

Episode 26:

Taking the
PARTY



out of
POLITICS

**The Northern Ireland
Protocol**

Hello and Welcome to *Taking the Party out of Politics!*

This is a podcast about understanding how politics is supposed to work, ...
... why it isn't working as well as it could be working, ...
... and what we might be able to do about it.

Because:

by understanding a little bit more clearly *how* things are supposed to work,
and *why* they are a bit messed up,
we *might* be able to get things to work a *bit better*. Perhaps even a *lot better*.

This is a little journey we are taking together, about the systems and functioning of Politics:
systems which we should all understand, because those systems affect all of our lives, all of
the time.

And this podcast is about how we might be able to make those systems work a bit better.

In Season 1, we took a look at how government is supposed to work, from the perspective of
us – the voters.

In Season 2, we took a look at how government is supposed to work, from the perspective of
someone trying to get elected, and then trying to do a good job.

Looking ahead, in Season 3, we will be looking at what we might be able to do, to make
things work a bit better. Importantly, when we get to Season 3, we will be sharing our ideas,
but also sharing some of the best of YOUR ideas, about how to make things work a bit
better.

Welcome to the sixth episode of our mini-series, looking at people, organisations, and issues
which fall outside the established (party) political systems. We are looking at how some of
those people and organisations are seeking to influence what happens in this country, and in
the world more generally – in other words, seeking to affect our lives for the better (but – not
necessarily – bothered about party politics). And, we will be looking at some of the issues
which currently aren't being addressed successfully by our political party dominated system
of politics.

Today will be the final of three short episodes in conversation with Professor Anand Menon,
from Kings College London.

Prof Menon: Hi, my name is Anand Menon. I'm a professor in European politics at King's
College London and I run something called [*The UK in a Changing Europe*](#).

Today we're going to look at something called the *Northern Ireland Protocol*.

Northern Ireland Protocol



Why is it so difficult?



Northern Ireland

Professor Menon, one of the big problems coming out of Brexit, out of the UK leaving the European Union, is the situation with Northern Ireland. Is there anything approaching a solution to that which is ever going to be likely?

Prof Menon: Well, we have something that is a potential solution, in the form of the Northern Ireland Protocol.

It's just that neither side seems happy with what is happening with the protocol, and how it's being applied by the other side.

So, can you just expand for a moment, on what the problem actually is?

Prof Menon: The problem is this. The Northern Ireland protocol... OK, let me go back a step. The Northern Ireland problem with Brexit was this:

- Of the three things, the Brexiters is wanted, you could only ever have two, so:
1. They wanted the whole of the UK to leave the European Union on the same terms.
 2. They wanted to leave the single market and the customs union, and
 3. They wanted to avoid a border between the North and South of Ireland because most people, including the police service of Northern Ireland, thought that if you introduce new border checks between the north and the South of Ireland, it might have inflamed violence and start to take us back in the direction from which we've come: of sectarian violence on the island of Ireland, that everyone wanted to avoid.

Northern Ireland Protocol



**Two out of
three is bad ... ?**



**1: Whole of
the UK
leaves the EU**

Northern Ireland Protocol



**Two out of
three is bad ... ?**

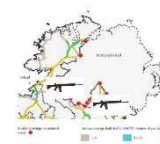


**2: Leave the
single market
& the
customs union**

Northern Ireland Protocol



**Two out of
three is bad ... ?**



**3: Avoid a border
between the
North and
South of Ireland.**

The problem with those three things is you could only have two of them.

So (A) you can leave the single market and the customs union, as a United Kingdom, with every bit of the United Kingdom leaving the same way. But then the border between the UK and the EU, where you would have had to have checks because we'd left their market, would be between the North and South of Ireland.

Or (B) you could not have a border on the island of Ireland.

You could leave as a whole of the EU, and not leave the single market and the customs union, which is essentially what Theresa May was proposing with her backstop. The whole of the UK would have stayed within bits of the single market and the customs union, specifically to avoid that border in Ireland or a border between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. But the more extreme Brexiters in her Party said that this was Brexit in name only. It was a betrayal because Brexit meant getting out of the single market and the customs union.

So (C) option three, you can leave the single market in the customs union.

You can avoid a border on the island divide. But you can keep Northern Ireland under some EU rules in order to avoid that border, and that's what Boris Johnson did. Now the logic of that is that the border between the UK and the EU lies within the UK itself.

As people say, figuratively, in the Irish Sea.

Prof Menon: In the Irish Sea.

So rather than having checks on things entering the EU market taking place at the border of the Republic of Ireland, they take place at the border of Northern Ireland, which remains under some EU rules. So, there are some bits of the economy of Northern Ireland that are governed from Brussels, over which Northern Ireland has no say.

Unionists are absolutely right.

That is weird. That is bizarre. That is borderline undemocratic.

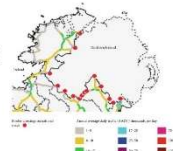
[But that's] what we signed up to.

Northern Ireland Protocol



A: you have a border between North & South Ireland

You cannot avoid at least one of three of the things Brexiters didn't want:



Northern Ireland Protocol



B: not having a border, means the UK would stay in the customs union.

You cannot avoid at least one of three of the things Brexiters didn't want:



Northern Ireland Protocol



C: Northern Ireland stays under some EU rules

You cannot avoid at least one of three of the things Brexiters didn't want:



Equally, goods are checked (if you take the protocol at its face value) going between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, because the EU wants to check what's entering its market.

That too is weird. Opponents of the protocol are quite right. It is weird to have customs and regulatory checks inside the same country. It is bizarre. And it's having political effects, because it's annoying the Unionists, who are those people in Northern Ireland who stressed the link with the United Kingdom, and want to be separate from the Republic of Ireland.

OK, so that's where we are.

What the government in the UK is trying to do is minimize those checks. So that there is as little friction as possible when it comes to trade within the United Kingdom.

The European Union is pushing back saying there's a simple basic amount of checks you have to do, and there's no getting around that, and that is where the standoff is, and it's very, very hard to see how you resolve that.

So, there you have it.

A protocol which requires checks between different areas of a nation is weird, and would annoy the Unionists (those people in Northern Ireland who want to be part of the UK). But, at the same time, it is reasonable for another country (in this case, the Republic of Ireland, but since the Republic of Ireland is a member of the EU, that's the whole of the rest of the EU), to know what is entering into it. But to do that, you have to have some sort of a border between the UK and the EU – and between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, that's a problem, and would annoy the Nationalists (those people in Northern Ireland who want to be part of the Republic of Ireland).

As Professor Menon says, people who voted Brexit might have wanted all three of those things. But you can't have all three of them. You are going to end up annoying at least some of the people. Let's face it: You're probably going to end up annoying all of the people. Even those who are neither Unionists or Nationalists.

Next time

That's the final episode in this mini-series. When we return with Series Three, we will be looking not so much at the problems, but at what we might be able to improve, and how we might do that.

Next time, on Taking the Party out of Politics, we are going start exploring what concrete actions we might be able to take, to help our (currently Political Party dominated) political system work a bit better.

We will touch on some ideas we have already seen along the way, as well as some new ideas. Citizen's Assemblies, for example, which we heard about in connection with our friends at eXtinction Rebellion, but also new ideas, like Citizen Scrutiny.

Lots of things to think about!

That's Next Time.

If you would like to have a look at transcripts of the podcast, including links to all of our sources and references, please go to www.talktogether.info, and follow the links to the Podcast from there. And, of course, if you would like to contact us – not least if you would like to share any ideas which you have about how we could make things better, or if there are any areas of how Politics is supposed to work, but why it isn't working – then please email us at any time on info@talktogether.info.

If you have enjoyed this podcast, then I hope that you will take the time to 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 appreciated. 😊

That would be great. Thank you.