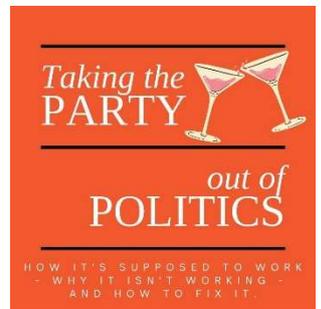


Hello and welcome to this introduction to:
Taking the Party out of Politics

My name is Andrew, **and my name is Caroline.**



**This is the introductory episode to the first series of Taking the Party out of Politics.
Our objective today is**

- **to give you an idea of the purpose of this podcast,**
- **to give you an idea of what we hope to achieve – with your input –**
- **and to give you an idea of the directions we will be taking to get there.**

**So, let's start from the very beginning
– what exactly are we trying to do here?**

Alright, well I think that it's really important to say – right from the start – that we are not talking about all the really boring Party politics stuff.

Isn't that a bit unexpected, for a podcast with 'Party' and 'Politics' in the title?

Well, perhaps. At least at first.

But, very importantly, the title is 'Taking the PARTY out of Politics'.

Because I think that what turns so many people off politics, is all the yammering away of politicians not answering questions, or always saying that the other parties are always rubbish – even if the next day, they actually do what the other party was trying to suggest. That sort of stuff just makes people stop listening.

OK, so, what we are going to do is to try to understand how Politics works, but pretty much to ignore the Political Parties ...

Yes. Completely.

We are going to try to understanding the way in which our political systems are supposed to work, understanding why they aren't actually working properly

And then we're going to start to look at what we could do to make them work a bit better.

To make these systems work a bit better for us.

Because these systems are supposed to be helping all of us.

OK. So that sounds straightforward enough.

But if I'm someone who doesn't know very much about politics ...

... am I going to find this a bit boring?

Well ... no. At least, I hope not.

And we're certainly going to try to make sure that it isn't boring.

We're going to use lots of examples, to help to make it clear what is happening.

And, we're going to try to help everyone to understand how this affects them, and therefore why it is important.

Right. Fair enough. So, where are we going to start?

Well, I think that this is the story of something which we all, already know.

No, really. You actually do.

You might not have put all the pieces together. Not in exactly this way. Not yet, anyway. But this isn't the story of completely new stuff. It's just putting that stuff all together, in a way which is easy to understand.

Got it. And ... how are we going to do that?

Over this series, we're going to do three different things:

1. We're going to start by looking at how things are supposed to work.
2. Then we're going to move on to looking at some of the big reasons why things aren't working as well as they could do.
3. Finally, we'll finish up by looking at three things which we could be doing, to make things work better.

Right. OK ... that sounds all very serious.

And I guess that it is good that SOMEONE is doing the serious stuff.

But what if I am someone who isn't really into 'politics'?

Is this really important for EVERYONE?

That's a really good point.

And I think that the answer is:

'Yes – this is really important for EVERYONE'

Yes, but can we say why?

Well, I think it is important for three reasons.

First, because politics (and, remember, we're not talking about Party politics, we're talking about the politics which makes all the stuff work – or not work – in our country) is really important. It's really important, because the way stuff works – or doesn't work – affects all of us.

OK. So, we're saying that Politics is everywhere?

Yes, exactly. It is said that politics is 'the art of the possible', which means that it is about working out what it is possible to do with what resources are available to do it. What sort of Health Care can we afford? What sort of Education system should there be? What sort of transportation system? What sorts of laws do we need – and where can people just be relied on to do the right thing?

OK, so Politics affects everything we do ... and how we can do it.

Precisely.

And what's our second reason?

Well, I believe that this is something which – probably because of the noise of Party politics – people have been turned off. And, yet, it is something which pretty much everyone COULD understand, if it was just presented without all the unnecessary, point-scoring noise, and without all the unnecessary, over-complicated vocabulary. The basic ideas aren't that complicated. They have just been made to seem complicated. Perhaps because it suits *some* people to find that *most* people aren't really paying attention.

OK, well that's quite a big claim.
Can we make it easy to understand?
And, why is that important?

Well, it's important because of the *third* reason why this is all important.

Because, although we have some good ideas to share with you – building on some of the best ideas around – this is no time for pretending that there is an easy solution to everything. **You** may have a great idea which **you** can share with everyone. Because, although we have brought together some of the best thinking from some of the best thinkers – nobody is as clever as everybody. The collective thinking of all of us together has the potential to be even more powerful than the best thinking of any individual (especially if that thinking is informed by a proper understanding of what the problems are).

And, fundamentally, nothing is going to change, if we don't have LOADS and LOADS of people

- who understand the problems,
- who understand why the problems **are** problems, and
- who understand how we **might be able** to make things work better than they do at the moment.

Because we're not just here to complain about problems.
It's important to understand the problems, not just to complain about them.
It's also important to work together: sharing ideas, and finding solutions to those problems.

Agreed.
So, Politics (not Party politics) affects everything.
This is stuff which everyone can understand.
And, if everyone understands it, and works together, maybe we can make it all work better.

Absolutely.

Alright, so what about an example of what we're saying?
Stuff which we kind of already know, but haven't put together in exactly this way.
And stuff which – once we understand – we might be able to start to think of ways in which it could be better.

An example.

OK

Well, we're going to go into this in more detail in a future episode, but let's just have a quick look at how we vote. I call it trying to do 'Three impossible things before breakfast'.

There are many problems with our political system, and with the work with which our politicians are struggling within that political system.

A quick example might be that we are trying to achieve too many things with just one vote every 5 years -

1. select a good local representative,
and
2. select a party which seems as though it could govern competently,
and
3. select a manifesto of what we want to happen.

All three of these things. With just one vote. Once every 5 years.

That's a little bit like trying to cook dinner, and play tennis, and write a letter.

All at the same time. One handed.

And then ... well, then we kind of expect that everything will be alright in between times, and that we won't have to think about it much. Or perhaps, we expect not to have to think about it at all.

Perhaps if we thought about things a bit more, we would make better choices when we do vote, and so we would get better representatives who would do a better job on our behalf.

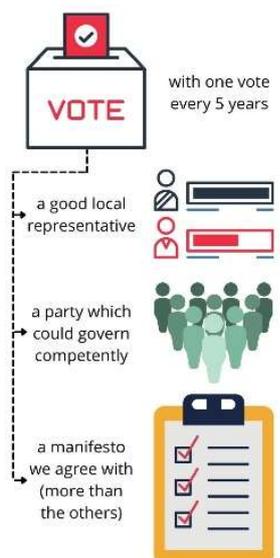
Right.

So, what we are saying is that, right from the very basics of how our electoral system works – voting for an MP, once every 5 years – well, right from the very start, that system isn't good enough.

Yes! The system (of one vote, every 5 years) is trying to achieve at least three, completely separate things.

And there are all sorts of problems with that.

Three impossible things before breakfast



For example, there might be a hundred things in a political party's manifesto. But with our one vote, we are not just

- voting for our local MP **and**
- for a national party which seems as though it could govern competently.

We are also

- voting for that manifesto – that list of what the political party says that it plans to do.

After the election, the political party might decide that:

'Oh! Look! Things have changed in the world! There are different pressures, now.

Whoops! We can't do all of those things.

*But ... what we **will** do, is to do this thing and this other thing.'*

Not everything in the whole manifesto.

Just some of the things.

Selected by the political party.

Way after the point at which the voters voted.

OK, and so, at first glance, that might not sound too bad. BUT!

Remember that we were choosing at least three things already, with our one vote.

And

Remember that we were choosing between a few different manifestos – perhaps, realistically in each constituency, only choosing between two different manifestos, of the two candidates most likely to win.

But then

The political party (at least some times) turns round and says

'Well, we've GOT to do this. I mean, we have a mandate to do this.'

What they mean is that the people voted, and this manifesto is the one they voted for, and therefore the people have given us this job to do, and we'd better get on and do it.

Sort of like the Blues Brothers, being on a mission.

But without the cool hats, sunglasses, and suit.

And without the cool music, too!

Now, is that really fair? Is it really fair for the political party to claim that they are 'on a mission', that they have been 'given a mandate' to do this or that particular bit of their whole manifesto?

Was there REALLY a national vote, in favour of those particular bits of their manifesto?

Or did those bits of the manifesto just happen to be the ones which got through, because ...

... well, because we were voting for at least three different things.

And one of those things, the manifesto, was really just the thing we paid the least attention to, out of the three things.

And, even if we did pay attention to it, then it was just the manifesto which was, overall, more like the sort of stuff that we wanted to happen, than any of the other manifestos on offer.

We didn't REALLY vote for this or that particular little bit of the manifesto.
And certainly not for EVERY bit of the manifesto.

But the political party is claiming that we gave them that mission ...
... OK, well, I can see why that is not really working in the way that it is supposed to.

Or, at least, it's not working in the way that political parties are claiming:
that they now have legitimacy,
that they now have national backing, for this or that particular bit of a manifesto.

And, that's just a **really small** example of why this stuff is important.

OK. And that's true. That was stuff which we sort of already knew, but perhaps although we could see it, we had sort of stopped seeing it. We just cast our vote – or, perhaps sometimes, some people DON'T cast their votes – and then we move on.

But that isn't good enough. And maybe, by understanding how we got to this position, we – *and I mean WE; that's us, AND all of the best thinking which is already around, AND with contributions from you, our listeners* – by understanding how we got to this position, we might be able to put our heads together, and figure out how we can make it all work a bit better.

~~But can we be clearer about why this stuff is important to EVERYONE?~~

~~Well, the challenge is to understand why the systems aren't working properly, so that we can all put our heads together, to explore how we could make things work better. There are many books which highlight the problems and the challenges faced by our political system. In this podcast, we will refer to many of the best and most interesting ones. But we need to do more than just point out the problems.~~

Overview

So, how are we going to do all of that?
Let's have a quick overview of the direction we will be taking.

First, the problems.

Then the solutions – once we properly understand the problems.

Yes.

I think it is important that we understand the problems, so that we work on the solutions. Does that make sense? We can't just say that such and such is a problem, throw it away completely. We need to understand which bits of it are problems, where the bottlenecks are, where the pinch points are, why it is a problem, and what should be happening, even if it isn't happening at the moment. Then we can work on the solutions.

Well, there are three big problems.

And, yes, a few other problems along the way.

But the three big problems are the ones we are going to focus on. At least at first.

We'll just pick up on the little ones as we go along.

These big problems are:

1. The Voters.
2. The *Wicked Issues*.
3. Scrutiny.

And for each of these big problems, there are possible solutions.

So, three problems.

Voters, Wicked Issues, and Scrutiny.

I think I understand the first one.

Do you mean that I am a problem?

3 BIG PROBLEMS

The Voters



The 'Wicked' Issues



Scrutiny



[Back to Contents](#)

Yes. Us. The Voters.

Essentially, we don't take our part seriously enough.

If we want our elected representatives to take us seriously, then we need to take our participation seriously. We live in a representative democracy. We'll look into that more later on, but the short version is that we elect people to do the decision making on our behalf.

However, if we never bother to engage with the issues at all, how are our elected representatives to know what we think about things? How are our elected representatives to take us seriously, if we don't show that we care? Even if our elected representatives want to take us seriously, the political parties which organise the election of our elected representatives will just be encouraged to treat us like easily manipulated toddlers, waving an ice cream in front of us and switching the TV on, and expecting that to be enough.

If our behaviour teaches our elected representatives - and their political parties - that we can be treated like toddlers, then that's what they will do. Why wouldn't they?

We need to do more than put a cross on a piece of paper once every 5 years. We need to keep up to date, with at least a little bit of understanding of what is happening in our country. That doesn't mean being swayed by a couple of newspaper headlines. It means making a bit of an effort to understand. To take the time to think.

Yes, sometimes that means being involved in protests, or signing online petitions. But it also involves just being good citizens, and not just passing the buck, voting once every five years, sitting back, and expecting that everything will be OK.

OK. So, we have to keep up to date.

We have to try to understand what is going on.

At least a bit.

And we have to sort of be part of a conversation about what is happening in the world, and about what sort of world we want to live in, so that the people we vote for can work for us.

Yes. Exactly.

How can our MPs deliver what we need, if we don't make it clear what we need?

How can they understand what we think, if we aren't spending at least a little bit of time doing some thinking?

Yes. I suppose so. I will have to keep thinking about that one. 🤔

Alright, what about the second 'big problem' on our list.

Wicked something ... ?

3 BIG PROBLEMS

1: The Voters

NOT
just 1 vote
every 5 years



Keep up to date ...

**USE
WHAT
YOU
HAVE**



Keep
thinking ...



Your MP can only
represent what you
want, if your MP
knows what you want

Right, well the second big issue is **The Wicked Issues**

Ah, yes.

We've all come across a 'wicked problem'. A 'wicked problem' is one that is difficult to solve.

It is possible to solve it, but solving it for the long term might involve some difficult choices in the short term.

A little bit of a challenge.

Perhaps a little bit of sacrifice in the short term, for longer term gain.

Perhaps you have come across a 'wicked problem' in business, or at work. Say that we need a new computer now (or any piece of machinery, really), because it will help us to do our work more efficiently. Should our company buy it now, or should our company wait, because in a year's time it might be cheaper. Or better. When is the right time to spend money? Do we risk it now, or do we wait?

Or even: do we make the investment now, and have to face the fact that we're not going to be able to give everyone a pay rise? Or do we give the pay rise, and make everyone feel happy for a week or so, but leave everyone frustrated because they haven't got the best equipment to work with?

Or, perhaps you have come across a 'wicked problem' in your personal life: perhaps wondering about the right balance of something, whether that is calories or socialising. It would be nice and easy to stay on the sofa, to watch another episode of your box set, and to have another chocolate biscuit. And, it might be cold outside. But, if your goal is to get fit, then do you take the easy option now, or do you face something you don't like the thought of now – in return for feeling better about yourself, but also in return for actually being healthier, in the future.

We're not all perfect. Sometimes it's the chocolate biscuit. Sometimes it's going for that run. With a bit of commitment from us, it's the run more often than the chocolate biscuit. Or, at least, more often than another whole packet of chocolate biscuits.

Yes, OK. Are you getting at me?

No, no.

The point is to explain that we all face little challenges. And we all try to do our bests.

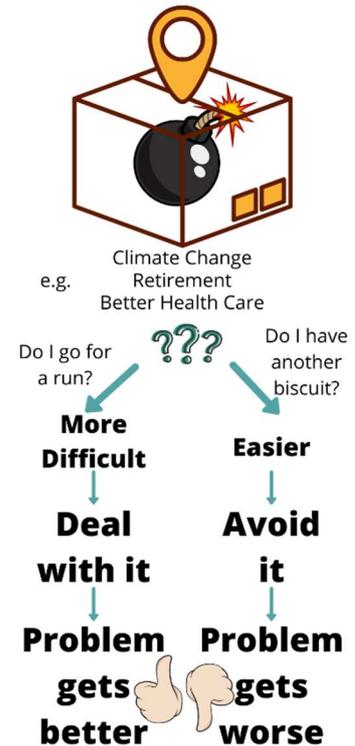
Well, in politics, a 'wicked problem' is referred to as a *wicked issue*.

The *wicked issues* are the things which are really important, but which don't get dealt with. Climate Change. Care for the Elderly. Saving for our retirement.

Some of us might be getting a bit better at saving for our retirement, but there are plenty of other things which we still aren't dealing with properly

3 BIG PROBLEMS

2: The 'Wicked' Issues



The *wicked issues* don't get dealt with because the short-term challenges are things which our elected representatives believe will mean that they won't get re-elected.

If you are trying to diet, and you are thinking about the pizza in the fridge, then the person who tells you that you can't have that pizza is not going to be your favourite person in the world at that moment.

Perhaps later, when the diet has worked.

But not at the time.

Our elected representatives are afraid that we won't re-elect the people who tell us that we can't have the pizza.

Or that we won't re-elect the people who tell us that we have to pay more taxes if we want better health care.

Or that we won't re-elect the people who tell us that we have to make changes in the way in which we live if we want to stop Climate Change getting any worse.

These are all wicked issues.

Well, not the pizza. That's down to you, and the good friend who is trying to help you.

But you see where we are going with this.

If you have the pizza today, the diet is only going to get more difficult tomorrow.

We aren't dealing with the *wicked issues*, and so they are just getting more challenging to deal with.

But our elected representatives don't have the courage – or perhaps we don't give them the courage – to deal with the *wicked issues*.

OK. That makes sense.

And, I guess that is sort of related to the fact that we (The Voters) need to be engaged a bit more.

If our politicians understood how much we care about these really important Wicked Issues, then they might do more about them.

That might give them some of that extra courage ...

Yes! Exactly right!

Alright, and what about the third big issue?

Well, the third big issue is where the political parties are directly the cause of the problem. Because we're talking about whether political parties have too much power. And whether they have too much power in too many places.

So, the third big issue is:

Scrutiny

The scrutiny (and detailed development and refinement, or, if you like, just the checking) of laws and regulations, is the opportunity to make sure:

1. that our laws and regulations are well thought through;
2. that there has been appropriate consultation with those who are going to be affected (and the stress is on the word 'appropriate', not just a show of consultation);
3. that a consensus has been built (as far as possible) across all parties, and stakeholders;

and

4. that the implications and the details of the implementation have all been fully considered. And taken seriously. And acted up, not just ignored

Scrutiny of Legislation (checking on all the details of new laws – and existing laws) is the opportunity to improve and to refine the laws which affect how our country works, and which then go on to affect all of our lives. However, the way in which Scrutiny of Legislation by Parliament works (or, in fact, doesn't work well enough) at the moment means that laws and regulations are not sufficiently well scrutinised, refined, and improved.

Hmm. Why not?

We're not going to be expecting our governments to be perfect, are we?

Everyone makes mistakes.

Of course, it is not possible to foresee everything. Genuine mistakes are made. Sometimes.

But many of the laws and regulations which have been brought in by governments over recent decades have had unintended, disastrous consequences.

And the key point is exactly this: Many of these consequences could have been foreseen.

Disastrous consequences which could have been foreseen make them *Blunders*, not just mistakes.

There are some great examples – which we'll come to later on in more detail – but just to give you a quick taste, some of the most famous Government Blunders include the Poll Tax, and the Child Support Agency. In the early days of the development of policies like these, people who were saying 'Hang on a minute! There are some things that you haven't considered properly here!' were just not invited to the later meetings. The government ministers and civil servants who were involved in developing policies like these, managed to get themselves into a sort of 'groupthink', where they stopped listening to other opinions, and so they made all sorts of mistakes. Mistakes which ultimately led to the fall of governments and Prime Ministers, and to all sorts of pain and unfairness for individual people all over the country, and, frankly, to all sorts of inefficiencies, loss of resources, so that even if these things didn't affect you directly, there was less money to spend on other things, things which would have been a benefit to you.

But, we're getting ahead of ourselves a bit. Much more on that later on.

Just in outline, the problem is that the ways that the system works at the moment means that the Government (the Executive) has so much power that new initiatives can be forced through, nodded through by the rubber-stamping of yes-men from the government's own party, while any real attempts to make constructive criticisms are dismissed along with a snow storm of party-political point-scoring from the opposition parties.

It's not that there is no scrutiny.

But the scrutiny which does take place is far too often inadequate, insufficient, or simply ignored and by-passed.

So, the government is both gamekeeper and poacher?

Yes, exactly.

They make the laws, and then they only allow their own party (or committees dominated by their own party) to check up on the details of those laws.

And, this causes other problems as a result.

Apart from the bad laws which come through the scrutiny system, there is also no incentive for MPs to focus on delivering good scrutiny.

I mean, why would you, if you're just going to be ignored?

Rather, the system encourages MPs to aim simply at being part of the Executive, to have *their* opportunity to make *their* mark.

It is not acceptable that the process of Scrutiny has simply become either

- a training ground for MPs to grasp at an opportunity for Executive power;
- an opportunity to score meaningless, party-political points; or
- a spineless, rubber-stamping of existing Executive power.

These are our laws. We need them to be good laws. Laws which achieve what they are intended to. And laws which achieve good things for all of us.

3 BIG PROBLEMS

3: Scrutiny

Laws need to be properly checked, and properly thought through.



But ... the government making the laws also controls the checking processes ...



... so we get law making in a hurry, but not (always) seeing the full picture ...



... resulting in some bad laws, and expensive government blunders.

Perhaps we should separate ...

Scrutiny

... from ... Government



Right.

Then how do we ensure that our laws are properly checked and planned?
How do we ensure that we get good laws?

Well, I believe that we have to start to separate the scrutiny process from party politics.

If party politics has a foot both in the Executive (the government – the law makers) and the Legislative (parliament – the law checkers), then perhaps a solution is to separate at least part of that process from our political parties.

So, perhaps:

Rather than electing politicians to the scrutiny process select members of the public (like a sort of jury service), from a pool of eligible candidates. Our politicians can still be elected to be local representatives, to form the government and the opposition, and to call the government to account in many other ways. But perhaps the checking of our laws – making sure that they are well planned; making sure that they are actually achieving what they are supposed to achieve. Perhaps that shouldn't be done by the same people who are making the laws. Perhaps we should separate the scrutiny of laws (the checking) from the making of laws.

And, that brings us to the title of this podcast: Taking the Party out of Politics.

We haven't got there yet.

There's a lot of thinking. A lot of understanding.

A lot of ground to cover before we get there. This is just a quick overview.

But, perhaps – just perhaps – that is where we need to be.

Or, at least, perhaps it is part of where we need to be.

Or, at the very least, the process of thinking about whether it is part of where we need to be – that process of thinking about it all – perhaps that process, perhaps that thinking, is where we need to be.

We might get there, and still not be quite sure if Taking the Party out of Politics is the right solution.

Perhaps we will even have new ideas on the way.

Perhaps YOU, the listener, will want to make suggestions which we can include.

New ideas which we can all consider together.

I'm pretty sure that – by the time we get to the end – everyone will be clear as to (at least some of) the reasons why our political systems aren't working as well as they should do. And if we have found some new ideas together, then that's great.

So, that's three big problems.

1. The voters need to keep thinking and learning. To keep up to date.
2. The politicians need to get on with dealing with the Wicked Issues, like better Health Care, better Education, and dealing with Climate Change.
3. And we need to think about whether our political parties shouldn't be able to form the government AND to control the processes which check up on what government is doing.

Exactly!

The Voters need to do their bit.

The Wicked Issues can't just be put to the back burner all the time.

And we should think about whether we should separate Scrutiny processes from the Government.

OK, fair enough.

Alright. Where do we go from here?

There will be three sections to this podcast. Or, if you like, three series.

1. In this first series will look at why we have a government. And why – particularly from the perspective of us, the voters – why that isn't working out as well as it could do.
2. The second series will look at why the system of government doesn't work as well as it could do – from the perspective of someone in that system: first someone trying to get elected as an MP, and then someone trying to do their best as an MP.
3. The third series will explore some of the ways in which we could think about tweaking the system.

Some of the ways in which we could make things work a little better.

Yes? **Yes**

So, you are going to explain

- what the problems are,
- why they are problems, and then tell us
- what we can do about it?

You are going to explain how to fix it all?

Is that right?

Well, up to a point, yes. Except that – although I have quite a lot of good ideas to suggest, I don't believe that **anyone** can expect to have **all** the good ideas.

What I really hope is that,

- as we go along,
- and as we start to really understand what the problems are,
- and what other problems are being caused by those problems,
- and why they are problems in the first place,

– I really hope that our listeners will get in touch share their ideas of how to make things work a bit better.

We will certainly be bringing together a lot of the really good ideas which are already out there. We will be looking at the experiences of people who have been struggling with the ways in which things aren't working in the way that they should. But we are also opening the door to a conversation, an exchange, with everyone who has got a good idea.

Yes, we have lots of good ideas to share with you.

But ... we aren't the only people who can have good ideas.

We really want to hear from other people, too.

Well, that sounds interesting. We'll have to see what people have to say.

That is what we are really looking forward to hearing!

With that in mind, the website for the podcast is talktogether.info.

There you can follow the link to the podcast, where you will be able to find transcripts of the podcasts, as well as our email address, and lots of other information which you may find useful.

* * *

So ... next time, on *Taking the Party out of Politics* ...

Next time, we will start at the beginning: *Why we have a government*.

* * *

For now, thank you for listening.

If you have enjoyed this podcast, perhaps you can tell your friends.

And perhaps you could also take a moment to give us a rating wherever you found us – that not only helps other people to find us; **it also just really makes us feel useful.** 😊

That would be great. Thank you.