

## [Transcript] The News Agents / Will the Tories move even further to the right?

This is a global player original podcast.

The independent expectations are that the Conservatives will lose more than a thousand seats and that Labour need to make big gains.

That was the worst, worst case scenario for the Conservative Party.

You can't lose a thousand seats, that would be crazy.

Well, now, on Monday, we have the full sets of local election results in and the actual number the Conservatives lost, all told, was a thousand and sixty-three.

So today, we speak to senior Conservative David Davis, former Brexit secretary, who tells us that it could have been worse.

Firstly, I think it could have been significantly worse.

Actually, I think if we'd had another leader like Liz Truss or Boris Johnson, it would have been worse.

I think the trend we were on then was downwards and it would have been worse than this.

And whilst that is undeniably true, it does raise big questions for Rishi Sunak if he wants to ever lead his party to victory.

Does he appeal to younger, more progressive voters, who he might take of Labour and the Lib Dems?

Or does he find a place even further to the right?

Welcome to the News Agents.

The News Agents.

It's Emily.

And it's Lewis.

And John has gone to Seeker Republic.

It all got too monarchic for him this weekend, so he's in Paris.

He's the biggest monarchist going, what are you talking about?

Honestly, not this week.

But Monarchy Free Zone for today anyway.

And we are going to pick up, though, as we were saying before, on the local elections, because all 230 councils are now in.

Redcar and Cleveland, for Byzantine reasons, which won't be telling us, didn't fully count until today.

And so now we've got the full scores on the doors.

And they are Labour up 537 seats, Conservatives down 1063 seats, Lib Dems also great performance with 407 seats up, and Greens also up 241 seats.

So basically, the areas that were voting in England last Thursday pretty much universally moved away from the Conservatives, two different progressive or non-conservative parties.

And what seemed to have happened is a very efficient reallocation of the non-conservative vote moving to wherever or whoever was the most likely side to defeat the Tories.

And I think at this point, Rishi Sunak cannot really keep arguing that he has stopped the decline.

That was always the narrative, wasn't it, that, oh, he's not Boris Johnson and he's not Liz Truss, and therefore things will turn around once we see his competence.

Maybe it would have been worse, we can explore that.

I mean, it almost certainly would have been worse.

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But he has now proved conclusively that you can still lose a thousand seats, a thousand seats on top of where they were in May of 2019, which was a terrible, terrible period for the Tories.

So I think that narrative now ends.

And I think the trouble is within the party now, everyone is saying the same thing, something must be done.

But meaning different things.

So you'll have what I'm going to call the Simon Clark wing, which is we have to be a party of housebuilding.

We have to do something for young voters.

We have to recognise people are in real trouble and they can't actually get on the ladder and they can't live lives that their parents were.

And then you've got the other wing, which is this never would have happened if Boris Johnson had still been in charge and we've got to cut taxes and we've got to be even more conservative and more to the right.

And weirdly, both those criticisms of Sunak are right.

And it's almost impossible for him to move one way or the other and keep the party together.

Yeah, because I mean, when we did the show on Friday and we had quite a lot of the results in and particularly from the Red Wall and one of the themes from Friday, the early part of Friday was this quite unexpected labour resurgence in so many of the places in which they've gone backwards since 2019 and before as well.

And then later on on Friday afternoon, after we finished recording, where we started to have a lot of the big Southeast councils in, you know, places, you know, in Oxfordshire and in parts of Kent and in Sussex and so on.

I mean, my words, some of the results from there, and I don't think this has been partly because when they came in and then it was the coronation and the coverage very quickly moved to the coronation, I don't think it's been fully internalised, although it will have been by the Tory party, just how appalling, like a bloodbath in the south to the Lib Dems. So you take a few examples, right?

Somewhere like South Oxfordshire, say South Oxfordshire contains Henleon Thames, like traditionally

we would not have thought of anywhere as being more true blue Conservatives, you know, the old constituency of Michael has a time Boris Johnson, Windsor and Maidenhead, which includes Eaton College, is now Lib Dems, right?

Yeah, exactly.

And, you know, before in South Oxfordshire, as recently as 2019, the Tories had 33 seats.

Now they have one, they have one seat, the Lib Dems had never had a majority there before you look at somewhere like Chichester, the Lib Dems have gained control, their majority control never happened before.

As recently as 2019, the Tories had 42 seats, the Lib Dems had three, now the Conservatives have five, the Lib Dems have 25, Horsham, the Lib Dems have gained control there as well, they gained 25 seats, the Tories lost 21, as recently as 2019, they had 39 of the 45 seats.

It goes on and it goes on and it goes on.

Basically, across the southeast of England now, this sort of place that is just so embodied

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conservatism in our political history, you see a massive Lib Dem ribbon running across it.

And what's extraordinary about that is, is that we talk about the collapse of the red wall.

That happened in 2019 in a parliamentary sense, but actually in a local government sense, the Labour Party didn't really lose that much control in most of these places before and since, happened in a few places, but in the main, in a local level and nuts and bolts remain Labour, now we're seeing this absolute route across the south of England for the Conservatives.

And I think, I mean, they will be, you know, if you're someone like Jeremy Hunt or Michael Gove or so many cabinet ministers whose constituencies are in these places with on paper, rock solid Conservative majorities, you're going to be really worried.

Yeah.

I mean, it's interesting because we talked, you talked a bit on Friday about whether Labour, given that they're not in double digits in terms of a poll lead over the Tories, if you project it onto a sort of national share, would Labour then need to be in some kind of coalition arrangement?

And I was reading a really interesting piece actually by Ben Ansell, which talks about tactical coping, a sort of take on tactical voting.

And actually the whole idea of a coalition for Labour stands if you think people go to the polls and just vote for the party that they want in their constituency.

But if you actually grant the electorate the sophistication to understand now the way that tactical voting or coping works, and if it's about your strategic preferences, this is another term that he uses, and your strategic preference is anything but Conservative, then actually you vote in a way that could indeed pave the way for a Labour majority.

Now I just think that's an important thing because clearly when people are voting for Lib Dems in local elections, we know that Lib Dems do really well.

They're very popular as local councillors.

They've got a really good marching army on the streets, same for the Greens, so I'm not minimising what they actually do in local constituencies.

And obviously we vote in two ways.

We vote firstly for what you want to happen in your local constituency, but also we vote in a bigger way when it comes to national election for who we want in that top position of power.

And I think if you start to understand that the electorate is already thinking in that way now, it probably won't have to be down to parties to decide who they work with.

We may decide that for them already in the way that we vote.

Yeah, we should say of course, I mean the Lib Dems have a long history of overperforming in local elections and then underperforming at a general election.

They're more thinly resourced at a general election and so on.

So it doesn't mean that this is...

And I also say actually that history has been shattered by what happened when they were in coalition with the Conservatives in 2010.

Don't forget during the Iraq War years when Charles Kennedy was the only party leader to

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stand against the Iraq War.

They were getting 50 seats.

Yeah, totally.

And partly what we're seeing here, we've seen it for a few election cycles now, is the Lib Dems managing to finally divest themselves of the shackles of that coalition period and re-establishing themselves as a natural alternative to the Conservatives in a lot of these places, which they've long been, but they're now doing it to even greater success in many of these places than they've had before.

And I think part of the reason for that is, look, in 2019, we were talking about and talked about since this sort of realignment that has been going on in Britain, this sort of post-Brexit realignment.

We could see that it was a realignment that worked very much in the Conservatives' favour because yes, they were gaining in these labour sort of areas, Brexit voting areas, fewer graduates, older populations and so on, but they were still keeping their southern heartlands, you know, with more graduates, younger populations and so on.

I think what you've started to really see reach a climax in this set of elections, what we've seen for a few cycles now, is that flipping on its head.

And you've started to see this realignment start to work deeply against the Conservatives because they no longer have Corbyn, they've had the chaos and the pillars of that realignment and that victory have started to move away from them.

And the question then it poses for Sunak in terms of what to do is a really interesting one, because one natural way that they might try and react is think, OK, we've got a big problem with younger voters, we've got a big problem with demographic flight, people leaving London to the sort of home counties and so on, they still keep voting Labour, these people we've managed to alienate over Brexit and all sorts of things, one-one thing can we do, what we can build more houses.

But of course the problem with that is, is that one of the key drivers of these election results is partly because the Lib Dems in the south do run as the NIMBY party, they run against housing targets and it's very difficult to oppose them.

And in terms of what Sunak can do, I think part of the legacy of this, quite frankly, is that the years of Conservative government, particularly now, they have alienated so many of these groups and so many of their natural supporters, whether it's social liberals or small government Conservatives, Greenbelters, higher income young people, higher income public sector workers, higher income like Cosmopolitan, anti-Brexit voters, and then part of their new base in the north through the Boris Johnson and Liz Trussies, there has been such a sort of process of alienation, it's hard for Sunak to know how to turn.

Yeah, I mean, you can also say they could be the party of house building in the southeast and the people that would move into those houses, first and foremost, would be people moving down from inner cities from London.

And they still don't vote Tory anyway.

Yeah, who probably are Lib Dem or Labour voters anyway, who are just taking their politics further into rural parts of the southeast.

I guess the other thing I'd say is that when the Lib Dems do really well, then probably they will open themselves up to more scrutiny.

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And that scrutiny is us checking them to see whether they're, ooh, we don't like house building or we don't like HS2 and Amisham and Chesham, actually stands up to what they're saying as a national party because arguably you can't run both arguments at the same time. But I think right now for Soonak, given that he's only got 18 months, two things can happen. He starts giving into, yes, there is an even right a wing of his party.

And that's the Natcons, right?

The people that we know are meeting next week, they like grassroots conservatism, family values, low taxation, they're kind of list trust sites with a bit of sort of Christian values thrown in on top of that.

Yeah, more authoritarian anti-boats.

Right.

So Ella Braverman would be their kind of load star in some sense.

They're quite like a bit of the old cultural as well.

Yeah.

They cut taxes for them and see where that gets him, although they still on one level sort of blame him for existing because they think that Boris Johnson should never have been ousted and that Rishi Soonak was part of that user-patient, right?

Cool.

Yeah.

Cool.

Or the other thing he does is he goes the whole hog and says, right, I'll be whatever you want to the next generation, which begs the question why the door is doing this now, 13 years too late.

But he can technically promise anything he wants because there's only 18 months left before we see it.

Well, look, to some extent, the 2019 Conservative Coalition was always going to be very difficult to hold together.

I think the long story of the last two years has been that the Conservative Party has singly failed to keep it together and it is fraying in every direction.

It's hard to know in which direction Soonak should turn.

I think though, I mean, we are going to see, we've already started to see the glimmers of it over the course of the weekend and as the Conservative Party has internalised this stuff, you've started to see people going, oh, well, this just proves we need to be more authentic and conservative.

We need to turn to the right.

I think there's two things to say about that.

One is like, it's weird.

What you've seen in this election is three parties, let's broadly say, call them progressive parties, sort of left of centre, broadly speaking kind of parties, do very well.

It would be, it's kind of a weird kind of reaction to that to turn around and say, ah, we've seen three broadly progressive parties doing really well.

Ah, what we should do is go even more down the sort of anti-woke reactionary kind of direction.

Imagine if we'd had like three, let's say, sort of more reactionary Conservative parties

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do extremely well in the wake of a local elections.

I think we all know what the response to that would be and it wouldn't be exactly the opposite of what all of those parties want.

So that's number one.

And number two, I think, is that, OK, let's say Rishi Sunak says, oh, yeah, let's go to the right.

Right in which direction?

We often forget Rishi Sunak is already a pretty right-wing Conservative Prime Minister.

He's very right-wing on the boats.

He's very right-wing, actually, he's dry as dust economically.

He would like to move faster on a tax-cutting direction.

I think we'll see that before the next general election.

He constantly talks about, he and Oliver Dowden, even though it doesn't sit very naturally with them, constantly talk about anti-woke, rewriting history, all of this sort of stuff.

So right-wing where?

Right.

If you take the last four Conservative Prime Ministers, David Cameron, Theresa May, Boris Johnson, Rishi Sunak.

David Cameron looks like the moderate, right, because he was in coalition with the Lib Dems.

And he sort of speaks and sounds and feels like a moderate.

Don't forget the kind of policy that he introduced.

You know, George Osborne and David Cameron on austerity, on the bedroom tax, on the cut to disability allowances, on the fact that in the European Parliament, he joined the really weirdo sort of radical group to the right because he didn't like being in the sort of mainstream right of centre group.

I think we've forgotten just how far that shift has happened.

Brexit confused everything because it seemed to be a sort of top to bottom rather than right to left move.

It was like a sort of earthquake schism through the rock.

So we couldn't really work out whether that was left or right in the end, and that's why you ended up with the whole red wall.

But actually, I mean, Rishi Sunak, on top of Boris Johnson's Brexit, on top of Theresa May and how right she was in the Home Office, on top of David Cameron and austerity.

Yeah.

I mean, that's pretty punchy now.

And that is what at least some of these voters will have been reacting against.

In a moment, we're going to speak to the former Brexit Secretary and Shadow Home Secretary, David Davis.

Now, he sits in a kind of curious position within the Conservative Party.

He's always been against ID cards.

He's always been very much pro-civil liberties.

But he is still firmly on the right of his party, and we want to get a sense from him of where the party sits right now.

This is the news agents.

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Welcome back.

David Davis is with us, as promised, and those local election results in which we saw the Conservatives lose 1,000 council seats, more than 1,000 council seats, more than their worst anticipated number.

What does that tell you, David, about the public's relationship right now to the Conservative Party?

Well, the primary thing to notice about it was, I mean, firstly, I think it could have been significantly worse.

Actually, I think if we'd had another leader like Liz Truss or Boris Johnson, it would have been worse.

The trend we were on then was downwards, and it would have been worse than this. So well done.

It wasn't as terrible as it might have been.

Yeah, well, actually, I mean, I've got no qualms about saying that.

It could have been worse.

And what you saw about it, largely, it's not universally true, because it varies in bits of the country, but largely what you can say is that it was an abstention vote by the Tories, mostly, not a transfer vote.

That's very important in terms of reading it as most people are, it's got implications for the next general election.

So a lot of my young colleagues are very nervous, Red Wall seats are nervous, because, you know, you've seen that's where it showed most in many ways.

But the simple truth is, it's still winnable.

What's happened is...

Wait a second.

The simple truth is, it's still winnable.

I mean, obviously, everything is ultimately always still winnable, but there was nothing about those results that show the Conservatives on track to win an election.

That's what I say.

Had it been the other two previous Prime Ministers, it would have been significantly worse in my view.

And what does that tell you?

And it comes back to why I actually voted for SUNAC in the first place.

Everybody thought I was going to vote for trust, and I said, no, I want SUNAC because I want clear competence, you know.

And the clear competence has come across, you know, I don't agree with Rishi on elements of tax policy, elegance immigration policy, but he is taking a grip on the issues.

He is setting out to deal with his five aims, his five targets and so on.

So that's half of the story.

It's not the whole story.

The second half of the story, which I think he's got to come up with, is not just the practicalities, not just the, as it were, trying to fix the machine.

It's also about the vision for Britain.

And there is, at the moment, neither, none of the leaders have a vision for Britain,

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which is, which I could sort of tell you in five sentences, you know.

I couldn't do it for STAMA and I couldn't do it for SUNAC yet.

And I think areas like housing, areas like elements of health service delivery, elements of the future growth policy, all these things, I've got to be articulated much more clearly. SUNAC's advantage in this is that STAMA has made no inroad on this area at all, and so is Knopenfield, and I think he can win that contest.

If it's a battle of technocrats, we won't do well enough to recover.

If there is a battle of vision, we will.

So SUNAC's five aims, his five objectives, it's not enough.

He's got to do something more.

Yeah, I don't think it's enough.

I mean, it's important.

Look, I mean, cost of living is by far and away, I think, for most people, the most important thing in terms of actually casting a vote.

If you ask them in a doorstep, they might say small votes or whatever, but when it comes down to it.

You've seen this in past elections, where, I mean, in 2005, when I was Shadow Home Secretary, we had a massive lead on immigration, but we didn't win.

Did the Tories have to be a party of house building now, when you talk about housing?

Well, I actually think we do.

I mean, I think we've got to cut that gaudy or not.

I mean, look, when I bought my house in my 20s, before either of you were born, the 65% of my cohort were buying their own home.

This is not simply a linear tussle between targets and Nimbies and all that.

You've had 13 years, and you're not going to be able to translate a massive house building programme by the time of the next election.

It's just not going to happen.

Your coalition is split.

We saw what happened in the local elections.

You mentioned the bad results in the Red Wall.

The results in the South were even worse, and you were basically running against a Liberal Democrat Party, adopting the Nimbious clothes possible, and, you know, you see in places like South Oxfordshire or in the whole valley, or you name it, it's always been wiped out, partly on that basis.

My constituency is full of villages which have, some of them, doubled in size in the last decade or so.

That won't do it.

It takes too long and so on.

The way to do it is, this is not just my policy idea, others have talked about it too, is a New Towns policy.

It means saying we've got to, I mean, today, there are 3 million people living in New Towns created as a result of the 20th legislation, and that's where we've got to go.

Well, it also means, doesn't it?

Be honest though, it also means turning round to dying in the wall Tories and saying you

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will have new housing developments at the back of your garden, you know, on your back door.

But no, it's not.

No, exactly.

Look, if you...

So you're saying no to that?

No, no, you don't.

That's going to happen to some extent anyway, but whichever policy's outcome, because there's always going to be pressure for the houses, if you get in a helicopter and fly from here to my constituency, which I've done once or twice, it's like flying over a golf course, which are outside London, Birmingham, Manchester.

The country is full of green fields and they aren't all green belt.

If you said about saying, OK, let's...

So wait, why if that was so obvious from the helicopter?

Why wasn't it obvious to the Tories for 13 years then?

But all Labour, for that matter, all Liberals, let's take the last 13 years, go on.

But the same is true, let us say, of a big policy back in Thatcher's Day, like right to buy.

Nobody thought of that for 30 years, and all of a sudden it came along and it transformed the attitude to a property-only democracy.

And we need to find some transformative policies.

This is my point.

This is not about a technocratic, I'm 5% better than you at this or that element of policy. It's about some big ideas.

So you, David Davis, if you were Prime Minister, you'd say I am going to be the party of Housebuilding now.

I would say I'm going to parcel all, which will allow us to create new towns.

In terms of the wide reaction in the party, do you think that there will be pressure for Sunak to move further to the right from some part of the party in response to this, to be more so-called authentically conservative?

The question almost answers itself, because what is to the right?

I am characterised all the time by your profession as a right-wing Tory, right?

So what's the issue on civil liberties, right or left, crime generally, immigration generally?

I think the public's view on this is what delivers for me, and that's the real test.

What delivers for me?

That's why I picked out housing is a big issue.

So what would be your response to the NatCon group, the group to the right of Sunak that we understand is sort of gathering, is having conferences next week, which is about sort of grassroots family values, bringing Sunak more in line on things like tax cuts and taking the Conservatives to the right.

What would be your message to them?

Well, like all these things.

I would agree with them on some of these things.

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I mean, I would agree that we have to have a tax cuts policy at some point.

I mean, I'm not a fan of a high tax policy.

I've made no bones about that, but each of these is circumstantial evidence.

So after the trust experiment, which went badly wrong, the Chancellor of the day, no matter who it was, frankly, had to first and foremost avoid destabilizing the market.

So he was where he was.

Now we've got a degree of stability.

I think come the autumn and the spring of next year, he should be able to look at a variety of things.

I will be looking at straightforward ordinary people's income tax.

I will be looking at IR35 and so on.

If this is a bring back Boris vehicle, does that work?

It won't bring back Boris.

I mean, look, I think we may have this conversation after the Privileges Committee has made its judgment.

If it's a bring back Boris vehicle, it's completely misconceived.

If it's a win the next election vehicle, then some of it is well conceived.

The Polish economy will considerably overtake the UK economy by 2030.

I think the Brexit regret stands at 63% today, all those who would vote against Brexit stands at 63%.

I wonder what your message would be now about Brexit benefits given where we are right now?

Well, firstly, I don't base anything on forecasts, you know, because one of the difficulties is these economic forecasts are always wrong.

And I remember one of the first questions I asked after I seized to be Brexit Secretary was to a Treasury Minister.

I said, when was the last time the Bank of England, the OBR or the Treasury got a forecast right and the House of Commons fell into laughter because it never does.

So, you know, saying, oh, in 2030, you don't know what's going to happen in 2030.

You have no idea at all.

And a lot of it depends on the things we've been talking about.

Well, the projection is that Poland's economy is strengthening quicker than ours.

I can guarantee the projection will be wrong.

You know, I mean, you don't know.

We are set.

I have an economics degree and I can tell you now it will be wrong.

Well, yeah, it might be wrong, but the general trend might be correct.

I mean, we don't know that, but the OBR have been basically correct about the cost to British productivity and the British economy of Brexit.

I chuckle when I hear these things.

I heard over the weekend that the local authority votes were a Brexit vote and yet, you know, stock nunties, red car, Leicester, even places in the middle of the fends that voted to leave, all big swings to us.

So it's sort of, you know, it's people going for confirmatory bias.

I think what I will say is that the government to date has not done enough to exploit Brexit.

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I mean, you've got some things out of it.

You've got the vaccine thing, which was worth thousands of lives.

I don't know how you can...

We do know that that is highly controversial and there is every likelihood that we could have got the vaccine without being...

No, no, no, no, that bit's not true.

That bit is simply not true.

You know, you could not...

We had at the time attempts by the European Commission to trigger the laws against us to prevent us making benefits or anything.

So you've got that.

There are things we still haven't done.

You know, you've got the one or two trade treaties, not enough yet.

You've got an approach on regulation, some of which is right, some which is wrong, but not quick enough.

I mean, we ought to have the beginnings of artificial intelligence regulation now.

We've not caught up on that.

So there are a series of things, but, you know, the idea that you can make a prediction over several years on the back of somebody's forecast is awful.

Or the regrets?

No, well, that's hardly surprising.

You've had a conservative party, primarily the Brexit arguer, in a sort of fairly...

Put it mildly a chaotic year.

When we get through this and we start to argue this properly, when Sunak has a time to deliver the policies that he quite rightly thinks will deliver on our Brexit agenda, including science and technology, which is barely started, brand new ministry, then the story will be different.

So people have realised that it's harder to trade with Europe, it's harder to travel to Europe.

You can't stay there for as long as you used to be able to, two things are more bureaucratic and they don't like it.

Maybe that's the regret.

Yeah.

When we were going through the Brexit referendum, I had some builders working on my house. And every time I came home on the Friday, they'd say, you know, what are you doing mistake?

It's a different group each time.

And when George Osborne had made his prediction of a £4,000 per family penalty, I drove into my courtyard and the quite clever man who ran the building company, pulled himself up by his bootstraps from his background, said to me, Mr Davis, £4,000 for my freedom, cheap at the price.

So it's not all about economy, although that will turn...

So get on with it.

It's going to cost you more.

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Get on with it and enjoy your freedom.

Well, we should get on with it.

No, it didn't say it's going to cost you more.

I said we should get on with it, but it's not the only story.

We talked about the new law that came in a week before the coronation and what happened on Saturday seems to be fair, absolutely inevitable.

Well, inevitable, well, likely because the law brought in, I think I was the only Tory voted against it.

And the reason I voted against it was it was heavy-handed and imprecise at the same time.

And so it depended on how the police interpreted it.

And what's interesting is that you had a left and right-hand problem because one hand of the police talked to the demonstrators for four months beforehand, agreed the placards they could bring, agreed the luggage straps they could bring, even agreed the megaphones to my surprise, I wouldn't have agreed megaphones, and then another group arrested them.

Do you think they were always intending to do that?

No, no, no, I don't.

I know I'm not a conspiracy theorist on this.

There's a pretty much absolute commitment in modern British law to the right to protest, not the right to disrupt, not the right to destroy somebody's day, but the right to protest.

And I think they were trying to find the way down it.

And I think there were so many of them, like Lord knows how many police there were in London that day, a very large number, and many of the people policing the demo were Welsh policemen, you know.

And I just think they didn't talk to each other.

I think it's as silly as that.

But it doesn't mean the government doesn't have a responsibility for it.

It allowed this by the way the bill, this bill, the public order bill, and the previous years criminal sentencing bill, both together conspired to create the circumstance.

That's why I asked if it was inevitable, because there is a carelessness, isn't there, in that legislation, that the government is putting all this pressure and onus onto the police.

I mean, given that we know where public trust at the moment lies, particularly with the Met Police, given that we know there are failings, why would you do that?

Why would you change the law to make their job even harder?

Well, I think two things.

I mean, number one, there was a real problem to be solved.

I mean, you know, the public were quite rightly outraged at the way people had used the right to demonstrate the right to protest and turned it into the right to disrupt people's lives, whether it's blocking a motorway, stopping ambulances, stopping people getting to work, blocking train, gluing themselves to trains.

And that's an overuse of it.

And they wanted to resolve that.

That's that's one piece.

So the motive is understandable.

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The way they did it, frankly, was designed more around headlines than courts of law. Where do you think the right to protest now stands in this country?

Oh, I mean, look, my grandfather was arrested for leading a demonstration in the 30s. He spent six months in prison, partly because he refused to undertake not to make inflammatory speeches, but he was arrested.

That we from that point, that's when the National Council of Civil Liberty is liberty today was founded.

And today we have a proper recognition of the right to protest.

But it's right to be seen, to some extent, a right to be heard.

And of course, if you bring half a million people to London, the ground march, it's going to disrupt the capitals somewhat.

But you shouldn't confuse that with an approach which says, I'm going to get news by ruining everybody else's life, by disrupting everybody else's life, by by causing trouble.

That's not the right to protest.

That's something else.

I'm not too worried about how it looked, although the contrast for you, if you like, was Margaret Thatcher's funeral, which was a big, it wasn't the same size of event, but it was a big event.

There were demonstrators there.

Everybody ignored them.

Who noticed?

Nobody, you know.

So what's happened is that the police action has actually magnified the effect of the protest.

I don't think people were worried too much about it.

You know, there was no violence.

It was, it was peaceful in that sense.

But, and I'm not worried too much about what the rest of the world thinks, because we can, we can hold our head up against most of them, but it doesn't make it right.

This is a restriction on, on not just on the right to protest, but actually what had been an agreed right to protest with the Metropolitan Police in the previous four months.

And no one's going to unwind, are they?

Because Labour have said they're not going to unwind it or they're not going to repeal it.

So now it is, it's on the statute.

Let's see what happened.

I called this morning for the Home Affairs Committee to get in the heads of the big police forces at London, Scotland, Manchester and the College of Policing and say, let's agree some proper rules on this.

Let's understand where the line is drawn, which allows people the right to protest to make their point publicly, which is, as you say, a fundamental

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democratic right.

And the other hand, not, not the right to ruin people's lives.

But you don't think this legislation will be repealed or amended?

Probably not, I think, because I mean, I was the only Tory voted against it.

You know, in a way, this may oddly end up with a good outcome in that it's going to sensitize the police.

I mean, the fact they apologized, I mean, it was a rather grudging apology, but the fact they apologize tells you they know that they've got something wrong. And that's bearing in mind.

People like me were quite quiet about it over the weekend because I didn't want to ruin the atmosphere around the coronation.

So, oh, that's you.

Are you doing a Theresa Coffey where you're going to have your alarm rap song in a moment?

No, no, I'm not the karaoke queen of, let me just tell you, it's a call from Scotland, maybe the Scottish police are listening.

We must get you to lunch.

David Davis, thank you very much indeed.

Thanks for coming in.

So I have to say, I mean, I was down at the coronation at the weekend.

I saw you from my balcony.

I know, I gave you a wave.

I don't know if you saw me.

You had your eyes front entirely, entirely appropriately, but it was,

I have to say, there was something, I mean, look, it was, it was a funny old day in, in lots of ways, you know, I mean, it was unbelievably wet and damp.

And it was quite sort of fun.

You sort of voxing people and asking for this film we were making, which you can of course watch on all the news agents YouTube and social media channels.

Probably seen it already, but you know, you were voxing people and saying, are you having a lovely day?

And they're absolutely soaked through.

So we're just here for the atmosphere, you know, so it was a funny day in lots of ways, but there was a, there was something quite dark about it, about going to Trafalgar Square and you'd seen it flashed upon your phone.

And obviously we went there straight away when it did, saying the police had very early doors, just arrested people for having placards.

And there was just something pretty disturbing about it.

And we spoke to some of those with Republic, their director had been one of those arrested and we were speaking to some of his colleagues there and they were saying, you know, we don't know where he is.

We don't know how long they're going to be held for 16 hours is almost an inconceivably long time.

I mean, I was held in a Cambodian jail like overnight.

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And I thought that was quite draconian.

I'd be really shocked to hear of anyone being taken into custody without having done anything at all for 16 hours.

I mean, one hour is bad enough, but it makes no sense at all.

The Cambodian story is on a bonus episode of the news agents to come, of course.

But in the meantime, this was one of Republic staff members talked to me at Trafalgar Square.

This is what he had to say about it on Saturday before the protests had even started, six of our organizers who were on their way to the protests were arrested and hundreds of our placards were seized.

It was obvious the police knew who they were coming after.

We don't know why they've been arrested.

We don't know where they've been taken.

It really does feel like something out of a police state, more like Putin's Russia than modern Britain.

And there's another guy I spoke to who said he just intended to make a speech.

She showed me the speech.

Speech was entirely kind of quite boilerplate Republic stuff, to be honest.

It was just saying, you know, this entirely inappropriate to have a hereditary head of state, et cetera, et cetera.

And, you know, the speakers he was going to broadcast it on had been confiscated.

I mean, it's just dark stuff.

And I got talking.

You say it's dark.

And I think it's probably as much as anything, terror and incompetence.

Yeah, we know that the Met Police is not particularly joined up in terms of what they think they've got to do, what they're being told to do,

what they're nervous about the headline saying and what happens on the ground.

So whatever they would have done at that point would somehow have been the wrong thing. And this is not to excuse it, but just to say that if you bring in something, which is a clearly highly politicized bit of legislation without explaining it properly on Wednesday, three days before the biggest event this country will see.

Yeah, no training, no ability to properly disseminate to your staff what they can and can't do.

And, you know, it's like leaving me in charge of a jumbo jet.

You know, it's quite a scary thing.

We did that at the very start of the show, of course, you know, back in October.

There used to be five of us.

Yeah, we don't talk about that now.

And that's the point.

There were, I mean, I got talking to police officer who echoed exactly that.

I'll quote you what he said.

So I was advised to be vigilant of protesters who may try to use lock on

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devices to disrupt or obstruct the event.

And if grounds existed, use our new stop and search powers.

However, the briefing was vague, as was the intel on which public protest groups may be attempting to obstruct the highway.

Effectively, what this meant is we were advised that we should consider any protester from any group, which would seem a totally disproportionate use of our powers and totally against everything that we had ever been told before when using stop and search, because we are told that we should be specific with Intel when exercising any power that we have.

And this is the point.

If you introduce something that's such short notice and you allow the police to do this, then you are just going to have indiscriminate and entirely arbitrary use of power. And I think that was deliberate.

I think when you keep a briefing vague, it's because you don't want to have your fingerprints or your instructions over something that you're not quite sure of yourself. And we should say that there was a big pro-Republic anti-monarchy protestant, Fox, where you could even hear a little bit on that clip now. So again, you know, that was in some sense disruptive.

But in the meantime, several of their colleagues had been hauled away and it was not particularly clear why they should be hauled away as opposed to the rest of them.

But, you know, at the end of the day, however you feel about a coronation, ultimately, the thing that makes me prouder to be British is a very fact that you could see these two kind of different groups side by side, one of which every time the Archbishop of Canterbury said something cheered and the other one booed. I mean, that is what Britain ought to be.

And as long as they didn't intentionally try and disrupt proceedings in an excessive way, then there was no problem.

And actually, it was just pretty bad in terms of kind of Britain's reputation that such an event should happen.

And you could see that the police now obviously feel pretty sheepish about it in terms of the reaction.

I suppose the thing looking to the future is just going to be once these powers have embedded and these powers, the police are properly briefed, how they're going to be used and whether or not.

And so much of this basically relies on the police's discretion and how they exercise that discretion.

Well, that was what was so interesting about David Davis.

There was a hint there that the police will actually choose what they do and what they don't do, and they will be setting out the rules as they can follow them themselves.

This is The News Agents.

You might have woken up to the breaking news, which involved a row of sorts between former Prime Minister Boris Johnson and the newly coronated King Charles, and that all came from memoirs of Gito Harry, Boris Johnson's former

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director of communications, and he is going to be speaking to us this week about his new podcast series called Unprecedented, which gives an extraordinary account of his time as director of communications in Downing Street.

Unbelievable ripoff of a John Soapwell book, of course.

Yeah, unprecedented.

I do. I do hope John's getting some royalties.

Yes, knowing John, that's all sorted.

John never says unprecedented without it kicking up the book sales.

And you can, of course, listen to Unprecedented on Global Player.

See you tomorrow. Bye bye.

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