

## [Transcript] The News Agents / Zuckerberg v Musk: it's war

This is a global player original podcast.

Big news today. We are launching Threads, an open and friendly public space for conversations. It takes the best parts of the Instagram experience and creates a whole new app around text, ideas and sharing what's on your mind.

That was Mark Zuckerberg, Threads user number one, announcing his new platform designed to knock Twitter off its previously unassailable perch.

This story is a parable of our age. Men of unbelievable wealth, unbelievable power, unbelievable influence, locking battle. These are men worth \$350 billion between them.

If these two men were an economy, a country, there'd be about the 40th biggest economy in the world. Whoever wins, if anyone wins, it will have reverberations on our culture, on our politics, on the tapestry of our lives. Can Threads unpick Twitter? And if so, what does it mean? It's Lewis here. Welcome to the news agents.

The news agents.

This content that will solicit a reaction to something that may include something that is slightly racist or slightly sexist, those kinds of things.

So you think if something is slightly sexist, it should be banned. Can you name one example? I honestly don't. You can't name a single example.

I'll tell you why, because I don't actually use that for you, Feed Anymore, because I just don't particularly like it. A lot of people are quite similar. I only look at my follow-up.

You said you've seen more hateful content, but you can't name a single example, not even one.

That was Elon Musk talking to the BBC's James Clayton a few months ago. Musk was, I think it's fair to say, cock-sure, every dollar of his \$250 billion net worth on psychological display.

One wonders if he's quite so sure of himself now. Meta, the company which owns Facebook and Instagram, has launched Threads, a rival to Twitter which must bought for \$44 billion. This hasn't come from nowhere. It's come from Twitter's perceived weakness. Last weekend, after a series of widely perceived missteps and misjudgment since Musk bought the company, there was this.

If you're having trouble using Twitter, it's no accident. Elon Musk posted a short time ago that unverified accounts which would include people not subscribed to Twitter Blue are now limited to reading only 600 posts a day.

Twitter, a platform reliant on people endlessly, maybe sometimes even mindlessly, scrolling for content. For reasons no one could understand, decided to limit the amount of content that you could see. Limit the number of tweets per day you could see. Add to that removing verification thereby reducing the site's utility as a rolling news service and the masses, the millions of its users, are stirring.

So at the risk of sounding like Helen Lovejoy, in amongst all of this, while someone please think of the social media managers, suddenly with endless new platforms to oversee and create content for. Funnily enough, Charles Ubar, the digital content director for global, knows this territory better than anyone.

Do you think that Threads has the potential to supplant Twitter?

Possibly. It definitely has more opportunities than what we have seen today with the Macedonian

Blue Sky. Part of that is that it is built on the user base that Mark Zuckerberg has up to the also. Meta on Instagram is about a billion people on there. Twitter, collectively I think their monthly active user base is roughly 400 million, basically, also. So it is considerably larger in the first place. So even if they get only a percentage of people on Instagram to come over to Threads, that's already a huge jump forward. There clearly is some appetite amongst the hardcore Twitter users for a more stable environment, for a place where they feel like there's going to be a bit more longevity and you'll be able to see all your tweets and not be rate limited, for example. So it's got potential. I think the challenge right now is that the people on Twitter who are looking for something else are looking for a new news source, basically, also to operate in a similar way that where Twitter is very much a real-time news medium, Threads is not 100% there yet. You can't search for news right now on the platform. You can only search for 8% handles, their username and so on. So we're not quite at a place yet, I think, where reporters are going to be going on there and talking about this amazing thing that's been happening on Threads and tracking a major event. Or politicians announcing events on news on Threads. You will probably start to see that. But still, the functionality sort of evolves a bit more where you can actually search for keywords and hashtags and really sort of coordinate things around that. That can obviously be a political event or statement and so on. I think that's the moment when you can really see that starting to switch, obviously, also. Apparently, that is in the pipeline. It's coming, obviously, also. So I think the reality is Threads has big potential. What they've launched this week is still a version one, basically, and they will keep working on that, obviously, also. But you know, the fact that they've hit 50 million users in 24 hours cannot be ignored.

In a way, Elon Musk and his Twitter has become a living, breathing, Rorschach test. One of those people or institutions or things who people respond to, conceive of, according to their own politics. And many on the liberal side resent what is done and who he favours, worry about the effect on the public square. And that's why this story matters. Like it or not, for a decade now, Twitter has been that public square, the arena in many ways of politics, how it operated, what we see, the news we consume, especially for political elites is determined by this site. If that's about to change, it's big for all of us. And never forget how much worse, how much bigger the impact on our democracy of all this stuff might yet be, how important these custodians of our discourse are and will be yet. Just listen to this. You might recognise the voice. It belongs to Martin Lewis, the personal finance expert.

Elon Musk presented his new project in which he has already invested more than \$3 billion. Musk's new project opens up great investment opportunities for British citizens. But it isn't Martin Lewis. It's a deep fake. It's almost imperceptible. And if you look at the video, it's even scarier, something the real Martin Lewis has talked about. My face and name have been the subject of Scam Adverts for the last six or seven years. I get countless reports every day. Now they have video and audio technology that is absolutely replicating my face and my voice. These people are trying to pervert and destroy my reputation in order to steal money off vulnerable people. And frankly, it is disgraceful and people are going to lose money and people's mental health is going to be affected. It has a massive impact on well-being when people are scammed. It's devastating for people's lives. And

we still don't have any adequate regulation to deal with it.

This is destabilising and disturbing stuff. And Facebook and Meta is hardly a clean skin in all of it. We've already seen the effect their sites have on the discourse, on politics at the very highest level. And this is personal too. Zuckerberg and Musk apparently loathe each other. They've challenged each other to a cage-fies. Musk wants to sue Zuckerberg for plagiarism. But whether we like it or not, these two men are maybe a bit uncharitably basically the robber barons of our less than gilded age. Even the entity, how it manifests itself, matters. So to unpick this, we're turning to a friend of the show, Bruce Daisley, a former vice president at Twitter and someone who knows Silicon Valley very well. Most people who use Twitter and were heavy consumers of Twitter often had this conflicted relationship with it, where they saw the benefit. They loved the fact that there was some major news story happening. That's electric, right? I mean, you can just exhilarate. You can see it second by second. Exactly. And actually, the challenge was finding someone to tell this revelation to that you just discovered. People loved that pop of revelation that it provided. But they often felt the toxicity of the discourse on there or the sort of the rudeness of the discourse on there was slightly wearing. Now, I do think it's the scope for Instagram and threads to maybe remove some of that. You know, you can't swear at strangers on Instagram. You can't abuse people in the same way on Zuckerberg owned products. And so there is a chance that they can come in and say new formulation cleaner than ever before and try and keep the benefits of the platform without some of these, the baggage, the toxins that it comes with. Although are we in danger maybe because I mean, a lot of people, particularly maybe on the sort of liberal end of the political spectrum, I mean, they really hate Musk. I mean, they really dislike it. They dislike in particular what he's done to Twitter that is any doubt that he's made it a much worse place to be much just a much worse kind of news platform as well for all sorts of different reasons. But that we kind of slightly beatifies Zuckerberg. And we slightly make his company meta into something that's not I mean, they've got their own problems, right? In terms of the way that Facebook has interacted with politics, the way it's interacted with the democratic process, the way that it's been used, the questions over whether it's a content creator or a publisher, nasty things can happen on there as well. They're not exactly got a spotless or blemish free record themselves.

It's very difficult to find yourself in a position where you're thinking the hero of this discourse is Mark Zuckerberg. Because, you know, the lessons of the last 10 years have not been that Facebook has been a meta has been a company that has focused on the public good for first and foremost. But we're in a situation now where I think a lot of people would say to themselves, okay, aside from the issues that the corporate ownership of the majority of social media now will fall into one company, aside from that, actually shifting the control from the capricious decision making of Elon Musk is probably a good thing. It's interesting as well, the way that this essentially a tech battle, it's starting inevitably, I was already done so, to map on to politics and people's political preferences, the way that Musk has got a clear contingent of people, particularly associated with the right in the libertarian wing of politics, the Republican Party in the US coming out to defend him the whole time. And then Zuckerberg, okay, an unlikely liberal champion in lots of ways, lots of people gravitating to him and his company in order to give Musk, who

has become this son of non grata for them, a bloody nose.

Yeah. And look, it's probably worth us trying to relate because I think there was a BBC interview a few months ago where Musk himself said, well, how has Twitter got worse? And the journalist actually at the time was unable to specify how it's got worse. But specifically how it's got worse is not only is it re-platformed a lot of extremists who maybe are not interested in racial or sexual freedoms that we've sort of taken for granted now, but also by selling verification to fringe voices on the platform, it's changed the way that the discourse is experienced. If you go now, and I mentioned earlier, the coup in Russia, but if you go now and you search any news item, the first results you'll see are people who are paying Elon Musk \$8 a month. Absolutely. And what you find as a result of that is that people who are inclined to pay for verification are slightly more rabid Musk supporters. And by the very nature of that, they're slightly more fringe. And so what you're finding is you go and search for something related to news, something related to TV and politics. And what you've been assailed with very quickly is often quite spiky, intolerant views. So that's what people mean by the discourse has got worse. And yeah, absolutely. I think, you know, it's critical consideration that a platform that is so influential as Twitter, so influential in setting the political agenda, so influential in shaping the experience of politics, both for participants of it and for people observing it, the fact it's been polluted is a cost to all of us. And Musk has said today that he'll always considering suing Zuckerberg and Metta that he's copying their platform and the way that they do things. Do you think that's very credible? I don't think it's remotely credible. Critically, the most important lessons that we've had here is the majority of the Instagram product we know today is inspired, borrowed, stolen from other products. So specifically, Instagram stories, probably the key aspect of that product was inspired by Snapchat stories. Reels was inspired by TikTok. Now, the idea that somehow a social media feed that looks like this that is currently being used by Mastodon Post, Blue Sky, the idea that that is a copyrightable format, I think he's pretty unlikely. We've talked about the sort of personal enmity between the two men. Do you think it's real? There's some people in Silicon Valley who know that each other well and there's some people who don't have any contact with each other. So I know that Elon Musk knows the founders of Google really well. He interacts with a lot of other people and he knew Jack Dorsey when I worked there. Jack Dorsey was always talking about Elon Musk. And in fact, Jack Dorsey stayed as an investor of the new version of Twitter. I don't think probably he has a lot of face to face interactions with Mark Zuckerberg. And I think there's a few of them. There's quite a lot of enmity between Apple and Facebook. There's quite a lot of enmity, I think, between Musk and Zuckerberg. So it feels like the Reese probably founded on ego and toxic masculinity as much as anything. There's quite a lot of hostility and quickliness between them. It's amazing, isn't it, though? The extent to which our public discourse, our democracy, our culture is so underpinned by and dependent on these people. Yeah, there was a really interesting thing that Mark Zuckerberg said overnight saying that we are not going to introduce advertising on threads until we reach a billion users or we're close to a billion, which is remarkable because that's sort of two or three times what Twitter's sitting on. But it's an illustration that this guy can magic up a product that has that sway over our lives, our political discourse, entertainment. If they get a billion, I mean, they will put Twitter in the shade in terms of their impact

on our politics. Meta will be the dominant force in how our digital politics is conducted. And for every demographic, you know, tick tock aside for teenagers and for younger people, but absolutely formidable. Now, Lena Kahn, who runs the FTC in the U.S., wouldn't allow Meta to buy a product that big. She wouldn't allow them to buy Twitter. And it's just an interesting illustration of the fact that they've got so much power invested in what they've already got. The questions of regulation are going to have to pose themselves as a more on the agenda because the home screen of our phone, that's the way to think about it. How many of the apps on your home screen are going in the same direction? And to control that amount, I think he's just a remarkable level of power, unprecedented in previous media areas.

The net result of all this, we're all focusing on Musk, but the net result of all this could be that Mark Zuckerberg is about to become even more powerful in our lives.

Yeah. And I'm almost certain we're leading now into the U.S. election campaign. I'm almost certain because this is broadly a bipartisan issue. This is going to impose itself as a bigger and bigger theme on, I think, both major parties in the U.S.

Bruce, thanks so much.

Thank you so much.

Right. That is quite enough of the Musk Zuckerberg show for one week. We're going to be back after this and we're going to return to the latest in a series of extended political interviews. And this one is another cracker. Stay with us.

This is the news agents.

Welcome back. Right. As I was saying, the next now of our political makeup series, an extended conversation with an interesting politician about what powers their politics, their own personal story, what keeps them in the arena. This week is such an interesting one because it's with a politician who is actually pretty fresh on the political scene, who has quickly become very senior as well. It's Stephen Flynn, the SMP MP for Aberdeen South and leader of the SMP group in Westminster. He took over from their former leader in Blackford last November in somewhat, I think it's fair to say, murky circumstances, something that we discuss, but in what has been an extraordinary few months for the party. And in a week where

his own deputy, Mary Black, resigned on this very show, it couldn't be a more opportune conversation. You'll enjoy it.

So we're joined now as part of our series of extended conversations with I think our first SMP MP in this slot. I think I'm most certain in saying, I'll tell you who it is, Stephen Flynn, who's the Westminster SMP leader, MP for Aberdeen South since 2019 and has been the leader of the SMP group in Westminster since December 2022, which feels like a bit of political eon, I go, Stephen.

Yeah, there's been a few things that have happened since December. Someone mentioned to me the other day, what's the last six or seven months being like, it's only six or seven months, but no, it's been good to have enjoyed it. And that's the main thing.

Yeah. And, you know, this is a conversation about you and your politics and where it comes from. But we should just say, given we're recording this on Wednesday and just yesterday, Murray Black, your deputy was in this very studio talking to Emily and saying that she's not going to be standing again for Parliament.

Yes.

It must be a pretty sad moment for you. What's your reaction about it? You must have known it was in the offing.

Yeah. I mean, obviously I was aware of what Murray was intending to do, but I'm a wee bit conflicted because on a political level, Murray, when it comes to politics as a rock star and her ability to connect with the public, I think, is unmatched. She's phenomenal. But see, on a personal level, I'm actually really happy for her because, you know, she's been through a lot and I want the people that I like and know to be happy in life. And I genuinely think she's going to be a happier person, not being a Westminster. And that's the most important thing for me. It's the most important thing for Murray. And when we're all kind of talking about this, I think it's important to reflect on the fact that she's just a lovely person. And I'm just fortunate enough to have spent a lot of time with her. You've been in Parliament for slightly less time than she has, but does what she says about Parliament, the way they operate its culture, does that resonate with you?

Yeah, I think so. Westminster's, it's really hard to describe to people who don't work in that environment. It's unlike anything I could possibly imagine. I often say that I'd love to pick up all the people of Scotland and get them one by one to spend a week in Westminster to realise quite how dysfunctional a place it is and the nature of everything that happens there is just absurd. But I guess it's more than that for Murray as well. I mean, Murray Black opens her mouth and says something, and no matter how good it is or how relevant it is, there's a cohort of the drags of society who just attack her. And you know, that takes its toll on individuals. And particularly women have to deal with the brunt of that. And it's not good enough. Society needs to reflect on that. And people need to be sitting up and thinking, why is one of the most popular faces in the UK, not just Scottish politics, walking away from Westminster? And it's because Westminster is not the place that normal people want to spend their lives.

But you want to continue? So you're not normal?

I want to continue for now because we've got a big challenge on our hands. You know, there's been well documented issues within the party. And you know, where there's a challenge, there's an opportunity. And I see an opportunity for us to really drive from that journey to independence. And you know, what attracts me to that with us is being the person who works past the statues outside the chamber as we leave, as SNP MPs leave and depart Westminster for good. And that's a big motivating factor for me. But of course, the personal challenges we all face in that are tough. And Mary's just decided it's better for her not to be there.

I mean, let's say you were elected in 2019 and sort of connected to that. Was Parliament what you thought it was going to be? I mean, has it surprised you? What is it about the chamber and the building and the way that it operates? Is there anything that surprises you or continues to surprise?

Yes, I don't think it's a functional place for decision making to happen. You look at where there's huge pieces of legislation which are having a big impact on folks lives and you know, the government can ram it through in a day with people having little to no debate on it. You end up in this absurd situation where with some legislation, it bangs back and forward between the House of Lords who want to make changes to something that ultimately

are powerless in that process, rightly so probably, because you shouldn't have unelected folk making those decisions anyway. But you have this archaic process of big legislation which is going to change all of our rights on the likes of protest and so on, going between an elected chamber to an unelected chamber to an elected chamber and ultimately what the government wants wins. And it's not a good way to make a lot.

Well, I suppose why I'm getting that in a sense about a lot of MPs, Labour or Conservative, whatever, they get to Parliament and they have coveted it for a long, long time and they are overruled by the place in a sense. I mean, they might come to in the end dislike it or dislike parts of it or how it works or whatever, but a lot of MPs find the place on some level either because that's what they've always wanted or because of the sort of political power of the place kind of thrilling. But obviously, if you're an SMP MP, you obviously instinctively presumably have a very different reaction to it because you just don't want to be there. So was there any part of you or when you first walked in there that was happy to be there and in any way impressed by the place?

Not overly, if I'm honest. I remember the first time I did go in was because I had to get sworn in. I had gone down a few weeks after everyone else because of my wee boy being born. I walked in and all of a sudden they were into prayers and everyone turned and faced the wall, which you don't see on TV, and then turned back around again and I was just standing there at the door thinking, what on earth is going on here? I've got no idea what's happening. And in a modern parliament, people are standing and turning to face a wall to maybe pray. I think some of them do, some of them don't before business starts. I mean, who else does that at their work on a daily basis? A very niche cohort of society. I'm sure you do as well.

Before we start every show, I've got a prayer for Emily's good health.

I mean, there's maybe a nice element to that as well, but it's just very odd. And I see Westminster as necessary. It's necessary for us to represent the folk who elect us, but it's necessary for us to be able to get across our message.

So what was it that drew you into politics? Your political inspiration? I mean, you were 34. So you're a youngish MP, you're certainly young for being a policy leader. What was it?

You know, I grew up between Dundee and Brechin in a pretty normal family life, properly working class. My folks worked a lot. And I seen a lot of stuff around me and just thought, you know, surely things can be better than this.

What did your mum and dad do?

My mum had loads of different jobs. She worked in a bakery, she worked in care. My mum worked in blockbuster, I'm sure some folk will remember that.

Did she?

Well, that must have been pretty cool as a kid.

No, it was all right. Yeah, I used to go and see her when she was finishing up her shift at 10 o'clock at night to go home and get tucked in the bed and stuff. And my dad was an engineer. It was a pretty normal lifestyle.

And what was their politics, if they had any?

I knew my dad was a nationalist because he'd had a long conversation with John Swinney when I was a young lad outside of Bakers and Brechin. And I was furious that my dad had spent so

long talking to this guy and it turned out it was John Swinney back when he was the member of the parliament.

And that was before the leader of the SMP.

Yeah, yeah. He was the MP for North Tayside. I think it was back in the early 2000s or just late 90s. But, you know, my family's traditional background would have been very much in the Labour Party. And, you know, that's a normal thing for working class folk for Dundee to have been Labour Party supporters. So I just wanted to change.

Dundee always used to have Labour seats.

It did. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Famously had Winston Churchill at a certain point.

He lost his seat. He was a Lib Dem at the time, wasn't he?

Libro.

Yeah. So, you know, I've seen an opportunity to create change. And I think when there's opportunities in front of you, like I said earlier, to do something different, you've got to push yourself.

And what was it about the idea of independence and the SMP that lured you in that direction?

So hope probably for a better future for being able to ensure that the decisions that impact us are taken by people in Scotland. And, you know, at this time, you've got to remember that, you know, I was growing up in the height of new Labour. The Iraq War is something which I cannot shake from my mind when I think about when was I first properly interested in politics. Because here you had this guy, Tony Blair, who was so detached in my view from public opinion, certainly public opinion in Scotland. And yet he was willing to cause devastation on the back of what turned out to be lies. And I really struggled to process, how is that a functional way for Scotland to be governed? Surely we can do things better if we make those decisions ourselves. And in Dundee, when I was growing up, there wasn't no opportunities. And it's only transformed recently. It's great to go back and see my folks and see what's happened to the city. But it had this legacy of deindustrialisation from Thatcher.

We should say Dundee is now the most pro-independence. If we take the 2014 result anyway, the most

pro-independence city of Scotland's cities. And the S&P is now dominant.

Yes, so I'm growing up in a city which is reeling from the consequences of decisions made in Westminster for generations. And this new hope of Tony Blair was just much the same thing. And in my view, we can do things differently, we can do things better. And then, of course, I get the opportunity to move up to Aberdeen and realise, you know, what a mistake we'd made. You look across the North Sea at Norway and there's an oil fund that's worth a trillion dollars and Scotland doesn't have anything to show for the 450 billion that's went down to the UK Treasury from North Sea Oil and Gas. And again, it's one of those sort of eye-opening moments of, wow, this is sitting on our doorstep and we've not capitalised upon it like others have.

I mean, your whole political adult life has more or less, it must have been framed and bookended, well, not necessarily bookended because we haven't seen where it ended, but certainly it really began when 2007, the S&P got that first majority book that became the governing party in Hollywood at that time. So you've sort of, you're part of a generation that have grown up with it, as opposed to, say, Nicola Sturgeon, of course, where the S&P were a pretty fringe force for much of our early political life.



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I would actually say it's bigger than that. It's not just the party, it's the parliament. I've always known there to be a Scottish parliament and you look at the positive things that have been achieved. I wouldn't be sitting here if it wasn't for a Scottish parliament.

Why'd you say that?

Because my family would never have been able to afford for me to go to university and the decision was made in Scotland to make it free for young people to go to university.

But you'd have just taken out a look because, again, we're roughly the same age. We would have been making that decision at the same time. I was from a working class background, but I took out, we had to take out loads, but you think you wouldn't have taken out, you just think you would have just been so versed to the debt?

Yeah, I would have just went and done all my pals done. Of course, I was slightly different at that time because I was disabled at that time.

Just explains to people who might be familiar with it.

Yeah, I mean, when I was younger, 13, 14, in school, I collapsed and I turned out I had this hip condition called vascular necrosis, a degenerative hip condition. I spent a lot of time in hospital, missed a lot of school and I walked with initially a couple of crutches and then one crutch for the best part of 18 years. When I came to Parliament, I had a crutch and I got my hip replaced, what, two years ago now? Life was changing. So I did have...

You've had an actual full hip replacement.

Yeah, which is lots of fun when you're going through airports every week, as I have to do to get back home. I'm very familiar with the airport security.

Be it being constantly.

Yes, absolutely. But you know, that was obviously a big thing for me personally.

And does that shape your politics?

It gave me a lot of time, I think. I was, a lot of my teachers would probably attest to this. I was a pest.

Pest?

Oh, absolutely. That's putting it mildly. I wasn't particularly academic, but when your whole life is turned upside down and you physically can't do things, I had a choice to make, which was pick up books and read or just go and watch TV and I decided to pick up books and read. And thanks to the policies of Scotland's Parliament, I was then able to go on to university, become the first person in my family to get a degree, kind of broke the mould in that regard. And yeah, everything's kind of flowed from there.

And you ended up as leader. And this has, I mean, it took some people who perhaps aren't watching this with Kremlinology or the SM free group in Westminster and who would those people be? I can't imagine. But by surprise, there's obviously Ian Blackford had been doing it for some time. Some people described it as a coup.

Is it a coup?

You know, there's been, there's been loads of commentary over many months about this. And I kind of have a laugh at some of the interpretations that people have about things what Ian stood down as leader.

He wanted to go.

He stepped away. And that was, that was his decision.

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But did he want to go?

And you'll have to kind of ask him that. I think...

You get the impression from him necessarily that he was desperately quite enjoyed it, didn't he?

Yeah, I think lots of people enjoy doing their, doing their jobs at certain points. But you know, there was, there was an opportunity that presented itself to me to kind of go after that thing that I always do, which is change an opportunity.

And...

Why was there dissatisfaction with him internally?

I don't think there was dissatisfaction with him at all.

There must have been some, because I mean, if he didn't really want to go, he could only have come from within.

I guess there's always natural cycles and politics. And there was a moment where Ian was leader and then he chose not to be. He stepped down and I put myself forward and my colleagues backed me. And you know, that was, that's quite a nice thing.

How have you found being leader?

Well, if someone had told me that the Necklough would step away, that would have a police investigation would have a new...

I'm going to get onto that.

I mean, just the kind of...

Because actually being one of the leaders of the big parliamentary blogs, it's a big job because you, you get invited to all the briefings, the sort of private things that go on with the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and so on. You get a lot of documents come your way. You're a big part of Westminster political parliamentary life.

How do you find that?

A bit surreal. I mean, some of the opportunities I've had to meet the likes of President Zelensky, for instance, has been phenomenal. There's a young lad, Fede Dundee, who's found himself in the room with someone who's fighting for democracy in Europe is kind of standing there thinking, what am I doing here?

Do you feel that a lot in politics?

I kind of feel detached from it a lot of the time in terms of Westminster.

You seem like that. You seem like detached is the word.

Yeah. So when we were at the coronation, I've said this before, I was sitting there just thinking, what am I doing here? I'm there because of my role, obviously, and to be respectful of the monarchy because he's the head of state and you should be respectful to whomever the head of state is, whether they're elected or otherwise. I'm pretty far from a review on that, but just sitting there for the few hours just thinking, wow, what am I doing here?

How does any of this benefit my constituents? And that's not to be dismissive of it because it's a big privilege to be there. But I do find myself certainly in a lot of the things that come with the role and certainly even being an MP in Westminster and the doors that are open for you and the people who want to meet you, I can often feel a little bit, is this necessary? Do we need these things to make people's lives better? I'm not sure we do, but we do anyway because that's how Westminster operates. It just goes around in a circle of this is what's always happened, so we're going to keep doing it.

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Do you worry that you've come into this job just at the point where SMP dominance is just on the way?

No.

I mean, we've seen what's happened over the last six months. I remember doing an interview with you during the leadership election. I remember saying to you, is there any danger that this becomes a spiral? And you said, absolutely not. Well, a lot has happened since then. Felt quite spirally.

A lot has happened, but two things haven't happened. Firstly, the SMP still has a pretty comfortable lead in the polls in Scotland.

Last one was what? A couple of points?

That was three points, salvation. I mean, have you ever a Labour supporter in Scotland? You'd surely be looking at going, how on earth are we not ahead of them after everything that's gone on?

I know, but you used to, in Tilbury, even quite recently, you had commanding leads. I mean, they've come from very, very far down.

Yeah, but remember the Tory voters collapsed as well in Scotland, which was David's and lots of others.

I mean, if that poll was to be replicated at the general election, I mean, you'd be looking at least a, what, a score of Labour MPs coming back, nearly all one from you.

Yeah, but that's 18 months away. And you know, given everything that's happened, the fact that we're only at a point where we're still ahead in the polls, I'm pretty comfortable with that. And I think we've got plenty of time to build that back up.

One of your great critiques as the SMP was to say about talking about Tory chaos. I mean, you've had a former leader and First Minister arrested. I mean, please turning up our house. Yeah.

That's chaos.

That was surreal to sit and watch that, absolutely. And I think I've spoken on the show before about the fact that it took us all by surprise. And on a personal level, it's tough to watch given everything that you've put into the party. But look, we're still comfortably ahead in the polls. When it comes to independence, and this is the big thing for us, putting party politics aside, the independence numbers absolutely rocks all. It's still the best part of half the population in Scotland believe in Scottish independence. So our job is to go out and speak to the public and ensure that, you know, they continue to put their faith in us. And we're 18 months away from a general election. Humza was fantastic at the SMP convention that we had that other week. He's really hit their ground running despite the huge challenges he's had to face. He's an exceptional politician, a really nice individual. And I think he's going to take us to new heights.

He must feel as if it must have occasionally wake up in the morning and think, what's going to happen now? I mean, he must be talking to him pretty regularly. He must be, should we put it, frustrated with the turn of events?

I think there was a few weeks, certainly, where you were almost thinking what's coming next. But what gives you the drive and determination to get through that is to focus on why you're in politics. And as much as it can be frustrating, and it is frustrating that we've got internal difficulties within the party itself, the public are still with us. They still believe

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in what we believe in. And that ability for us to offer them change, to offer them a bit of hope, when things are a bit bleak, I think, is a big driving factor for me and for Humza. Are you in contact with Nicola Sturgeon?

I have not been in contact with Nicola now.

Do you think it would be better if she just stepped away now from the Scottish Parliament?

A bit of a distraction that she's still there now?

I don't know. Nicola was quite clearly the best politician in all of Europe for a long, long time.

She's not now, is she?

She won an election victory after an election victory, and I guess we need to wait and see what happens from the police investigation. There's an easy position to take, which is to provide a run and commentary on the police investigation. I know some of my political opponents have done that, but I don't know what's going to happen. As it stands, I don't see any reason why Nicola shouldn't be in the Scottish Parliament now. I think she's got a lot to offer public life.

Do you have any friends across the chamber, not in the SNP?

Friends loosely, I'd probably say. There's people I'd have a boiler with and have a drink with, but I'm not inviting anyone back to my family home, you know?

You're not socialising with MPs or late in the house of commons and bars late at night, or making friends?

I'll have the odd pint with my colleagues. I am more infamously in apparel spritz, which people often like to talk about.

Explain the apparel spritz?

I was on holiday in Italy years ago, and I liked an apparel spritz, and they sell them in the commons, and there was a photograph of me and Ian having a drink, and the apparel spritz was on the table, and folk got awfully excited by it, which I found...

Not a bad drink to be associated with, really, I don't think.

No, that's all right. There's not many boys fed on D here sitting having an apparel spritz on the terrace in London right now.

You've changed even.

That's what my pals were saying.

Better than I in brew, I suppose. A little bit more.

I don't actually like Imbre, I'm not a fan.

Losing votes by the battle over there.

In fairness, there's good people in different political parties.

I disagree with their politics, but you can disagree without being disagreeable.

Do you have any politicians past or present who inspire you?

You know, in the Scottish context, you obviously, as a member of the SNP, you know, the likes of John Swinney would immediately jump into my mind, but when I was growing up and you're at school and you're reading all the textbooks and so on, and you probably know the name Ruby Bridges, the young African-American lassie who was famously escorted out of school by the federal officials. Everyone will remember the image of the small lassie with the four federal officials when they're doing the desegregation. I think it was in Louisiana.

And I remember kind of looking at that image and just thinking how powerful that was, that

this little girl was doing something so ordinary, just going to school, and the change and the hope that that offered to so many people was huge. And, you know, that's the sort of stuff that inspires me. That driving force of people who offer hope and change is at the forefront of why I'm doing what I'm doing.

Are there any politicians not in your own party that you admire?

You know, there's a few across the chamber at the moment who kind of respect probably the best speech I've heard in Parliament since I've been there was Tom Tugginhuts following the withdrawal, the ridiculous withdrawal from Afghanistan. Tom's a pretty serious guy.

I disagree massively. It was a lot of his politics, but he presents himself in a way which I think is pretty good. I used to have a huge respect for David Lamme. I used to think David was phenomenal.

Used to?

Yeah. David Lamme was the guy who was talking about why I got into, stood for a general election in 2019 when Brexit was at its heights. David Lamme was the one who was championing, who was remaining in the European Union, and of course, his vault faced massively and that. So I've not got a lot of time for that, but some of the stuff that he'd done in the years before I've always hugely admired.

Finally, you're young to be talking about your political image. Although who knows? You're older than Marie Black and she's leaving Parliament. What would you like one day when you're sat on your veranda? I assume you hope in an independent Scotland looking out in Aberdeen or Dundee or wherever you are. What would you like to be remembered for?

I mean, you'd be brave to sit on a veranda in Aberdeen for most of the year.

I mean, unfortunately, we wear climate changes going. It might be unseasonably warm, but what would you like to be remembered for?

I would like to be remembered for making a difference and being able to offer people a bit of hope. And I'm confident that we can offer hope and change for the future. And I think that's really important.

Stephen Flynn, thanks so much for coming on.

Thank you.

OK, well, that is quite enough from us for this week. After our meritocracy row yesterday, Emily and I are off for a cage fire of our own, Jon is ref. Remember though, you can catch up on all our shows from this week on Global Player and send us story tips and feedback to newsagents at global.com. As always, thanks to our production team for this week on the newsagents. It's presented by Emily Maitlis, John Sobel 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.