

## [Transcript] The News Agents / Ukraine: a war without end?

The winner of the Eurovision Song Contest 2022 is Ukraine!

That was the sound of Ukraine storming to victory in Eurovision 2022 in Turin.

At the time, the hope held by President Zelensky down was that when it was time for the competition to be held again, that it could be held in a Ukrainian city, in a victorious Kiev, perhaps.

But a year on, it is not on the banks of the Dnieper, but on the Mersey in Liverpool.

And though it is being held for them, with them, the echoes of the war are perhaps a little bit fainter than we might have anticipated a year ago, with the European public perhaps a bit more weary of the grind of a war without apparent end.

So today's episode isn't about Eurovision, it's about where we are, with that war, now 442 days old, who, if anyone, is winning, 442 days on, what, if anything, might bring its end.

It's Lewis here, welcome to the newsagents.

Now later on we'll be bringing you the latest in our My Political Makeup series, extended interviews with interesting politicians about what drives them in politics, but first, back to Ukraine.

In Liverpool, it is inevitably this Eurovision, a peculiar event, one that's never happened before, that a city should have to host in another's stead because of an ongoing conflict. A delicate balance between celebrating the country it ought to have been in and the place that it is.

We caught up with Scott Bryan, TV critic and journalist who is covering this great song contest, Jamboree.

It's a situation that Liverpool has really, really embraced.

I was speaking to some people who were at the Eurovision Song Contest last year when it was in Turin, and they said that last year it felt great in the arena, but then when you got into the city centre, it didn't really feel like there was the Eurovision going on at all.

This couldn't be any more different.

There's been a real emphasis on celebrating Ukrainian culture, highlighting the music scene and having artists perform and dancers and choreography.

There hasn't been so much of an emphasis on the war, and I think deliberately so, and it's because the EBU, who are the European Broadcasting Union, who oversee the event, they're a bit like the Olympics in a way.

They try to ensure that there is not much of a political angle.

Now, that's also based within a lot of ironies because, as you know, Lewis, the Eurovision Song Contest is a very political event.

There are songs about, you know, that feel kind of political in nature.

There are different states that like to go and vote for their friendly allies.

It is very much a part of it, but I think the EBU and the BBC have felt, OK, we can't really dwell too much on the war because there were also participating nations who are allies to Putin.

So, there's been a bit of an emphasis on, this is a party for Ukraine, an emphasis on this is to highlight Ukrainian culture, that we are holding a party because they can't.

Not so much about the war, and that's what makes all of the conversation around Zelensky.

That's why it's caused a lot of an interest in the rather surreal role that the EBU finds

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itself in.

A request by President Zelensky to make a surprise video appearance during the final, in which he was expected to urge the global audience of 160 million people to continue their support for his country, was apparently turned down by event organisers, the European Broadcasting Union, the EBU.

Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak have both said that Zelensky ought to be able to do so, and who knows, maybe by the time you hear this, the EBU will have reversed course.

But it is just the latest bittersweet moment for the Ukrainian public.

Kira Rudik is a Ukrainian MP.

Well, indeed it is very painful for us because it was such a dream for Ukraine to host the Eurovision this year, and it could be like super uplifting for people here as well.

However, we do understand that it would be almost impossible to ensure the security.

And honestly, we are very glad that it is England that is hosting Eurovision this year.

I have watched so many videos online with how Liverpool greets all the guests and how it is really Ukrainian party, Liverpool is just hosting it.

It has been amazing, and I think it made this closeness between our nations and our people even stronger, and it allowed to show the solidarity and love so much.

You know, yesterday was such an important day with the news that the United Kingdom is sending us their long-range missiles and their shadow force.

And so I had a meeting with my constituents and one of them asked, are we getting the weapons as exchange for Eurovision?

If so, it's totally worth it.

But this is to show you the feel that is on the ground.

We, of course, feel so much struggle, pain, but there are some good things.

And these good things, when we are reminded that we are not alone.

And this Eurovision contest is a fantastic way to remind that not only we are not alone, but we all stand together.

You can see why Zelensky would want to make the most of the opportunity.

A year ago, when the shock of the war was still so acute, so raw, barely a crack appeared in European or Western solidarity.

Whatever it takes was the cry.

And in lots of cases, this is still true.

Just this week, the UK government agreed to send long-range storm-shadow missiles to the Ukrainians.

Support among European publics remains strong, but it is inevitable that both Western populations and their governments should ask what the endgame might be, how credible a military victory rather than stalemate might seem.

And then there is the potential of a ticking clock, not just in men and materiel and bullets and bombs, all in short supply, but bizarrely enough from the American electoral timetable.

After Donald Trump's CNN Town Hall on Wednesday night, there can be little doubt that if there is a Trump restoration, American support will end.

I want everybody to stop dying, they're dying.

Russians and Ukrainians, I wanted to stop dying.

And I'll have that done, I'll have that done in 24 hours, I'll have it done.

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I need the power of the presidency to do it.

So, where are we?

There are reports that after the long winter and incremental Russian advance, the Ukrainian counter-offensive long-coming is at last on its way.

There appears to be some advance in the city of Bakhmut, the head of the Vargda Group, the paramilitary organisation, mercenaries, which have aided Russian forces, has warned of desertion at the Russian front there.

We can now rest on how successful this new counter-offensive can be, how much leverage Ukraine can extract, how good a position the country can place itself for any talks when exhaustion on every side finally inevitably hits.

We caught up with someone who watches the military developments in Ukraine meticulously, Shashank Joshi, defence editor and the economist.

In terms of momentum, we have seen a long-grinding Russian winter offensive that began in January and is pretty much running out of steam now.

It has basically failed.

It's failed to take the town of Bakhmut, let alone fulfil Vladimir Putin's broader aims of taking the entire Donbass region, which would involve taking the rest of Donetsk, which is part of Donbass.

Now, what we are looking at really in the hours and days, as we're speaking, is what could be the beginning of a Ukrainian offensive.

We're certainly seeing local counter-attacks around Bakhmut and Ukraine rolling Russian positions on the flanks of Bakhmut, outside the city, back by several kilometres.

I think what we sometimes call this in military language is shaping operations, that is beginning to take out depots, transport nodes, headquarters, behind the front lines, so that when you decide to send significant forces to try and break through defended lines, you're in a much more advantageous position.

I think what the Ukrainians are probably doing now is trying to make the Russians move around so that they expose weak points in the line.

I'm hesitant to say who's winning, although broadly, of course, Russia has lost in a sense.

It's completely failed to fulfil its war aims of taking Kiev, it's failed to take its war aims of even Eastern Ukraine.

However, that doesn't mean Ukraine is winning or has won.

I think for that to happen, we'd need to see significant territory taken back and some kind of settlement or end to this campaign in which they can rebuild themselves as a country.

And we're still a long way from that, I'd say.

It feels as if the war is now a very long war of attrition.

How do you assess how long each side might be able to continue and endure?

Obviously, there have been lots of stories about potential ammunition, depletion, heavy weapons depletion and so on support from the West or Russia's ability to corral resources from outside the West increasingly exhausted.

Which side can sustain this for longer, do you think?

First of all, it depends what happens in this offensive and if Russian forces are routed and lots of their troops are lost and suffer heavy casualties and expend lots of ammunition, that will have a huge and profound impact on their sustainability of this campaign.

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So let's not forget, Ukraine has been saving up for this offensive, therefore it may look like it's very weak, it may look like it doesn't have much ammunition in the East. But I'd suspect that's partly because it's been holding back its tanks, it's been holding back lots of its artillery ammunition and that's been very unfortunate for those Ukrainian soldiers defending Bakhmut, but I'm sure it will probably manifest in the coming days and weeks.

I think in terms of your broader question about which I guess gestures to the longer term, I'd say Ukraine is dependent on the West.

If we keep supplying it, it will keep fighting.

It has enough men, it has enough will to fight.

So it's almost a political and financial decision on the part of Europe and the United States than it is any kind of underlying industrial problem.

On the Russian side, they can keep going for a while, but I'd say at a much lower intensity and pace unless they are bailed out by the Chinese, which right now doesn't look like it's going to happen unless something quite dramatic happens to the Russians on the battlefield. So they will have to conduct another wave of mobilization.

They can do that.

It's a big country, but as they do that, they will suffer more and more political problems because you can't just scrape up 300,000 young men, throw them into a meat grinder and expect there to be no political backlash to that.

On that point about internal political problems within Russia, obviously there's been that endless speculation about how secure Vladimir Putin might be over the long term and what effect this apparently endless war is going to have on his regime.

Where are we in terms of that?

Is Putin still as secure as he's looked so far?

Well, my view generally has been that he's in a reasonably strong position, that there's been no real splits in his inner sanctum, in his inner leadership, and that's probably true.

But I have been struck in recent days by the vehemence with which Yevgeny Progosian, who is this rather sinister looking chap who's the head of the Wagner Group, the private military company that's been doing a lot of the fighting in Bakhmut.

The way he's turned on the Russian leadership.

He talked about using profanities that I won't repeat on here, but referred to the Russian leadership and many people thought he was referring to Vladimir Putin.

He called him grandad.

It's a sort of mocking term of abuse and he used even stronger language than that.

He later said he was referring to Gerasimov, the chief of general staff in Russia and Sergei Shoigu, the defense minister.

But I think people understand, Progosian is now publicly attacking the Russian leadership and getting ever closer to attacking Putin himself.

And I think Putin has a decision as to whether he accepts this and his authority is punctured a little bit or whether he rains him in.

But I have to say that Putin's position, I think, will depend much more on what happens in the offensive.

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And if Russian forces are humiliated, if they're pushed back substantially, if they suffer more heavy losses, I think Putin will try and continue this war.

He'll mobilize again.

He'll try and escalate.

But at some stage, his ability to deliver, his sense of invincibility, his promise that Russia is actually winning, it will all look completely absurd.

And I think his political authority will ebb more and more.

We should say that the Wagner group, boss, as you say, I mean, this is the sort of paramilitary group that has been assisting the Russian operations.

He was saying that Russian troops were banning their positions near Bakhmut, which has been the center of the fighting.

Is that credible?

It is.

But let's remember here Bakhmut's a small town, you know, we call it a city, but it's really a town.

And it's the...

A lot of the fighting is in the middle, but actually also a lot of the fighting is on what we call the flanks.

So if you imagine the front lines facing the city, you know, north and south of the town of the flanks.

And when he talks about Russians abandoning their position, he really means on the flanks.

And he's talking about one specific brigade, blaming that brigade for abandoning its position.

So this is part of it, as I think you've alluded to, a long running feud between Progosian and the regular army.

Progosian basically doing lots of the fighting and in some ways, Wagner has been the most successful bit of the Russian force.

The regular army, including its elite units like the paratroopers, the VDV and the naval infantry have done very badly.

So Progosian is saying, look, you know, I'm the only one who can deliver this.

Everyone else is absolutely runnish, but it is plausible that they're having setbacks.

And I think the situation is very fluid.

I think not just that brigade abandoning its ranks, I think we're seeing a lot of Ukrainian attacks literally as we speak.

And it's only going to become clearer over the, I think, a day or a couple of days as to whether this is just some opportunistic attacking by the Ukrainians to push the Russians back where they found a weak spot, or whether we are seeing something coordinated to try and really put the Russians on the back foot, make them send more units to buck moot.

And that by doing so, weakening their positions in the south, perhaps leaving spaces in the trenches where you can then see a much bigger armoured thrust by the Ukrainians.

I suppose the ultimate question is always going to be where this ends, isn't it, Shashankin?

And despite the attrition and the endless loss on both sides and the exhaustion and so on, it doesn't seem that there is any weakening of the resolve on either side to abandon quite absolutist ends.

I mean, the Ukrainians are still saying that, you know, they want to reclaim all territory.

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Putin still needs to eke out some sort of victory.

Is there any sense yet at all of how this might come to a resolution?

I think the Ukrainians have to allow their offensive to play out completely, because until then, they don't know what they can achieve by force of arms.

If they don't do very well, it will increase pressure on them to talk and compromise, because the West will say, look, you've had a great shot at this, but ultimately, more arms are not going to solve this problem.

So we have to do this by diplomacy, and that may involve, you know, freezing the current lines even if you don't want to formally give up territory.

If they are successful, then they may try and negotiate from a position of strength and say, look, you better negotiate now, Russia, or we may take back even more in a couple of months' time.

But I think what could also then happen is that offensive would be proof of concept to the West.

And Ukraine would say, look, we told you we can do this.

We told you we can push back even very well defended Russian positions if you gave us the equipment and you gave us the troops.

And so give us another round, give us the chance to do this.

And if the Russians won't negotiate and give us the territory back in a deal, we have to take it back, and we've shown you that we can do that.

So we're only going to have a clearer picture, I think, towards the end of the summer, because this offensive will not be a sort of matter of days, it will be, we're talking weeks and perhaps months.

And we do need a bit of time for that to play out before we can judge.

But there is an absolutely feasible pathway in which this war drags on into 2024, albeit at higher and lower intensities, in the same way of the past year, we've had highs, we've had lows and slow points, but that can absolutely continue into next year.

There's no doubt that that's a feasible option.

So the Ukrainians think that for now, time is just about on their side, and they maintain that they're fighting for something bigger than themselves, one of the key principles of the international order.

Obviously, the war has been going on for well over a year now.

In terms of Ukrainian resolve and Ukrainian feeling towards the war effort, do you feel that that is strong as ever, and do you feel that you are still getting enough support from international partners like the UK, Europe and the United States?

Of course, their support has changed, and it changed from emotional support when many decisions were made because they had to be made quickly to more sustainable, pragmatic plan support.

And again, we are talking right now, just a day after this hugely important decision on long-range missiles, that we think that when the United Kingdom took a leadership on, that others would follow.

In terms of feeling here on the ground, we are all running on a fuel that is called hope.

And right now, we live in the hope and the preparation for the counter offense.

We know that this year will be our chance to regain our territories and liberate our people.

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And we are right now concentrated on making sure that we get everything possible and impossible that our soldiers may need for this important and historic step forward that we will need to take.

So every morning when you are waking up, you are asking yourself what you can do to bring the country, the nation closer to the victory, because you honestly cannot plan ahead.

You don't know what is going to happen like in a week.

People say that only crazy plan for a month, and this is why your concentration needs to be on the victory and your personal efforts towards that.

Is victory for you and for the Ukrainian government, you think, does it remain the total reclamation of all Ukrainian territory, including Crimea from Russia, and there can be no peace negotiations or discussions which are not on that basis?

Yes, absolutely.

We are a sovereign country, independent country.

What happened to us in 2014 when some of the territories were annexed, it was wrong.

It was a super wrong precedent, and it cannot be repeated, and it cannot be agreed on that it is okay.

This is why right now when we are fighting, we know that we want back our country and we want freedom back to our people.

For me personally, I became politician because I wanted to build a country where we would be able to have children that be free and that would not have to face the struggle of growing up in a developing country that I faced.

Right now, we as a nation are robbed of this chance because we have a generation of kids that have seen dead bodies, that have been studying under the bombarding, that had to leave their homes, and there is one thing that we owe to this generation of children.

The thing is that they would not have to fight this war again, over and over.

It ends on our generation.

We win this war, and when we are talking about victory and peace, we need to ensure that Russia would not attack us again.

What do you say to those who say that it is unrealistic to expect Russia to retreat from Crimea, and that any negotiations that are absolutist in the way that you've described in terms of the total territory of restoration means that the war will just drag on indefinitely?

Then we agree to the precedent that in 21st century, one country can annex a territory from another country and get away with that, and the world would be watching and agreeing.

It's extremely dangerous because you know what I learned is it's not only Russia or China that are watching closely to how the Western countries react, how they support us, and what they can agree to.

There are so many other dictators all over the world who are watching closely, who are watching precisely, who are looking at the opportunity to raise their heads.

Is this the world that we want to live in?

Is this how much our values cost?

For us, it's very clear.

We know that we did not attack anyone.

We know that we were living our lives, and at some point another country is coming and saying, no, we are taking what is yours.

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We are killing your people.  
We are raping, destroying, taking everything to the ground.  
And now we want to negotiate.  
To negotiate what?  
To negotiate with whom?  
So we are not fighting right now for this one particular point, the point of my country.  
We are fighting right now for the precedent, one or another.  
And the precedent that we are fighting for is, no, you cannot attack another country.  
If you commit war crimes, you will be prosecuted, and there would be justice for your victims.  
We are fighting for the fact that the international laws matter, that the democracy matters, freedom matters.  
So as you're settling down to watch the glitz and the glamour and the craziness of Saturday night, or even if you don't plan to, it is worth remembering, however fatigued the West may have become, just how costly this war in Europe has been in the theatre itself.  
39,000 civilians dead, so many more wounded and maimed.  
Over 500 children among the dead's number, not to mention over 40,000 to 60,000 Russian troops carried home in body bags.  
Lives and livelihoods obliterated.  
8 million refugees, 8 million more internally displaced, \$350 billion worth of damage, greater than Ukraine's GDP, a GDP that has halved, by the way.  
All because of yet another man sat in the Kremlin with designs on the bloodlines of Europe, and it feels as if the beginning of the end hasn't even come yet.  
We'll be back right after this.  
This is The Newsagents.  
Welcome back.  
Now we go to the next in our My Political Makeup Series, the kind of cross between This Is Your Life and Desert Island disc for politics.  
One interesting politician, the same set of questions about what brought them into that great arena of politics, what keeps them there, what guides them, what politics makes them up.  
This week, a treat we recorded a little while ago, Jess Phillips, Labour Shadow Minister for Women and Domestic Violence, and of course, a fellow brummy, it is a treat.  
We hope you enjoy it.  
Jess, welcome back.  
I know you're going to get really brummy now that I'm here.  
People actually say that on a Friday when Auntie Emily and Uncle John aren't here, that I do go more brummy on my own.  
So with you here, quite frankly, I don't know, by the end of the podcast, I just don't know where we're going to be.  
You don't have much of a birthing of accent there, do you?  
No, when I'm at a drink, when I'm at an eye rate, when did it go though?  
I think it went when I was at Oxford, shamefully.  
Your mum must have it.  
Yes, she has it.



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No, but I think, shamefully, I think it went at Oxford because there weren't a lot of people who spoke like that.

I know, shameful.

But anyway, I mean, in a way, as well, you have become politically, I think, synonymous with Birmingham, mainly because you do have an accent.

And we've talked about this before, but it's funny, I think people always assume as well that you're working class.

Yeah, because I've got an accent.

Because you've got an accent.

And as you always say, that's not true.

That's not true at all.

Yeah.

So I come from working class.

Stop, like my parents were working class, but no, yeah, no, I mean, my parents were a going concern.

By the time I was like, by the time I was 15, they were positively affluent.

A going concern.

Very solvent partnership.

Do you think that people in Westminster, when you first arrived because of your accent, what do you think they thought of you?

Because you did stand out very early on.

I mean, I remember when I was working on Newsnight as a producer at the time, the deputy editor at the time was like, I'm very interested in Jess Phillips.

And I don't think I quite clocked you at that time.

And I was like, okay, right, fine.

But even then it sort of stood out and that was probably connected with the accent.

There's probably something about my accent, my willingness to speak like a human, I suppose.

I didn't go out of my way to, I remember, I tweeted in like the first few weeks, I'd spilt, and it was the first time I'd ever had to really like dress smartly for work.

And I'd spilt something down my top.

And I took a photo of it and I was like, it looks like I've lactated all over my top.

And I tweeted it.

And I think it was Harry from the sun was literally like, where did you come from?

He was like, you can't tweet things like this when you're a member of parliament.

Being working class, the idea of being working class, I think is definitely, seems electric to the establishment.

Yeah.

I mean, the other, as I said, I already mentioned it, but the other way in which you quickly roast some prominence is by what you do every year, which is list of women who are killed by men in the country in that given year.

Yasmin Begum.

Shatira Beebe.

Sherry Bruce.

Helen Laurie.

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What was the genesis of that?

What made you want to do it?

A backup plan was the original.

So on the first ever international women's day that I was there, myself and another member of parliament, she's now in the Lord Sue Heyman.

We wanted to try and do something to honour the women who had been killed in the previous year.

I mean, obviously the genesis comes from working in the domestic violence sector for many, many, many years and being really irritated by the fact that domestic murder is not headline news in the same way that any other homicide is.

And that annoyed me.

And we wanted to do something to honour those women and we wanted to lay out shoes in Westminster

Hall where they would have been standing to represent them.

Obviously, I asked like a new MP and I didn't know anything about the level of protocol that is needed to do anything in the Palace of Westminster.

And they basically laughed at me and then told me they had to always, and this seems ironic now, protocols that had to be in place in case the Queen died.

So like there was basically some rule that meant like I was infringing what would be the possible plans for the London Bridge takeover of parliament.

And I was a bit like, what at the time?

I think that was my first time I thought, well, this is really is a royal palace.

And this sort of like, you know, sorry, there's all these protocols in place and I was a bit like Sagittarius is in the night sky, so I'm afraid you can't stand there is really stuff like that.

And you will never learn all the rules and so you are constantly walking into walls.

And so literally at the last minute, I was just like, OK, I'm just going to read out the names and the names are provided to me by a woman called Karen and Gala Smith who had done this project where on Twitter she counts the dead women and she names them all.

And she was scaring through these tiny publications in local backwaters and to find the names. So it takes that level of detail.

She has to do it every single day.

She has to sit down and look through.

But now I'm pleased to say it's an easier job because they are reported in the national media now.

It's but, you know, I'm not taking all the credit, although, you know what, we'll take some credit.

We care much more about domestic murder now.

So job done.

Well done Karen and Gala Smith.

And on your brief, we've seen the illegal migration bill move through the Commons and Parliament more generally.

And there are provisions connected with that which are connected to human trafficking and slavery and so on.

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What's the worst case scenario, do you think?

It's not even the worst case scenario.

It's definitely what is going to happen in the case of modern slavery, which has no place in the bill at all.

And even as I sought to amend it and try and protect some groups of modern slaves.

These are women basically brought to Britain or children.

For sexual slavery or, you know, the Cockle Pickers, for example, who all died in, yeah, and all those people on the back of that lorry who all perished that time.

You know, it absolutely, every time I try and I'll amend it just to take out people who've been sexually exploited, for example, and now start thinking, it just needs removing.

It has no place in the bill.

But the worst case scenario and what will definitely happen, and in fact, Manchester Police reported that it was already happening, is a massive drop in the number of victims of modern slavery coming forward, women not coming out of the brothels that they are kept in.

And bear in mind, over 80% of all modern slavery recorded in the UK is slavery that happens within the UK by UK criminals.

And Manchester reported a dramatic drop even since the bill was first charted and in fact the previous one, the Borders Bill, which is the same bill.

And that's because effectively there is the traffickers or the human slavers can say to these women.

You'll be deported?

Yeah.

There's no point coming forward because there's no protection for it.

If I had a penny for every single time, I'd met a victim of trafficking or even domestic abuse or sexual violence whose husband or trafficker said to them, if you come forward, you'll be deported.

You know, I'd be able to set up my own refuge.

It's a common way that abusers, they will control you and the state is literally colluding with traffickers.

The bill helps traffickers.

And do you think Sorella Braverman has any conception of that?

Well, first and foremost, no, she doesn't have any conception of that because she's not across her brief, nor does she understand it enough.

She doesn't understand the system of modern slavery.

She runs in her own country, in her own department.

She's in charge of it and she says ridiculous things like people are coming forward to the modern slavery system who are faking it, but nobody can come forward to the modern slavery system.

That's not how it works.

You have to be referred in.

And the main referral points are the police, the border force, the national crime agency, all of which the boss of all of those is Sorella Braverman.

So if anyone's referring people in who are fraudulently claiming that they are victims

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of modern slavery in order to stay in our country, then she's the boss of the agencies that are doing that fraud.

And she doesn't understand the very basic fact of the system that she's in charge of.

And to follow that up, she also just doesn't care.

She hates migrants more than she cares about catching traffickers.

That's all I can assume from the modern slavery elements of the illegal migration bill.

So we should talk a bit about you, really, from that.

There's not much to go from there, so let's talk about you rather than Sorella Braverman.

What was your inspiration into politics?

Was there a moment or an event or a personal?

What was it?

I mean, not always I grew up in a political environment where we were always campaigning about something.

I don't know.

Your mom and dad are very political.

Very, very political.

So as a child, I was balloon release.

I'm sure all campaigns where there was a balloon release in 1984 were utterly successful.

I presume we've got rid of nuclear arms because we definitely balloon released for that.

Really, really left wing.

Yeah.

Well, I mean, he didn't like Jeremy Corbyn, but yeah, makes Jeremy Corbyn look like Blair.

So we campaigned a lot and I went to Women's Liberation Playgroup for goodness sake.

The women's movement was a massive part of my life growing up and it was always like meeting in our house, which I used to think was political meetings and I realise now as I've got older, it's just an excuse for drinking.

Like all good women's meetings, but I became less political actually under the last Labour government.

I suppose my politics, the politics of my parents was always born out of injustice and when things started to go a bit better and people were getting wealthier and less to be angry about.

Yeah, there was less to be angry about.

So I sort of waned in my politics.

So really, I think it was the collision course of two events really and that is the 2010 election.

I'd actually left the Labour Party and actually I felt a little bit guilty about that when it came to 2010.

Why did you leave?

We left over Iraq and whilst I definitely felt that I should leave over Iraq, my mum and dad were still paying my direct debit and they left so I didn't even have to click the form to say it, but you know, people have often said it as if it's a great point of principle.

It's like, yeah, my mum stopped the direct debit, but my mum was dying and I mean, she died in 2011 and watching her dying as the Labour government also died, it made me feel

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like, you know, pull these socks up, you've got to work at this, it doesn't stay.

Like, don't take for granted progress is made, basically.

You sort of felt that that was a sort of twin, a parallel kind of thing.

My mother was my political icon really.

I mean, when my brothers were very little and she lived in, like, you know, in Bairwood in the Black Country, in two up two down terraces, she took on ICI, the country's biggest drug company, and managed by 1981 to have found all the people who needed compensating for a drug that they had taken called a rolled-in that had made her own mother go blind.

And she'd sued them for like 8.1 million pounds and she'd never had a house phone.

So my mum had dedicated the last 20 years of her life really to trying to improve systems within the NHS, trying to make care in the NHS better.

And actually, I felt like the system failed her quite badly and she was dying because of failures within the system.

And it just made me more activist again.

And there's that clip of you on question time, isn't there?

From before I was a member of Farland, yeah, you know, like, you're having a go at someone.

It was Sade Vase and I feel really bad now because I quite like her, but at the time she was the chair of the Conservatives at the time, yeah, it was at Hansworth Grammar School in Birmingham and I basically said, what do you know in your ivory tower or something like that?

Which, you know, I would never say to Sade, I think she's amazing.

And what's your earliest political memory?

Oh, I mean, all my earliest memories are political.

In my head Margaret Thatcher was a member of my family, not because we liked her, but because we loathed to say much that the only conversation we ever had was about what Margaret Thatcher was doing wrong that week.

So she was your political villain?

Oh, 100% Mrs. T.

Do you ever look at her now and the sort of politician she was and obviously as a first member of Farland?

Do you have more complicated feelings about her now?

Much more, much more.

Really?

But even my dad said to me when Boris Johnson was the Prime Minister, he said, I never thought I'd say this, Mrs. Thatcher would never have done this and I was like, oh my God, yeah, we got some perspective.

What is that complexity you feel about?

I feel like what a woman, I feel what a woman, like how she was working class really.

I mean, from well, you know, well to do respectable working class, yeah, but like, you know, she's from this small life in the East Midlands and she manages to rise to the top of the Conservative Party in the 1970s, even that alone to rise to the top of the Conservative Party in a time where they, you know, they didn't hide the light under a bushel about not liking women.

I mean, she didn't either.

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You couldn't believe it.

Yeah, I think every decision she made was awful.

But I also, when you watch interviews with her now and it's funny because I now look at it through completely different eyes.

We were literally, it was like a pantomime.

We were like, when she came on the telly and things and she took the milk away from kids like me.

But I think she's an absolute class act when you watch her at being interviewed now.

She sort of babies the interviewer and dismisses the whole premise of their questions.

She was so capable that it's hard not when you're particularly compared to some politicians and I think if you were working class yourself or not from the elite, you recognise the difficulty of the journey and anyone who doesn't just doesn't want to do it.

Yeah, total admiration for her in that regard.

Something about other, I suppose pioneers, obviously Diane Abbott has lost the whip now.

How do you feel about that?

I feel really mixed about it.

I feel sad.

Genuinely.

I feel sad and I hope that there is a conclusion of, redemption sounds too ridiculous like we're an X-factor and we're all going on a journey.

I hope that there's a way of Diane coming out of this because people do stupid things and make mistakes.

I think what she did was horrendous.

She wrote this letter to the Observer which essentially suggested that Jews and Irish and travellers who were not subject to racism, they were subject to prejudice.

The sort of crassness of comparing it to being ginger that I thought was the most jarring thing.

But she has apologised and both on the left say, well look, if someone's apologised and they do it straight away, should we not recognise that?

The reality is that the scourge of anti-Semitism within the Labour Party over the previous period, Keir Starmer rightly made it, you know, he's an absolute core mission in the first years of his leadership that we had to rid ourselves of it and that meant zero tolerance and so he absolutely has to show that and in his reaction to Diane's desire to make a hierarchy of racism.

We'd like to see a conclusion when she's back at the PRP.

Essentially, yeah.

I think she deserves it.

What's your political aspiration?

What would you like to achieve?

I like the government to start.

I'm taking that as a given.

Take that as a given.

If you could do one thing with a magic wand and you could just get it done, there's no push-back, there's nothing, you just get it done.

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It would have to be social care, wouldn't it?

It would have to be social care because the push-back is always the problem that leads to no progress in that area.

It would have to be a one that can just overnight do all the work that needs to get the country into a position where everybody is satisfied with how we deal with dealing with people when they are sick and when they are elderly because we're all going to get there, we're all going to need it, it's going to need to be a universal service.

If you had a magic wand, you'd get over all the work that that's going to take.

Finally, if you could speak to Jess in 2015, the night before you got elected, what advice would you give to her?

What would you say to her about the eight years ahead?

There are definitely things I've said and done that if I add my time again, I feel like I'd just cause myself less grief and pain, but I don't know.

I like the fact that I stumbled into it like a Banshee and rocketed around a bit like I was Crash Bandicoot.

A PlayStation game of the past, for anyone who needs a fair with Crash and his work.

Crash Bandicoot was a great game, but I wouldn't want to take that away because I think it sort of has led to the sort of rich tapestry of where I am now, but I suppose, I don't know, the advice I'd probably give is try not to fall down rabbit holes and that's the advice I give to other people now and new members of parliament, they come in and they're like, oh, but you know, my constituents moan at me if they don't see me on the live camera at PMQs and I'm like, are you joking?

Like eight people will moan at you, you become very obsessed with the negative and politics does this a lot and actually the culture wars thing is absolutely that, like focus on what you can do, don't just always focus on winning the row, I suppose is what I'd say.

Jess Phillips, Bob.

So, very much.

You're very welcome.

Right, that is it from all of us for this week.

John and Emily were not here.

You will have noticed John has had to take Emily off on a cheer up weekend to Magaluf after she found out that Catherine Tate would be doing our Eurovision scores instead of her.

She was completely inconsolable.

We tried to tell her there's always next year.

Remember, you can catch up on all our shows from this week on Global Player, send us story tips and feedback to newsagents at global.com.

Thanks to our production team on the newsagents, Gabriel Radus, Laura Fitzpatrick, Ellie Clifford, Georgia Foxwell, Will Gibson-Smith, Alex Barnett and Rory Simon, our editor is Tom Hughes and our executive producer is Dino Sophos.

It's presented by Emily Maitlis, John Sople and me, Lewis Goodall.

We'll see you on Monday.

Have a lovely weekend.

This has been a Global Player original podcast and a Persephoneka production.