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# Paula Keaveney’s Political Week – Episode 4

Paula:

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We're here again with Paula Keaveney, senior lecturer in politics at Edge Hill University. We haven't talked for a couple of weeks or so, but a lot has happened in that time. So, perhaps you can talk because through what's happened, you know, with regards to our new Prime Minister and what will be in her in tray.

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Yeah, so they always say when you become Prime Minister that it's a shock because there's suddenly all these extra things to deal with and anything can happen. But this is probably the most dramatic job induction that any prime minister would have because normally you wouldn't be expected in your very first few days to deal with a series of circumstances, such as the death of a monarch and clearly that has

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upended the normal run of things. So, there will be lots of things that Liz Truss would have wanted to do straight away, which are now waiting. Meanwhile, there's a whole world of dealing with protocol, dealing with Arrangements going forward, that she wouldn't have been expecting to do straight away. So, a big, big shock and a lot of difficult things to deal with. So, from Liz Truss’

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point of view, she'll be trying to think “Okay, now how do I work through the priority list”. Because she had a priority list and it was really long and it's got longer because that's the nature of these things when you become prime minister. So, she'll be thinking “Okay, energy crisis, International diplomacy managing the Party, Party Conference”, you know, all of these

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things sort of going forward that normally you would expect her to have had a lot of planning and run up time for which in our crowd, and you know each other. So, really, really tricky, really, really tricky, few weeks coming up. So first, I guess everyone prior to her election victory was fretting about the cost of living. She was on the brink of announcing that when other things happened, I mean, how does it how do they take this forward to… You know, how

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are they going to practically deal with the issue? Yes. So she was making a statement in the Commons and during that statement, we could see pieces of paper being passed around which were actually partly the news about the queen, being seriously ill, the statement was made and in that statement there was mention of some emergency legislation and the need for not a budget that they're calling it a fiscal event. So, the announcement of some changes

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to taxation, for example. So those things will still have to happen, and the question is about finding parliamentary time for those things to happen. So, when Parliament comes back, there's a tiny tiny bit of time before the party conferences start. Normally when the Party Conferences start MPs are off for a period of time for that to happen. The suggestion is that that times going to have to be short.

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And because some of the things that truss announced do need parliamentary time, do need legislation to happen so that will have to be managed. And of course, you know there are other things that need parliamentary time as well. That just reporting back on things taking other pieces of legislation forward. So, we're going to see quite a crowded timetable. She's made a lot of promises to the conservative members, but will she be able to deliver

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on those or will reality bite? Well, reality will bite, in the sense that, you know, there were a lot of things said, and many of those things are the type of decision that actually takes several years to get implemented. That's just the nature of large changes in government. So, some of those things will undoubtedly end up in an election manifesto but you know some of the things she's talked about you will be able to make progress on for example lifting the ban on

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fracking, if she decides to do that, that can actually be done reasonably quickly sending signals about the sort of approach she wants to have can be done reasonably quickly. But if somebody were to go through all those hustings and write down everything that was said and then look at how long it would take to do that. That would be a bit of an eye-opener because one of the things we think,

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Can happen in Politics is that someone says on day one, I will do X and quite often doing X involves a whole other load of administrative processes and organizational details and planning. That means it can't be done on day one, but maybe on day 365 we can start getting it in place. So right in the middle of all this is conference season and I'm guessing there's already been one or two

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casualties there, can you fill us in on the importance of conferences? You know a lot of people would be thinking why bother with them at all? Yeah when I was a child these conferences used to be on live television including the TUC conference so you'd effectively have, you know, three or so weeks where the afternoon broadcasts were live from conferences that doesn't happen anymore, and we wouldn't expect to see it on the main BBC channels anymore. Do they matter?

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Well, they matter for in some ways. So, for political parties, these events are very important because some parties actually make their policy at these events, their decision-making bodies. And their part of the way the party is run, the conservatives don't actually make policy at their conferences. The conservative conference is much more of a rally, much more of a sort of shop window for senior people to make speeches. But

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even so they’re important to party members because it's a way of sort of, renewing your commitment to the party, sort of coming together celebrating training all these sorts of things. So, conferences are important to a relatively small group of the population, mainly party members, but also journalists. Because if you're a journalist, a very easy way of getting a story is to go to a party conference and find a split so journalists actually they complain about them.

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But they love them because they generate lots and lots of stories. So, conferences are really there for the parties and the sort of part of our democratic the way we keep our democracy going and there have been casualties. So, the Trade union Congress, cancelled theirs and the Lib Dems cancelled theirs. This is both because of the actual funeral and the period of mourning, running up to this that caused a dilemma

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for the other parties but Labour and the conservatives will hold their conferences as I think will the SMP. But again, the tone will be important because even when an official period of mourning is over, there will be a sense that it might look wrong to be too stridently political campaigning slagging off other parties. So, it is going to be interesting to see how

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particularly the Labour party, manages the tone of of what that conference does. And the Labour party conference is actually in Liverpool this year. So, we will probably have more of a chance to see how that's playing out than we normally would. And I believe that when possible you take students? Yes, we've got some students actually going to one of the days at the Labour conference this year. The party, very kindly, have let us have some

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free passes for a day. So, it's great for students to be able to experience the inside of a big political event. And in previous years, we've been to conservative conferences, we’ve been to a lib Dem conference and we've been to a green Party Conference so where we can we get into these events, It's very exciting to be inside a conference. You see, a lot of famous people. I mean, if you're interested in politics, you see a lot of famous people at Close Quarters.

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And you can see some very Lively debates going on. It's funny when you're inside a conference and then you step out, it's like two worlds. So, for example, I've been to a conference in Bournemouth, and in the conference centre, big issue, you know, lots of people getting worked up and then you step out and there’s people just having a nice walk by the seafront eating fish and chips and It is so very different. The two worlds are very, very different

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I know journalists In the past, have said they like, coming up, for example, to Liverpool, because eating out afterwards is so cheap. Yes. I mean, the one downside for people that have to pay their own way to party conferences, is that you are eating out all the time. So, you do have to watch the pennies, but it is great, If you're used to London prices coming to a conference in Blackpool or Liverpool or Manchester and appreciating that, the difference, I guess it is good as well.

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So, for politicians to get out of that Westminster bubble at times. Yes, although if they stay in the conference Hotel on the conference centre, the bubble’s just moved really. But generally, the senior politicians, try to go out. So, parties will organize photo opportunities and visits in the local area of the conference for their senior people. So, in Liverpool, I would expect to see Keir Starmer and others in the team.

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actually going out to visit projects in the wider Merseyside area partly for photographs, partly to meet people. And I would expect the conservatives do a similar thing at their conference. I feel very sorry for the press officers because actually sometimes devising an interesting photo linked to a conference in very specific, geographical area is difficult and there's a limited number of places

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you can go because of security. So, every year there is this search for what is the best image? You know, what is the best image, where can this person go, who can they go and talk to that's going to add value to it. And then this Conservative Party Conference. Will there be any surprise guest speakers? Yes, so that Conservative conference is interesting because their period in the main hall is is generally shorter than the

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other parties, so they… Because they don't have debates as such. They won't be like labor and the lib Dems starting at 9 a.m. with a full program in the big Hall. So, their time in the big Hall is shorter, but they do have a very extensive program of Fringe meetings, you know, some of them run by business, some by think tanks campaigning organizations and often at Conservative Party Conference. The Fringe is more newsworthy than the

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Main hall. So, you know in the run-up to brexit there were some Fringe meetings very much, Anti the EU which attracted large numbers of delegates and big name speakers. So, we may see Boris Johnson at a fringe meeting. We may see other former office holders at Fringe meetings and so the journalist will more likely be going to The Fringe meeting with Boris Johnson than

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the debate in the hall about foreign policy, you know, because they can always get the foreign policy material later, what they'll be looking for, if there's a fringe with Boris Johnson, speaking will be how far he will go in criticizing, that's what they're looking for. So, I would expect if he's speaking at one of those fringes for that to be, where the cameras are. An unfair crystal ball time is, will there be a comeback?

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I can't see Boris Johnson making a comeback as prime minister for the simple logistical reason that he’s… So you have to be an MP to be prime minister. He is an MP, his constituency is is a marginal constituency now so he would have to first hold that seat or persuade someone else to stand down and then persuade that area to select him as their candidate and that's a big ask and

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the Labour party, will clearly target the seat that Boris Johnson is defending, you don't need to be a, you know, brain surgeon to work that out and other senior conservatives with marginal seats, will also be targeted not necessarily Always by labor. So, the lib Dems are targeting Dominic Rob, but these people are targets. And so, Boris Johnson has a big job to hold on to that seat. And is he the sort of person that is going to want to spend the next few years before

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between now and the election shoring up support in a constituency as opposed to developing another career, I don't see him as the sort of Theresa May, let's go back to the constituency and do lots of casework type of person. I just don't. So that's a decision. He would have to make, you know, you can't take for granted that you're going to be returned as the MP and

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the party has to decide what they want to do in terms of their relationship with him. He's still got to publish a list of peers. He gets his resignation honors list. So, you know there is still the potential for mischief making but I honestly don't see him as a sort of person that spends the next, however, many months and years, it is doing case work in his constituency. Okay.

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Final word. So just to get back to Liz truss and the things that lie ahead of her. She'll obviously, as part of her role is to develop a relationship with the Monarch. So that brings together, two people new to that particular role. How, how does that work? Yeah, well there’s no real training for this apart from there is this group of people at the top of British politics called the privy Council and

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They will have had some experience of meeting a monarch. So, we'll have some sense of how protocol works but you know that, that said we have a new monarch and a new prime minister and a new relationship to be worked out. So, the late Queen was very experienced and knew how to deal with a procession of different people that she had to deal with as prime minister and

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the King has had some experience of this because the late Queen did attempt to help him think through how this would work. But this is going to be interesting because it's sort of, although we think we know about Charles, we don't really know about Charles. So, this is one of an unknown quantity meeting an unknown quantity and working out how that's going to operate so that will be interesting. I mean these these they have a weekly audience

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and and these are not reported, so we won't have TV cameras seeing what goes on. So, the only way we're likely to find out is by Anonymous briefing. So, I mean, if, if we find there’s a lot of anonymous briefing, we know the relationships going wrong straight away, because you shouldn't ask that. But again, it's another thing that Truss has to try to manage and when you are active in campaigning politics and you, you're focused on sort of winning votes, you know, winning.

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See, going up the ladder. Things like sort of protocol and dealing with ceremonial are never top of mind. It's something that's added on to your job, but it's not the main thing. And now all of a sudden she has to focus on, developing the ability to do this and it'll be interesting to see how she manages to do that. And Charles has obviously been fairly outspoken in certain regards in the past, particularly the environment. So, it’ll be

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Interesting to hear the conversation around fracking. Yes. And I mean, although he's now in a situation where he can't make the sort of public statements that he used to, we know, don't we that he's, he's had a long, long term interest in environmental policy and I mean, I would like to be a fly on the wall at the first audience. Because one of those trusts, his first actions, has been to sack from a particular environmental roles that Goldsmith old Goldsmith who, you know, was actually

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somebody very focused on environmentalism and obviously is also someone that that King Charles will know. So, I suspect he would have a view of the removal of that Goldsmith from from that role. So, you know, oh, to be a fly on the wall for that one. Oh to be a fly on the wall in a lot of rooms over the next few weeks. Once again, Paula, thanks again for your Insight. Interesting stuff, food

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for thought. I look forward to the next one, pleasure.