



Of bits and pieces

15.02.2019, Episode 50

Owen in China

Hello and welcome, this is Owen and this is my podcast for Friday 15th February, 2019. It hardly seems possible but this is now the 50th time I've welcomed you to my podcast. A lot has happened in the world since we started this podcast. We live in interesting times. Whether you feel optimistic or pessimistic about the future, it certainly feels like a lot is happening. If you follow the news, you sometimes get the sense that everything is connected. Something grabs your attention [1] and because you're thinking about it, you notice a link to something else. I've had that feeling a lot this month. Everything is somehow linked. Linked to me, linked to each other, even linked to this podcast.

So today, I'll be talking about bits and pieces of interconnected news.

First off, if you live in the UK, there's one topic you can't get away from. You can't turn on the television or the radio or read a newspaper without coming across it. It's everywhere and it isn't going away anytime soon. Even after it's officially been taken care of [2], discussions will no doubt continue for many decades. Books will be written, films will be made, it will never end. I'm talking, of course, about Brexit. I have returned to the land of Brexit and it's exhausting [3]. At the time of the referendum, I was still living in China and I followed the whole thing from afar. But I got the chance to relive the period leading up to [4] the referendum recently



because they've already made a film about it. If there's one thing the British can do, it's make a good film about it. They'll make a right [5] mess of the referendum, but they'll find a way to turn it into great entertainment. The film was produced for television and it's called 'Brexit: The Uncivil [6] War'. The film focuses mainly on the winners, the people behind the campaign to leave the EU. The main character in the film is one of the main strategists of the Vote Leave campaign. Needless to say, some of the tactics that were employed [7] were very questionable. I'm not sure how accurate the film is, but it does make you think about people's motivations for doing things.

Speaking of political strategists and motivations, I recently read an article by a Swiss journalist about the American political strategist, Arthur Finkelstein, who helped get Victor Orbán elected in Hungary. Finkelstein ran lots of Republican campaigns in the US before working for various political parties all over the world. In Hungary, he was the one who had the idea to make the billionaire, George Soros, the enemy. The demonisation [8] of Soros has undoubtedly contributed to the rise in antisemitism in Hungary and other countries. But Finkelstein himself was Jewish. It's all very disturbing [9]. After reading that article, I heard Soros give a speech in Davos at the WEF. He spoke very frankly [10] and openly about China and the threat posed by the Communist Party of China. It was the type of honesty about China that you don't hear that often, especially from a billionaire, because of business interests and all the money that is invested in China.

Billionaires and China bring me to a book I've been reading. It's about the concentration of wealth and power and all the problems that that creates. It's written by an American journalist who used to work for the management consulting firm McKinsey. He's very sceptical of billionaires who think they know what's best for the world. He questions their philanthropic projects and what the motivation behind these projects really is. Having worked for a company like McKinsey, I think, gives him some interesting insight [11]. McKinsey made the headlines themselves recently. Headlines for all the wrong reasons. At the end of last year, McKinsey held a big company retreat [12] in China. Out of all the places in China, they chose to hold the party in the desert just outside of Kashgar, a city on the old Silk Road in the far west of China. It was a very strange choice of place for a retreat. There is something extremely worrying going on in the

far west of China at the moment. The Chinese government has set up a huge network of re-education camps where thousands and thousands of ethnic Uyghurs are being held. I wish there was more coverage about it in the media.

As I was preparing this podcast, I thought that I should end it on a positive note. After all, there are lots wonderful things happening in the world as well. I was struggling to think of something when I came across an album I haven't listened to in a while. I spoke about it on one of my first podcasts. It's an album by Jeff Bridges and it once helped me get over [13] jet lag. Anyway, Jeff Bridges is, of course, more well-known for being an actor. In fact, he's in one of my all-time favourite films. The film is called 'The Big Lebowski' and in it Jeff Bridges plays The Dude. I think it's fair to say [14] that The Dude is one of the most iconic [15] characters in cinema history. If you haven't seen the film, please do so immediately. The Dude is the complete opposite of all the political strategists and billionaires I've been talking about. He's lazy and laid-back [16] and not at all ambitious. The other day Jeff Bridges posted a short clip of himself as The Dude online. The clip shows The Dude walking into a bar and glancing around [17]. Almost immediately, there were rumours that they might be making a sequel. Were they really going to bring back The Dude? If there were ever a time the world needed The Dude, surely it would be now. He could certainly bring a bit of perspective to it all. A few days passed and Jeff Bridges posted another clip online. This time it was a little longer and it revealed the real reason for reviving [18] the character. I can't tell you how disappointed I was. I couldn't quite believe it. Jeff Bridges got back into character as The Dude to make ... an advertisement! An ad [19] for a multinational beer corporation! If you know the movie, you'll know that this is not at all what The Dude is all about. The Dude sold his soul [20] to a beer corporation. I could add that the ad mentions a clean water initiative that was launched [21] by this beer corporation. But what was that about questioning philanthropic projects?

That's just about it for this month. Thank you so much for listening and for your comments. Ruth, I've passed on your message to Gerry. Armin, what a great friend you have! You can listen to all our episodes by downloading our app or by visiting our website podclub.ch. You can also download our vocabulary trainer and you can find us on Instagram. I'll be back on 15th March. Until then, take care.

Glossar: Owen in China

[1] to grab so.'s attention: to succeed in getting so.'s attention

[2] to take care of: here: to do what is necessary to deal with a situation

[3] exhausting: making you feel very tired

[4] leading up to sth.: happening right before sth.

[5] right: here: complete (normally used to emphasise how bad sth. is)

[6] uncivil: impolite, unfriendly in a formal way (civil can mean polite but a civil war is a war fought between people from the same country)

[7] to employ sth.: here: to use sth. for a particular purpose

[8] demonisation: the act of describing so. as bad or dangerous even though they are not

[9] disturbing: worrying, upsetting

[10] frankly: in an honest and direct manner

[11] insight: the ability to understand a situation

[12] retreat: a period of time you spend in a relaxing and private place

[13] to get over sth.: to start to feel better again after sth. bad has happened

[14] fair to say: reasonable and not expected to cause argument

[15] iconic: famous and distinctive

[16] laid-back: relaxed and easygoing

[17] **to glance around:** to take a quick look around

[18] **to revive:** here: to bring back

[19] **ad:** short for advertisement

[20] **to sell one's soul (to the devil):** to do sth. immoral for money or success

[21] **to launch:** here: to start