalled by the whole situation the migrants live worse than animals they guaranteed one fundamental right the right to water and even here you don't have that I'm going to Spain now where a lack of rain in recent years meant the northeast of the country is seeing its worst drought on record this means a series of strict measures are being taken to try and protect the water supply not a single drop or very little Barcelona has barely received rain for several months now fountains remain empty due to water cuts a precious commodity and a basic necessity for life at the center of rising concern and conflict Europe has a water problem it's not all bad news in Andalusia on our drive back we see these extraordinary towers resplendent over the landscape projecting luminous beams to the ground producer Rory says they look like the eye of Sauron they're nearly as astonishing they're light towers built in the last decade or so capturing and reflecting the mighty Spanish sun at hundreds and hundreds of hungry solar panels below such is the power of these beams that the farms are enough to provide energy for a city the size of Seville not far away in extra madura huge lithium mines will be opened exploiting a massive natural resource that will help power this country and the rest of Europe to electric vehicles but with light comes heat and with heat comes drought and increasingly in Spain like the rest of southern Europe as the fires burn many are asking how to live with what once seemed the best thing about

these magical places summer so really is that weird juxtaposition right that I was talking about the end of the piece there which is that on the one hand you can see this transformation that is happening across Europe you can see it in Andalusia you can see the net zero revolution happening all around here you know with the endless numbers of solar panels those solar towers that I was talking about there the lithium mining there is that race which we've been talking about all week for this net zero future which is our future whether people who don't believe in climate change like it or not and states are moving in that direction and yet at the same time we have had this weird last couple of weeks where politicians in Britain at least have been rhetorically at least moving in the other direction so I think it's relevant that today we finally heard confirmation from Rishi Sunak that he will stick with that 2030 ban the ban that stops the sales of new petrol and diesel cars he feared an industry backlash and he realized that you can't start talking about major inward investment for Jaguar Land Rover and electric batteries and at the same time start rolling back some of your green policies but it's surprising how long it's taken us to get to that place where we categorically knew that because if you look at what the public actually thinks and it's really pretty categoric 50 percent of all voters this is according to one of the latest polls from more in common 50 percent of all voters think the government hasn't done enough on green issues 25 percent say current plans are about right only 12 percent say too much so every time you hear a politician wobbling or wavering or rowing back whether it's on eulers or diesel or electric or whatever it is they are probably only speaking to 12 percent maximum of the population so to think that somehow this is going to be a vote winner to think that the sort of views of of Lord Frost who's talking about how great it is if Britain gets hotter to think that that is somehow going to help you towards a general election win is catastrophic electorally and in terms of what we're actually needing far more catastrophic because we're still at least 15 maybe 18 months away from a general election where we cannot afford that kind of stasis from our politicians I think that the the key for politicians to make this agenda work over the long term is to make it clear that your average voter doesn't lose from it right yeah you can imagine a world where particularly with cost of living is it is particularly with how hard press people are and how they're to be honest likely to be for the rest of this decade if the current fiscal and economic projections are right you can imagine a world where in 2030 if the right infrastructure has not been put in place around electric vehicles that people find that they can't buy diesel or petrol cars and go well electric vehicles don't work for me they're still too expensive what am I supposed to do you can imagine a world in which the government phases out gas boilers and if the right infrastructure hasn't been put in place to make their replacements cheap and to make sure that people are effectively being subsidised to buy this stuff you can imagine a backlash that all relies on politicians making the right decisions now and you know what's crazy Emily just talking about that boiler point which is going to be absolutely central what is really crazy and this would be a decision the government could take for free now it is crazy that homes are being built in Britain right now with heating systems i.e. gas boilers and so on that even by the government's own estimations will have to be replaced in the next 10 years or so anyway why hasn't the government which they said initially they were going to do it's a crazy bit of public policy this why the government hasn't changed planning regulations to make sure that every new home that's being built where possible has a solar panel that is being built with heat pumps



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it's crazy the reason they haven't done it is because the builders in Britain the building industry don't want it to happen because they can build more cheaply with the old setup now but in terms of our long-term future that is just robbing Peter to pay poor because then we're going to have to rebuild those houses effectively more expensively over the long term and of course into the bargain the climate suffers well yes coming up after the break we're going to be talking about Nigel Farage but in a slightly different tone to possibly many of the coverage you will have seen on the front of the papers today he's been getting a lot of oxygen and he's riding pretty high but we're speaking to somebody who's put in the legwork on finding out what was really in that document that he requested

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welcome back it is extraordinary to see the amount of coverage and the domination that the story of Nigel Farage's Coots bank account is still getting couple of weeks on and it's even more extraordinary to see what has happened in the wake because a

board meeting right into the early hours of the night finally led to the resignation of Alison Rose who stands down as Nat West's CEO and she admits that she made a serious error of judgment

in I guess leaking or talking about a client and leaking their confidential material to a journalist and I think everyone can understand that in terms of a breach of confidentiality that was probably where it had to go but for Nigel Farage this isn't enough he's also talking about wanting to see other board members go he's wanting the privacy regulator to get involved and there are quite a lot of his cronies who are shall we say now pursuing a whole line on woke banking gone too far it has become the culture war issue that he dreamed of so today we thought we would just examine what we actually know of the facts that take us away from all the heat in this and get back to a few of the basics yeah look I think the extraordinary thing about this story is that the way that it's unfolded is to presume that this is just really really straightforward and there's no sort of murkiness to it I mean my reading of it throughout has been that this is a more complex story than is being projected and portrayed something that we talked about on the show last week yes we have seen these files which Farage got hold of or we've seen a sort of redacted version of them we can see that Farage is right to an extent that the politics and his reputation were part of Coots is decision-making and our understanding is this is something that banks do quite a lot particularly with sort of high-profile people we've heard a lot about this concept of politically exposed person but it's also clear from from those documents that the initial Coots justification that was given to the BBC's business editor Simon Jack we now know via Dame Alison Rose the former chief executive was that commercial considerations were a factor

and it does seem that commercial considerations were at least part of the reason that they did what they did ie did Farage have enough money and so on and as we said on the show last week I mean the truth is and I don't think this necessarily speaks very well of Coots but the truth is probably if Farage had had loads more money if he was one of their other clients that you know let's be honest they probably have their own reputational risks attached to them that they probably or they may well have kept him but they obviously made a different decision and I think what's extraordinary about this is the extent to which Farage's power is astonishing his power to corral virtually the entire kind of right-of-centre media and political ecosystem

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is I think completely unparalleled and unmatched he's got everyone from the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Czech down singing from his hymn sheet about a story that as we say is at least a bit more complicated than frankly the kind of persecution narrative that we're seeing would allow for it's like it's the draper's affair or something right it's just it's it's crazy if you turn this upside down right if I went on Twitter or any social media outlet and said I have been denied a platinum amix account I doubt that the entire establishment would have stopped what they were doing and fought my cause they would have gone oh my god you ridiculous elitist you realize how utterly entitled you sound rightly and they would have gone for me and I would have been pushed off Twitter without another word so let's just get a few things straight here Nigel Farage's ability to bank has not been restricted his ability to bank with one specific premiere account premiere bank has been restricted and his kutsu account wasn't closed because of those political opinions but because he arguably posed a reputational risk to the bank it felt and wasn't earning them enough money and I think that is crucial that kutsu has very specific limits or requirements including either three million pounds of liquid asset savings or one million pounds in your account that is the rules it's like a gentleman's club right I'm not pretending it's a great thing but if you go to them you know the rules of their club he was offered alternative banking arrangements and yet this whole thing has been confected as if he somehow is a victim here and whilst I think it's perfectly legitimate to talk about where banks overstepped the line into asking about people's personal thoughts and opinions and whether kutsu has been consistent with everyone who banks with them or whether it was just because

Nigel said those things out loud what we shouldn't do is miss the key of this story which is fundamentally

it's about money because this is a bank and they believe they had legitimate reasons to think he was no longer worth it to them yeah I mean Faraj has claimed that I think 10 other banks have refused him services but he hasn't named those banks obviously we can't verify that for sure and obviously if there was any sense that people's politics was meaning that they were just enuded of a bank account full stop which is a sort of line that Faraj has been taking I mean obviously that would be unacceptable as you say Emily the picture is far more complex than that I think what's really interesting just politically though is in terms of the prime minister's reaction and the chancellor's reaction the top echelon to the conservative party's reaction the fact that they didn't want to have a cigarette paper a Faraj cigarette paper between them and Faraj on this one that they've moved entirely to his position with no intervening period whatsoever it just shows how scared they are of him they're still really scared of him something that they know they can't afford is any sense of any kind of insurgency or right wing sort of insurgency that might sort of deplete their votes further or even the hint of it and they know how powerful he is so the fact that they just move there straight away I mean what a transformation from if you know you only go back to 10 years say to 2013 this was a sort of period of high Cameron when Cameron

was trying to put as much distance to some extent at least between himself and Faraj at least personally

well he called them the fruit cakes and the loons and the luck cases quite so quite so as much as possible moving as far as possible and here you have 10 years later just shows the sheer sheer authority and force that he has on right of centre politics in this country that someone



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like Sunak who you know I think fundamentally probably is not necessarily it's definitely not sort of Faraj he's still a hunt particularly but you have a situation where Faraj comes out and says the government's reaction to this is an absolutely perfect absolutely superb tells you a lot about how far the conservative party has shifted well let's speak now to Francis Coppola she's the FT journalist she's seen all 40 pages of the subject access request and she can join us now Francis so what was it in the report that told us why they stopped his account there the first is that Nigel Faraj had made his banking relationship with them public he did that in 2019 and they regarded that as a risk because he's a very inflammatory character he will go and say things in the press that set people's backs up or that whip up a storm or something like that and they were concerned but that would reflect badly on them given that the banking relationship was in the public domain and we can argue about whether or not they were right to be concerned about that he was the one that voiced it out loud is that basically what they're saying that's exactly it yeah they will have people who have similar views to Nigel Faraj on their books I imagine all banks do and you know it's not uncommon the difference is how they manifest them talking about them down the pub is one thing shouting them all over the media is another and so it is his political activities and the way he expresses his views that is the problem rather than the views themselves so this has nothing to do with money then oh no but it absolutely has to do with money managing a politically exposed person like Nigel Faraj creates additional cost for a bank interesting on the first page of the bundle it actually says that and on the second page it says for example that they put in place a monthly adverse press monitor so they were going through everything in the press about Nigel Faraj once a month that's enormously costly they don't do that for everybody they did that for him so that's additional cost for them so the account has to generate the missing remember this is a private bank this isn't a high street bank the issue is different for high street banks but for a private bank they offering services to very wealthy people they expect their accounts to make them money and if a bank account doesn't make them money they're going to want to terminate it so what was happening was they'd got a high risk high maintenance customers costing them a fair bit to manage and the account had fallen below its commercial viability criteria because he paid off his mortgage and so they weren't earning any interest from him anymore that's why they terminated the account so was it as simple as that if he hadn't paid off his mortgage and he'd carried on paying them interest none of this would have happened they would have sucked up the reputational risk because they were getting interest from him is it that simple they did in fact suck up the reputational risk for some time while he had a mortgage with them they did so for some years it was absolutely about the mortgage that said they had decided to end the relationship when the mortgage reached its refixed date and that was because they felt that he just posed too great a reputational risk for them do you have any sympathy with Nigel Farage saying it's unpalatable for banks to behave in this way not a great deal to be honest because in the end most people don't behave like that most people don't live their lives in the public eye like that you could say coats terminated his account because he was Nigel Farage they wouldn't have done that to somebody with similar views and you may think that's unfair but it's all to do with their perception of the

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risk to them it's fascinating Francis Coppola thanks so much it's really helpful to have that spelled out for us pleasure if you put to one side the leaking of customer confidentiality which we probably all agree was egregious i think the one thing we've learned from all of this is how to whip up a populist storm because at the heart of this is the choice by one private bank to say no to one customer who they decided was costing them too much and wasn't bringing them in enough money they offered him another high street bank like 95 percent of the population use and that wasn't good enough and he made it Farage made it an argument about free speech about liberty about censorship when it wasn't no one was shutting him down no one was stopping him

from banking no one was calling him names they simply waited until he paid off a mortgage having decided ahead of time that they would call it quits at that point and this isn't a public utility it's not electricity it's a posh private bank it's in the name yet the power of the populist somehow is to turn utter entitlement into victimhood and that is quite the move

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now before we go a little treat instead of the news agents we bring you the old agents because a year ago this week the future of the Tory party was being decided in a televised debate between the

two leading candidates one Rishi Sunak predicted the imminent collapse of the economy with higher mortgage rates if Liz Truss had her way luckily Liz Truss put him right

in the US at the moment do you want to use them as an example their mortgage rates are almost 50 percent higher than mortgage rates in this country because they're borrowing so much I'm sorry this is Canada Canada actually has project fear I remember the referendum campaign I remember the referendum campaign and there were only one of us who was on the side of Remain and Project Fear and it was you not me okay and you talk about this we talk about this it was your economic advisor right you were on the today program you named one person who supported your plans that one person not me not some theoretical thing that one person said that your plans would mean interest rates going up to seven percent I should be honest with people about the trade offs involved because your proposals would mean that we get the short-term sugar rush of unfunded borrowed tax cuts but that would be followed by the crash of higher prices and higher mortgage rates and that is not something that I want to put in the highest tax rate for 70 years let's never let project fear get in the way of a good idea bye for now this has been a global player original podcast and a Persephoneka production