

Transcript

Speaker 1

Ten years ago, go on.

Speaker 2

The vote to leave the European Union changed the course of British history.

Speaker 3

Both seems unimaginably distant and like yesterday.

Speaker 2

Ten years on, this is the story of the EU referendum. told by those inside the campaigns.

Speaker 4

They were putting pressure on me to do joint events with Cameron. I said, No. It's not going to convince anybody, other than we both look desperate.

Speaker 5

It was very difficult because I was a campaigner, but I was also the prime minister.

Speaker 1

I said, This is not Project Fear. This is Project Apocalypse. This is something that is far graver than just worrying people about leaving the European Union. I got the impression very, very early that the people that ran vote leave, they didn't really want to win.

Speaker 6

It was nothing to do with the EU, Britain's place in the world. It was Game of Thrones. That's what Boris Johnson was playing, and he could see the Iron Throne right there about to be vacated.

Speaker 5

I don't think... At that point, he really believed in it. He believed it was gonna lose.

Speaker 7

Watch out, team, watch out. Everybody says, I did this in order to be PM. I would have become Prime Minister anyway.

Speaker 5

Morning, Ed. Hello, morning.

Speaker 2

As the country voted in the 2015 general election, few expected it would lead to a referendum on whether Britain should leave the EU.

Speaker 5

What's going to happen? What's going to go on? The mayor, one in four, still undecided. The express vote to keep Britain great. The Guardian couldn't be closer.

Speaker 8

We gathered in the Prime Minister's home on election day, and there was a real feeling in the air that we may have lost this, or at least that Labour would be the largest party and be able to form a government.

Speaker 5

I remember that afternoon, I wrote a speech which would have effectively been conceding, 'cause you've always got to be ready for every eventuality, and I remember reading it to my team.

Speaker 8

David Cameron's mood throughout the evening became bleaker and bleaker. We then sat down to watch the BBC exit poll.

Speaker 5

It was a really heart-stopping moment, just simply not knowing what the result was going to be. But here it is, 10 o'clock, and we are saying the Conservatives are the largest party. I remember the exit polls, if it was yesterday. It was a moment of great joy for me, that we'd worked really hard. I think we'd run a good government for five years, and we had the chance of serving again. Quite remarkable, this exit poll. The Conservatives on 316. That's up nine since the last election in 2010.

Speaker 6

On the night of the election, I mean, I was up in the north of England in my own constituency, so I wasn't with the rest of the team. And a huge cheer went up with the group of people I was with, and then I immediately phoned David. We no longer had a

coalition, we no longer had Liberal Democrats, but in some ways it was going to be harder to govern.

Speaker 5

I mean, it was an exciting time, but I knew we had made a promise to hold a referendum before the middle of the Parliament.

Speaker 2

Cameron's victory left Labour and the Liberal Democrats leaderless.

Speaker 5

And now it's time for someone else to take forward the leadership of this party. And therefore I announce that I will be resigning as leader of the Liberal Democrats.

Speaker 2

It was also an eventful night for UKIP leader Nigel Farage, Nigel Paul Farage, who was hoping to be elected as an MP for the first time.

Speaker 5

UKIP, 16,000 and twenty-six. Craig McKinley, the Conservative Party candidate, 18,800.

Speaker 1

Election Day 2015 didn't win the seat down in Thanet. So, yeah, there was a sense of disappointment about that.

Speaker 9

When the count came through, I remember him walking off stage, we went out the back, and he sat in a corner on his own for about 10 minutes. He was exhausted, he was ***** *** he had lost. So there he was on the clifftop. That's him unfinished.

Speaker 1

There hasn't been a single day of my life since 1994 that has not been dominated by UKIP. I haven't had a fortnight's holiday since October 1993. I intend to take the summer off, enjoy myself a little bit, not do very much politics at all.

Speaker 9

Nigel can get a bit emotional sometimes, can't he? So he needed to have his moment, his tantrum, and then recalibrate.

Speaker 1

I was down for about 24 hours. I woke up the next morning. And I've not won a seat. That's life. But the government's been elected, and they've promised us a referendum on European Union membership. They then thought, hang on, maybe I shouldn't resign. If there is a referendum coming, perhaps I better be a part of it. So I then unresigned very, very quickly.

Speaker 2

David Cameron had won a majority of 12. His first opportunity to speak to his newly elected cohort came at the 1922 committee, a meeting of backbench Tory MPs, dozens of them determined to leave the EU.

Speaker 8

We went into the 1922 committee and there was a lot of banging of desks and cheering and a scarcely believing that the Conservative Party had gone from being in a coalition government to actually having an overall majority.

Speaker 10

I deliberately sat at right up the top of the room, near where the Prime Minister David Cameron would be, And I sat facing so I could see the rest of the room, see how they were going to react. I strongly recall that David Cameron looked like a man who was surprised he'd won. He did not look elated. He looked daunted, actually, by what he was now going to have to do.

Speaker 11

There was the dawning realisation that having a majority did mean that we would finally get that referendum.

Speaker 10

David Cameron's making this good fist of trying to look pleased that he's still the Prime Minister. So he thanks George Osborne, his great master strategist. And I'm looking around this packed room of elated people. And I think, where's George?

Speaker 6

I think we expected to stay in office, but we didn't expect to win outright. And so there's that moment when you're exhausted and you've won. And then, you know, politics is, and now.

Speaker 10

And I spotted him sitting on the steps next to the big committee table. So almost hiding, he wasn't making himself seen, but he was sitting there with arms on his knees and his head down. You know, this was a despondent looking man. And I thought, yeah, you

didn't expect to have to hold a referendum because you thought you'd bargain it away with the Lib Dems.

Speaker 8

There was a feeling, I think, that there was a virus inside the Conservative Party and a lot of people had come to feel that dealing with the Europe issue was more important than the party itself.

Speaker 6

Immediately it was clear. The big issue was now going to be the EU referendum, and that was going to dominate the coming period in politics.

Speaker 2

Before holding the referendum, David Cameron promised to renegotiate Britain's relationship with the EU.

Speaker 5

David Cameron is attempting something no EU leader has done before, asking every other country to agree a set of reforms that will then be put to a national vote on whether to remain in or leave the European Union.

Speaker 2

But that summer, the EU faced a more pressing problem. The hunt for safety, prosperity, or both, is right now causing the biggest movement of people since World War II. Hundreds of thousands of refugees, many fleeing the war in Syria, were arriving on Europe's shores. You can't harden your heart for scenes like this. These are some of the latest migrants making the perilous journey across the Mediterranean. Many have lost their lives. For Cameron, the race was on to hold the referendum before another huge wave of migrants provided further ammunition for Eurosceptics.

Speaker 9

But Nigel was starting to get excited. This referendum, this is going to be good. I don't know when they're going to call it, but it's going to happen. But after the election, he was exhausted. So I said, do you want to come on holiday? Do you want to come fishing? And he said, yes, yes, that's good. Let's go and do that. So I said, why don't you come to Belize?

Speaker 1

I went away with one of my advisors, Aaron Banks, for a few days, and we talked about what would the sequencing be? What would the time be? And I was convinced that Cameron would go early.

Speaker 12

What amazed me about Nigel was just how deep his understanding of politics is. And he realised that the referendum was more than just Brexit. It would be to do with the future of the Conservative Party.

Speaker 1

I knew from day one that the Conservative Party would back Remain, the Conservative establishment would back Remain, but that some would break away.

Speaker 12

He said, we need a separate campaign. We need to get out ahead of the Conservatives who will try to avoid immigration as an issue.

Speaker 1

They found it always too difficult, too awkward to discuss. So we decided in those weeks following the election, we'd get going.

Speaker 9

So that's how we created this Leave.EU campaign. Good morning, Nigel.

Speaker 5

Good morning.

Speaker 1

It was at the UKIP conference in the autumn of that year that we launched leave.eu. The best thing we did was to start early, because that then forced others who wanted to come out for leave to get their campaign going as well.

Speaker 2

The UKIP leader's brand of politics was a concern for many conservatives who wanted to leave the EU.

Speaker 13

It wasn't going to win a referendum where you need to win over the broad consensus of the population. Too many people were alienated by the Farage brand.

Speaker 2

Tory Eurosceptics like Jenkin wanted their own campaign and knew just the man to run it.

Speaker 13

Gordon Brown's chief economic advisor is now republishing A pamphlet he wrote a few years ago.

Speaker 5

Saying what a terrible idea the euro is.

Speaker 2

Fifteen years earlier, Dominic Cummings had successfully run an operation to stop Britain joining the euro. He was the obvious choice to run Vote Leave.

Speaker 10

I knew he was the guy who could do the job, because he's fearless in his campaigning.

Speaker 6

Dominic goes all in on something. In some ways, a bit like a sort of SAS general.

Speaker 10

He's able to, if you sort of point to the fortification you want to take, He's all in to take that fortification, come what may, using whatever methods necessary to do it.

Speaker 2

Elliot and Cummings were determined to launch Vote Leave with a bold claim.

Speaker 14

I'm at my desk and Dom walks past and goes, Oliver, roughly speaking, how much do we send to the EU every week? So I basically went on to the official government stats, the so-called pink book. and found the numbers and simple divide it by 52. And so it's roughly speaking about 350 million pounds a week, taken as a gross figure. Do you want that figure? And he goes, yeah, absolutely. And I said, well, why do you want it? And he goes, oh, no reason. Don't worry about it.

Speaker 15

Every week, the United Kingdom sends 350 million pounds of taxpayers' money to the EU.

Speaker 16

We did use it deliberately. In doing that, it helped everyone discuss what is the balance sheet? What's the true balance sheet?

Speaker 15

That's 20 billion pounds per year.

Speaker 16

The reason why that figure drove everyone crazy is that we were using true figures.

Speaker 2

But Cummings' figure did not account for the rebate, around 80 million pounds, or EU money spent in the UK.

Speaker 13

It was a fantastic video. But I thought, we can't use 350 million. That's the gross figure. We've got to use the net figure. Otherwise, we'll be completely lampooned and ridiculed.

Speaker 1

From the minute the vote leave was launched, and that was in direct response to what leave.eu had done, I thought, look, there must be a coming together of some kind. There must be an accommodation of some kind. It makes sense. It makes sense to have a campaign with a lot of the political spectrum represented.

Speaker 2

A meeting between Farage's Leave.eu and Dominic Cummings' Vote Leave was organised.

Speaker 12

They said that immigration and Nigel would put middle-class voters off from voting for Brexit and that he should be sidelined.

Speaker 5

What they didn't realise was actually both Dominic and I had a very clear idea about how the referendum campaign could and should be won. And it wasn't basically going all in on immigration and concentrating on the call vote. You needed a more sophisticated campaign.

Speaker 1

They thought we would actually lose the referendum on our side because of the negatives. So, you know, the 38% of the population that were not going to vote leave hated Farage. Ah, look, there's a minus approval rating. What they didn't understand was on the positive side of the equation, we could increase turnout.

Speaker 9

It started getting into a row. So... Aaron was not holding back, he was piling in.

Speaker 1

Certainly Cummings and Banks had a lot to say about each other.

Speaker 12

I told him straight to his face what I thought of him, you know, that he was a political spad that had never done anything with his life, never amounted to anything. And he was here to tell me, you know, anything really. And then he responded with, you know, a four-letter expletive, starting with C.

Speaker 9

That's when we knew pretty much that there was no way there was going to be any joining of the forces.

Speaker 2

Meanwhile, the Remain side had their own problems. Peter Mandelson was an experienced former Labour minister and EU commissioner. He was organising A cross-party campaign. and wanted to get the Prime Minister signed up right away.

Speaker 17

I met David Cameron at a leaving party for a number of 10 official. And he came up to me and we started talking about the prospects for the referendum. And I said, well, we've really got to start mobilising. We've got to start organising. And he said, hold on. No, we haven't even had a negotiation yet. We have to maintain the illusion that we might, even if the negotiation is disappointing, recommend that we leave the European Union. This gave me, you know, it was a real problem because, you know, on the one hand I had a Conservative leader and Prime Minister who was trying to sort of put the brakes on and not being entirely enthusiastic. And on the other hand, Jeremy Corbyn. Jeremy Corbyn elected as leader of the Labour House.

Speaker 18

At a moment some of his critics hoped they'd never see. Now the challenge is, can he make the group hug last? Can he keep Labour together?

Speaker 16

In the leadership campaign in 2015, Jeremy was the only candidate who wasn't just to kind of absolutely remain enthusiastic. A lot of the Shadow Cabinet were very anxious about that. They wanted just a very clear answer, Jeremy, you are supporting him. And Jeremy sort of pause and gave his view of the EU, which is a mixed bag.

Speaker 4

I was saying that I see social advantages, I see the point about trade within Europe. I do think we have to be there, but not be tied into free market economics, which will damage the whole of the economic strategy I wanted to put forward, which is about a public investment-led economic revival in Britain.

Speaker 16

You could see the minute he said that, they just cut him off and turn, but we are sporting in.

Speaker 4

I said, yes, we'll campaign for it with the qualification, and I've made this qualification from the very beginning, that we weren't going to campaign jointly with the Conservatives or Liberal Democrats. It was going to be our campaign, it'd be a Labour campaign, which would also be about the need to change and reform the EU.

Speaker 2

Without direct support from either Corbyn or Cameron, Mandelson and his cross-party group decided to press on and launch, using the name Britain Stronger in Europe.

Speaker 18

We were getting very close to launch date. We didn't have a chair. And somebody had been talking to Stuart Rose, who'd been the chairman of Marks and Spencer.

Speaker 19

Nobody was more surprised than I to have a phone call one day saying, Stuart, you know, we've got this campaign now to remain in Europe, and you're the man to do it. And I said, You must be joking. And then I had another phone call, you know, an hour later saying, Stuart, you're just a man. Then I had another phone call saying, Stuart, you're just a man. I kept saying, No, no, no, no, I'm not the man. But they lent on me very heavily.

Speaker 18

Stuart's speech had been approved and it had been briefed. And when a speech is briefed in politics, it means it's already being written up. and the media are expecting the lines to be delivered. But at the 11th hour, he decided he didn't like some of those lines.

Speaker 19

I'm used to going through a debate to make sure that we get the best line, we all understand it, and you believe in what you're saying. It's very hard to stand up when someone gives you a script and suddenly starts spouting forth on this stuff when half of

you don't believe. There was the word quitter. Instinctively, it said to me, Stuart, we really shouldn't be calling people who don't want to stay in Europe quitters, 'cause it's a negative. I remember sitting there with the speech, and I had my pen out saying, you know, I'm not saying this, I'm not saying that, or trying to change words. Welcome to the launch of Britain is Stronger in Europe campaign.

Speaker 18

It was kind of like taking a world-class lock forward from a rugby team and trying to make him open the batting for England in the ashes. He was a brilliant sportsman, but playing the wrong sport.

Speaker 19

I am not saying, and we are not saying that we would not survive from being without the EU, but I'm saying that we would-- but I'm asking the very real question, would we thrive? I thought the launch went extremely badly. If I'd been me, I'd have marked myself three out of ten. And it really wasn't that bad.

Speaker 8

Watching the launch of the Stronger In campaign, our heads were in our hands. From that moment on, the campaign was mocked. And I think that really catalysed the sense that if we don't get a grip of this, we are going to lose this.

Speaker 2

Craig Oliver was dispatched to meet the leaders of Stronger In.

Speaker 8

When I was shown the polling, what was clear was on one side, we had a third of people who were going to be out come what may. We had a third of people on the other side who were going to be in come what may. And in the middle were a sceptical group. They didn't particularly care about European unity, but they did care about whether it was going to impact on their pocket.

Speaker 18

I think the thing that really ensured that the number 10 folks were comfortable with the Remain campaign was our insistence that we understood economic risk had to be a critical part of the message?

Speaker 17

The other thing I was keen to persuade the mob was that we weren't a bunch of Euro nutters, that we did understand where the British public were, that we weren't just

taking for granted, that we could just sort of conjure up Ode to Joy and play the music and just march off into the sunset and win this referendum.

Speaker 8

So by the end of that meeting, I felt, look, we can work together, we can be part of a team, and that that should be what we did going forward. We shouldn't reject them.

Speaker 2

In public, though... Cameron insisted he could still opt for leave if his negotiation with the EU failed to deliver special concessions. But his chance of success was made far more difficult by the ongoing refugee crisis, which was dominating nightly news coverage.

Speaker 5

A desperate scramble to get on board as Hungary opens its main railway station to thousands of migrants who want to get to Western Europe. There was a crush to get back from the tear gas. We are human, we're trying to be someplace safe.

Speaker 20

Why they're hitting us? They travel onwards, propelled by hope, most heading for Germany.

Speaker 3

I remember talking to David in November of 2015. The one thing that I said to him, and this was more by way of being an advisor than a friend, was that immigration was going to be key. Unless, in this negotiation, it was clear that there'd been a significant win in terms of Britain's capacity to control free movement and to control migration, then it would be much more difficult for him to sell any deal.

Speaker 5

The most obvious answer to having some measure of immigration control from people coming from other EU countries was simply to have an emergency brake, a cap on numbers, so that if, for instance, in a given year, it was going over 50,000, you could say, right, we're pulling the emergency brake, the cap comes into operation, no more can come for this year until the numbers come down.

Speaker 2

When Cameron consulted the EU's most powerful leader, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, she gave him worrying feedback.

Speaker 5

I talked to her about it at length, and she said, this is not negotiable. This is something the European Union cannot allow. The freedom of movement is one of the four freedoms in the European Union, of freedom of goods and services and capital and people, and you can't do that.

Speaker 2

The EU's rejection of Cameron's demand made it even more important he had the backing of his high-profile colleagues. The Christmas holiday provided an opportunity for him to test the water.

Speaker 3

David Cameron invited me and my family to checkers, and it was a very relaxed family gathering. We talked about, you know, shared friends, food, football, all of the things that friends would probably talk to each other about.

Speaker 21

I think, part of the reason we were there was Dave reminding Michael of what it was that he had. this is who we are, this is, you know, I'm the Prime Minister, this is Chequers, you know, this is the environment. I felt like a kind of subtle sort of, do you really want to give all this up sort of a thing?

Speaker 3

We talked about almost everything apart from the looming vote on the European Union. But David, on the whole, didn't really like talking in detail about politics or policy when he had downtime. It might come up tangentially, but it wasn't a subject that he liked to address. And I had my own reasons for not really wanting to disturb the festive atmosphere by bringing up anything uncomfortable.

Speaker 21

He's a very diplomatic human, actually. I've always admired that ability. And he just sort of, you know, we were sort of, I think we were sort of in charge of the children or something. The others had gone away or gone for a walk or gone for a swim.

Speaker 5

I remember sitting on the sofa talking to Sarah and asking her, you know, I hope I'm gonna be all right, that Michael will be, you know, supporting and on my side.

Speaker 21

So I just said to him, Michael's life, he doesn't, he's not scared of Europe. He thinks that Europe takes lots of liberties, but I think he'll probably ultimately come down to your way of thinking.

Speaker 5

I thought, you know, I genuinely thought that would be the case because we were close and we'd done so much together. I thought we'd be on the same team.

Speaker 2

Next in Cameron's Sights was Boris Johnson. The mayor of London had also become an MP at the 2015 election. He'd never had a cabinet job.

Speaker 8

For David Cameron's point of view, in meetings, he would say, look, we've got to try and bind this guy in. It's the old Lyndon Johnson thing of wanting somebody inside the tent ***** out, rather than outside the tent ***** in.

Speaker 2

The 2 men had a decades-old rivalry.

Speaker 20

They were both at school together, and when Men of a certain Class A school, what they mean is Eton. And the rivalry really started there. The fact that Dave became Prime Minister first, even though he was two years younger, I think really riled Boris. He thought that it was his turn to be working before it was David Cameron's.

Speaker 5

I wanted to have, just a personal conversation with Boris, without any aides or other people around, just sort of the two of us. And we always talked about our joint love of tennis. I had this wonderful deal where I could use the American Ambassador's Court next to Regent's Park, and it was a sort of peaceful place to go for some rest and recreation.

Speaker 7

I love playing tennis. And Dave is actually very good. He's a left-hander. Sorry, left-hander. And he's very hard to beat. I find him... I've never beaten him. I think my sister Rachel has beaten him, I'm proud to say. And I've beaten Rachel, so that counts as a sort of partial victory over Cameron. First of all, you know, he did thrash me, but that's fine. And he then said, Look, would you... consider joining us on the Remain campaign. And, you know, it'd be much better if you, I'd love to have you in the cabinet. You should have a top five job. And I wasn't sure what the exact hierarchy was. I knew there was, you know, I've obviously thought about it. Out of pure curiosity, what was this job? There's Prime Minister, Home Secretary, Lord Chancellor, Home Secretary, Foreign Secretary, that's four. And what is the fifth? A mystery.

Speaker 5

I didn't say which job it was. I said, be it no doubt, you know, defence is a top five job, for instance. I wanted him, you know, to understand that I valued his contribution, that he would be a major part of the government going forward.

Speaker 7

Being offered a top five job by the Prime Minister, it's pretty fantastic thing. So I was interested and excited.

Speaker 8

David Cameron came back from that tennis meeting feeling doubly good. One, that he'd beaten Boris Johnson in tennis, and two, that he may have a concession that he would actually join the government.

Speaker 5

CBI, shame on you. CBI, voice off Brussels.

Speaker 2

While David Cameron was fighting to keep the Conservative Party united, Vote Leaves chief strategist Dominic Cummings was already working to sabotage this.

Speaker 5

One of the most important things that a government can deliver is long-term economic security and stability. Come on. Come on, guys. If you sit down now, you can ask me a question rather than making fools of yourself by just standing up and protesting. We got in because Vote Leave formed a company for us and we pretended to be businessmen.

Speaker 14

It became clear very quickly after the event that certain people, certain MPs, really didn't like what we had done.

Speaker 10

I was absolutely furious. I'm afraid I... Even now, I want politics to be noble. I think politics is important.

Speaker 14

They just laid into Dom and said that they had to respect David Cameron, that he was the Prime Minister, that he was the leader of the Conservative Party, and how could we do this?

Speaker 10

It was just an appalling neglect a fundamental requirement of our campaign that it should leave the Conservative Party fit to actually carry out the result of the referendum, whichever way it went.

Speaker 14

Dom just turned around and said, you are wrong. You can either support leaving the EU or you can support David Cameron. And if you don't like that, there's the door.

Speaker 13

I went to see Dominic Cummings and I explained. I didn't think that vote leave could be some kind of political terrorist campaign just blowing things up. Dominic was absolutely furious, and he took me outside into the stairwell and bellowed at me.

Speaker 16

I'd been at work during the day, and so I went over to the offices at about six o'clock in the evening. Up I go in the lift, up to the vote leave floor, the doors open as if curtains on a stage, and there are two characters on the stage. looking at each other and I'm looking at them and they're about this far apart. One is Bernard Jenkin and the other's Dom Cummings.

Speaker 13

He was shouting at me and very, very angry and trying to intimidate me in an almost uncontrolled way.

Speaker 16

Bernard is looking really quite disconcerted while Dom says something along the lines of, if you ever say something like that to me again, I'm going to make sure you never are going to be allowed in this office again. Do you hear me?

Speaker 13

I certainly felt his spittle on my face. And I was just thinking, this is a very serious breakdown in a relationship and a very serious threat to the good governance of Vote Leave.

Speaker 10

From my point of view, from that moment on, certainly Dominic should have been removed. Because what he showed was that he was not willing to be held to account. And that's the recurrent theme of all of the time I've known him.

Speaker 2

It was not just Tory Brexiteers Cummings was alienating.

Speaker 22

My problem with him was that he didn't seem to think that MPs really had much should have much say in anything. He seemed to not understand or not want to understand that, what was happening at the ground level, at the grassroots level, was going to be very, very important.

Speaker 2

For Nigel Farage and his team, securing A Labour MP would be a coup.

Speaker 9

The rumblings had started within the Vote Leave group about the fact that, a lot of them weren't happy with what Cummings and Elliott were doing at all.

Speaker 22

It was really obvious to me that you needed to get the Labour vote out if we had any chance of really winning. And that seemed to be something that Leave EU, in particular, Aaron and Andy understood better.

Speaker 12

We encouraged Kate to come and join Leave.eu. We basically said, Yeah, leave it with us. We're going to build a ground campaign.

Speaker 2

In a move unprecedented for a Labour MP, Kate Hoey agreed to share the stage with Nigel Farage.

Speaker 9

I get up there in the morning, there's a queue. I said, What's this for? And they said, Oh, this is for the campaign, the Leave campaign. I hear you're doing a rally. I said, yeah, but not for about 5 hours. But, yeah, we're queuing. The traffic jams we caused, it was extraordinary. I said, mate, we hardly advertise this. We thought we were going to have 200 people. You've got 1,600 people in that room, and they're all here to hear what you've got to say. Oh. They said the blood drained from his face as he realised this is a big deal.

Speaker 22

I'd never met Nigel. It was slightly concerning. I mean, you have to remember that in those days, there was a feeling about Nigel that was just pretty horrible. A lot of people had very, very, very strong views about him. And there was always this feeling, you know, oh, if I go on a platform with Nigel Farage, people are going to start calling me a racist.

Speaker 1

She probably, like many Labour figures, thought I was Voldemort or something like that. I sat down with Kate and I thought, well, the most important thing, Don't try too hard. Just be what you are. And I think within 10 minutes, actually, we hit it off.

Speaker 22

The Kettering Rally was a very Trumpian kind of rally. I didn't know there was going to be music. I didn't know that I was going to have to walk up this long alleyway and, you know, between people cheering. We are finding that people are coming out and saying, at last, within the Labour movement, there is some kind of debate. We're fed up with the Europhiles who've been running our party. It was very moving because there was no doubt about it that there were lots of people there who were not Tory voters.

Speaker 9

Kate turned to me and said, these are Labour supporters. These are not Conservative supporters. These are people who feel that they've been left behind, let down by the political class. Nigel walks in like the Messiah, with all these people clapping and standing, and these Tories behind us going, What the... You know, this is mental. How the hell is Nigel Bryce having that reaction?

Speaker 5

This is so important that it's not about left or right. but it's about right or wrong. And we know what's right, and we must win this referendum.

Speaker 22

For Nigel, it was the first time he had been with all party members on a stage. And I think he was quite emotional about it, too, that day.

Speaker 1

It was almost like that group of people were welcoming me in, albeit slightly nervously, whereas The snobbier end of the equation within Vote Leave would have nothing to do with it.

Speaker 2

At Vote Leave's headquarters, unhappiness with the leadership of Dominic Cummings could no longer be ignored.

Speaker 13

By this time, quite a lot of MPs were saying, have you got rid of Dominic yet?

Speaker 23

There began to be a sort of consensus that something had to be done if the campaign was to be saved. The result was an agreement in general to draw up a contract which would move Dominic away from the day-to-day operations. Now, it just happened that I was already discussing a contract with him. It was really as to whether he should be a contractual employee or a freelance operator. I said, look, let's have a one-to-one discussion in private.

Speaker 14

I mean, just a normal day to begin with. But then Dom says the board want me to go across the river to the other building.

Speaker 23

Once we sat down and we were looking at each other, I said, Dominic, I'm sorry I brought you here under false pretences. I said, it's not working. You've upset too many people.

Speaker 24

I came into the Vote Leave office and something felt very different. Matt Elliott, our chief executive, came to me with a very long face and said, have you heard what's happening? And I said, no, what's going on? And he said, well, the board have summoned Dominic and they're going to fire him. And I said, what? This is going to be catastrophic. We can't lose our campaign manager. What are we doing here? Let's go over there and do something about it.

Speaker 23

By this stage, a number of senior members had joined the meeting and I handed Dominic a draft contract which actually I've got here. And it's a contractor agreement, which made him a strategic advisor rather than a campaign director. I think this document gave him quite a shock. And he started texting, clearly texting back to his colleagues.

Speaker 14

Suddenly, I'm pulled into the corridor by our head of operations, who goes, there's a coup. the board are trying to make Dom resign.

Speaker 24

Dominic was saying, I'm going to walk out and I'll take the whole team with me. And I, in that moment, I thought, this whole thing, this whole thing, which I've been working towards for the better part of 30 years, is about to collapse over some stupid personality clash.

Speaker 14

So we decided that we needed to draft a letter making it very clear that if they forced Dom out, we would all walk.

Speaker 3

Out to the blue, I got a call from Dominic Cummings. Dominic had been working with me in the past at the Point for Education, and Dominic was uncharacteristically agitated. He was normally ice-cool in most conversations about politics. It was clear that there was something that was up in the campaign, and Dominic asked me if I could speak to a couple of people. I talked to a couple of MPs who were involved in Voter Leave, and I said, Look, I haven't made-up my mind definitively yet. David hasn't concluded his negotiations. However, I have to tell you, if Dominic Cummings is not playing a role in this campaign, then I'm not going to be playing any sort of prominent role at all either.

Speaker 2

Cummings' supporters had saved him. I

Speaker 14

saw Dom that evening after the attempted coup, and I asked him how he was doing. And he just looked back at me and said, We need the cavalry to arrive.

Speaker 2

In early February, a draft of Cameron's EU deal was published.

Speaker 7

I couldn't get my chair up a bit. It seems to be kind of... I'm sitting at my desk in City Hall, and Dave calls me up to say, you know, How's it going? with the decision-making process on... the EU referendum. I said to him, Look, I'm really sorry, but, you know, the way things are going in the way my mind's moving at the moment, I think I'm going to go with leave.

Speaker 5

I said, Look, I know you think that my renegotiation hasn't achieved everything you think it should, but you've never backed leaving the EU before. You've argued for reform. You're a Eurosceptic. Fine, but you've never argued for leaving, so don't start now.

Speaker 7

He did get a bit testy, and he said, Well, if you do that, I will **** you up forever. And I was... I was a bit intimidated by that because I didn't... It's a long time to be, you know, ***** ** by, you know, the instruments of government with all the, you know, trained fucker-uppers.

Speaker 5

I don't remember saying that, but, look, I was getting very passionate about it because I knew that Boris had a huge role to play in this.

Speaker 7

I went back to see my family later on that evening. I said, well, look, you know, I had a bit of a bust-up with Dave earlier on about the EU thing.

Speaker 15

Boris relayed that Cameron had said to him, if you support leave, I'll **** you up forever. I thought it was actually surprisingly weak in a way. And I thought it was surprising that they weren't talking about the issues.

Speaker 2

Marina Wheeler, Boris Johnson's wife, was celebrating her recent appointment as a QC.

Speaker 15

Is Boris ahead? He's not here, no. I was hoping to persuade you that you might not need to stay around here, actually.

Speaker 2

She had long-standing concerns about the EU's increasing hold over UK law.

Speaker 15

David Cameron had come back saying that he had achieved a great deal by managing to exempt the UK from Ever Closer Union. The real problem with Ever Closer Union was that the Court of Justice used this as a way of expanding the reach of EU law and expanding the whole scope of the project. And what Cameron had achieved in terms of agreement wasn't going to touch that.

Speaker 7

I've known Marina since I was a small kid. We've both been small. She's basically a liberal soul, right? She's not a foaming xenophobe, the absolute opposite.

Speaker 15

As a lawyer, I began to be more and more aware of that process of what the court was doing. And I did have that conversation with Boris.

Speaker 7

I was very struck when she said that she, too, was inclined to vote leave.

Speaker 15

Personally, I felt, you know, the country will choose. You can't just keep quiet. That is abrogating responsibility. But he was coming under great pressure to stick with Cameron.

Speaker 7

I didn't particularly want to upset the apple car. I didn't want to, you know, be ***** ** forever. Why, you know?

Speaker 2

As Boris Johnson wavered, David Cameron decided he and George Osborne needed to confront Michael Gove.

Speaker 3

David Cameron once described the world of politics as being divided into two types of people, team players and *****. And from David's point of view, I'd been a team player in the past. So when there was a requirement to fall into line on the EU referendum, I think he naturally assumed that I would be a team player then.

Speaker 6

I really remember that meeting. And it wasn't just a meeting, it was a meeting of friends. You know, we were people who had lived together for 10 years in terms of our work, in terms of our holidays. You know, we knew each other's families.

Speaker 5

George and I tried to spell out for him what we thought the consequences would be if he supported Leave and if, as a result, Leave gained a lot of traction and won.

Speaker 6

I basically pleaded with Michael. I said, if you go to the Leave campaign, you are going to give it credibility, which it doesn't currently have. It's got a kind of farage tinge to it, which puts a lot of respectable people off. Boris Johnson is going to get FOMO and feel he has to be part. And David Cameron is going to have to resign if we lose. Don't kid yourself that this government can continue if you've lost this big referendum. And everything we have worked for is going to be shattered.

Speaker 3

For me, the fundamental problem with Britain's membership of the European Union is that laws were imposed on us that we couldn't alter or change. And European Union law for all of the member states is supreme.

Speaker 6

And I said, whatever your sort of particular concerns about parliamentary sovereignty, we are a country that needs the economic support of the EU. And frankly, you know, what's going to happen if we leave? Who's going to be happy? Vladimir Putin's going to be happy. The Chinese president's going to be happy. And doesn't that tell you what this really means for the West?

Speaker 3

I made it clear to them, I'm sorry, this is something I deeply believe. I didn't want this referendum. But now I have to make a choice.

Speaker 5

This was a bombshell that someone who I was very close to was a key part of the team was wavering and then effectively saying, I think I'm going to go with leave.

Speaker 3

For me, there was a choice between staying close to what I believed and, you know, relative moral cowardice and suppressing that in order to, well, to safeguard personal relationships.

Speaker 2

A week later, Boris Johnson invited Gove to dinner.

Speaker 15

I had some warning because I cooked a pretty delicious slow-roast lamb, and it turned out that the purpose of the evening was for Boris and Michael to discuss this impending decision.

Speaker 7

I think what we were both thinking was, well, you know, do we want to go through the pain of being at variance with the prime minister, seeming to be difficult, being mutineers, and then probably losing, and then, you know, being cast out as splitters and, you know, whatever.

Speaker 15

We started off, I think, upstairs, you know, chatting around them. We went downstairs to eat dinner.

Speaker 3

Marina had cooked lamb. While we were reaching and discussing the pros and cons of our membership of the EU, the phone rang. It was Oliver Letman, who was David Cameron's policy supremo. Boris put it on speaker.

Speaker 7

We were trying to sort out this question of whether you could somehow assert the supremacy of UK law over European law.

Speaker 15

Although I was trying hard not to show that I was listening to this, I mean, obviously, I was hearing sort of snippets of it. And I thought, Hmm... I mean, it sounded pretty unlikely to me.

Speaker 3

It became clear during the conversation that Britain remaining in the European Union would mean Britain continuing to be subject to European laws and the European Court of Justice. We couldn't change those laws. We'd have to accept, of a closer union, whatever the deal said. And that, for me, was a clincher.

Speaker 2

But Michael Gove did not tell the Prime Minister he'd made his decision.

Speaker 5

I'll be battling for Britain. If we can get a good deal, I'll take that deal, but I will not take a deal that doesn't meet what we need.

Speaker 2

The next evening, just as Cameron was about to announce the deal he'd secured from his EU counterparts, news broke from London.

Speaker 20

In a blow to the Prime Minister, the BBC has been told that one of his closest Cabinet allies, Michael Gove, will campaign to leave the EU.

Speaker 5

We were at the end of an incredibly long negotiation, and it was a shock that it was being done at the moment when I was preparing to think how I would talk to the country about this. Now, let me say about Michael Gove. Michael is one of my oldest and closest friends. So, of course, I'm disappointed that we're not going to be on the same side as we have this vital argument about our country's future.

Speaker 2

Cameron returned home to launch the referendum. He called the first Saturday Cabinet meeting since the Falklands War in 1982.

Speaker 11

It felt momentous to be walking into that Cabinet meeting. We're all... conscious that it was a meeting that might play a significant part in history. There was lots of support for the Prime Minister's deal. There are other cabinet members who made their views plain that they were on the Leave side.

Speaker 21

It was worrying to hear different views on one campaign that the government was going to be running. It's difficult enough in politics to all follow one leader, one plan. And the concept of us all having different views and picking sides was going to be very different from what we'd got used to.

Speaker 11

I think the most powerful intervention came from Michael Gove, where he emphasized that he just couldn't pass up the opportunity to secure the UK's place as an independent, self-governing democracy.

Speaker 3

I just spoke from the heart, that this was the moment that Britain could choose to be an independent, self-governing nation. And for me, that was, above all, the most important consideration.

Speaker 5

Those who want to leave Europe cannot tell you if British businesses would be able to access Europe's free trade single market, or if working people's jobs are safe, or how much prices would rise. All they're offering is a risk at a time of uncertainty. On Monday, I will go to Parliament and propose that the British people decide our future in Europe through an in-out referendum on Thursday, the 23rd of June.

Speaker 21

When the Prime Minister actually announced the date, I thought, holy **** that is so soon. We've got so much to do in order to win that referendum. But the Leavers had a plan immediately after that Cabinet, and they came together very quickly.

Speaker 10

I had a Jaguar XF which had parked up outside the house and the ministers came over from Downing Street. So I put a great escape on and drove them over to vote leave. I remember looking in my rearview mirror and thinking how slightly absurd it was to see

four members of the cabinet crammed into a car heading to vote leave. It was a very strange moment.

Speaker 3

Theresa Villiers, the Northern Ireland secretary, had a government car for personal protection reasons, and she invited me to join her to go to the Vote Leave headquarters.

Speaker 11

The car journey, it was quite quiet and solemn. I think both Michael and I were conscious that these next hours, days, weeks of the referendum could have a... Big impact on the future of our country, potentially, and significantly an impact on us and our careers personally. Michael was perhaps not quite his ebullient self. Mr. Gove, tell us why you're against Prime Minister.

Speaker 3

I'm normally a relatively ebullient person. I was reflecting on what a momentous decision this was.

Speaker 10

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming both the... It's me who opened the door and asked everybody to welcome them to the campaign, and it was a genuine moment of joy that suddenly the cavalry had now arrived.

Speaker 6

I remember watching it with David Cameron on TV, just like every other citizen, and it was a real shock because these were, you know, our colleagues, our friends, some cases close personal friends. I think that was the first moment we realised, my God, this is going to be proper kind of civil war inside the Conservative Party. You know, there's something, you know, there's something about a civil war, which is, which kind of hits you here.

Speaker 2

Just one person was left on the fence. Your comment, Mr Johnson.

Speaker 8

That morning, I sat on the sofa opposite the Prime Minister trying to discuss firing the gun on the campaign, and I remember a clear moment where David Cameron had his BlackBerry in front of him. And I stopped talking and just let him read it. And when he'd finished, he just looked up at me and said, well, it looks like out. And he didn't need to say to me that was Boris Johnson's e-mail.

Speaker 2

Within hours, Johnson seemed to have U-turned.

Speaker 7

I was just getting bombarded with phone calls from people I know and love saying, you know, if you vote, leave, you'll be tendering your resignation from the human race. You'll be joining, you know, bigots and xenophobes incorporated. It's like, you know, my spirit sinks like, oh, God. And then I sent another message today, you know, recording my growing depression about the situation.

Speaker 5

I wasn't hopeful about the depression setting in, obviously, but I was hopeful. that he was really having second thoughts about supporting leave.

Speaker 15

My vice to Boris was to go by himself to our house in Oxfordshire in Tame, and write a case for leave and write a case for remain, and just get it completely clear in your own mind.

Speaker 7

I did, like, and I read about a thousand words or so for leave, and I talked to Marina, and we talked it over.

Speaker 15

It contained what I thought were the fundamental issues about sovereignty, and it was clear that some of what I'd been saying had had an impact.

Speaker 7

When I sat down to write the second piece, the best argument I could come up with was David Cameron's deal wasn't any good, but, you know, he was never going to get a good deal, and we might as well just grin and bear it.

Speaker 20

Boris hates being on his own. So I texted him to say, what are you doing? And he said, why don't you come to him and have lunch?

Speaker 7

Rachel turns up, and she's brought lasagna. And it was very kind of her. I thought it was exactly fantastic.

Speaker 20

I could sense this pent-up anxiety and sort of tension. So I said, why don't we go and play tennis? So we hit balls to each other. And I was trying to work out his thinking. I said, I don't get it. If you want to be prime minister, which you do, why wouldn't you support David Cameron, who said he's only doing one term, and then you'd be the natural successor? And he was saying, But that's not what I'm thinking. I don't give a **** about being prime minister.

Speaker 7

I was getting incredibly impatient. with arguments based on what might happen to me.

Speaker 2

They went back inside, and Rachel Johnson, a committed Remainer, read her brother's two articles.

Speaker 20

And I say, Well, it's quite obvious. The column for Remain is very powerful and conclusive. And the column for Leave is all about how, if we were in the EU, We couldn't determine the height of wing mirrors on our trucks. And I was like, Is that it? Is that the best you've got?

Speaker 7

There was nothing in the article for Romaine except, you know, doing the right thing by Dave. And anyway...

Speaker 20

I remember him saying to me, and being very struck by this, that he'd re-read the column for Romaine. And he said, And it made me feel sick.

Speaker 7

At some deep level, it is an emotional thing, you know. You either want the country to be independent, or you think that we should create a federal Europe.

Speaker 5

You're a fraud, Nigel! I said, It's got nothing to do with it, Boris. It's about stopping Nigel.

Speaker 1

It was a very powerful image. It's an image, by the way, that if you used it today, you'd probably get very little criticism.

Speaker 13

David Cameron said, We need a shock factor. And I said to him, Look, we've had the shock factor. Joe Cox was assassinated.

Speaker 23

From global events to viral chaos, top comment unpacks the trends making up your social media feeds now on Sounds.

Speaker 18

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