Arts & Theatre

In Conversation

Shadow Culture Secretary The Rt. Hon. Stuart Andrew MP

Sophie Layton (she/her)

As the Government has settled into its new roles following the 2024 General Election, ensuring that a strong Opposition is prepared to face them is crucial, and with the former Secretary of State for Culture, Media & Sport losing her seat, it was time for a new figure to rise into her place to face Lisa Nandy and her Culture, Media & Sport ministerial team. Heading to the Capital and into the stunning setting of Portcullis House, I recently sat down with the man tasked with advocating for our cultural industries, to hear about his plans for Opposition, and his career prior to the Opposition front bench.

The Rt. Hon. Stuart Andrew MP is the Conservative Member of Parliament for Daventry in Northamptonshire. He currently serves as the Shadow Secretary of State for Culture, Media & Sport, in the Opposition Shadow Cabinet of Kemi Badenoch. First elected in 2010, Andrew has served in a number of Government roles, including in the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Justice. Following the appointment of Liz Truss as Prime Minister, he became Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Sport, Media, Civil Society & Youth within the Department of Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), a brief he was charged with until the dissolution of Parliament prior to the 2024 General Election. With the Conservatives now in Opposition, Andrew served as Opposition Chief Whip under the outgoing leader and former Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, until Kemi Badenoch won the Conservative leadership ballot, and appointed him Shadow Secretary of State for Culture, Media & Sport. Born in Anglesey in North Wales, Andrew was a fundraiser, as well as a borough councillor before entering Parliament.

With Parliament's Shadow portfolios discussed much less than their governmental counterparts, I began by asking Stuart Andrew what his role involves, and what the key differences are between a Governmental and Opposition portfolio. "I mean, the reality is, it's similar, but it's very different at the same time [...] as the Shadow Secretary of State, I cover the whole brief, so that includes media, tourism, historic sites, all sorts of other things as well, so it's trying to learn, or keep up-to-date with what I was doing anyway, but then actually learn a whole host of other things".

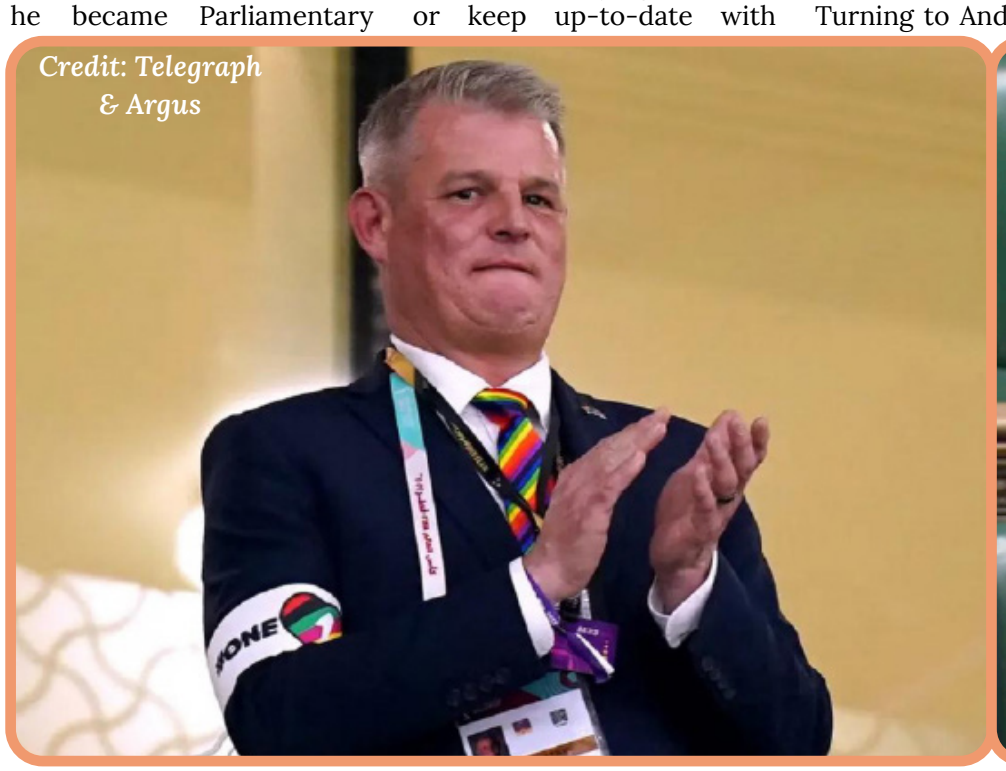
"My job is now to hold the government to account, to make sure that the promises they've made are being delivered, and then to scrutinise some of the decisions that are being made [...] to just ask the questions that perhaps they hadn't given some thought to". Andrew also spoke to the need to engage directly with sectors in his brief and understand their concerns, such as the rise in Employer's National Insurance contributions that is reported to be of concern to many charity bodies.

Andrew also spoke passionately about why it is that he enjoys this brief so much, particularly compared to other Shadow portfolios: "You also get the opportunity to see some of the amazing things that go on in this country, whether it's charities delivering services on the ground, to some of the best art and productions that you can see anywhere in the world, and particularly the creative industries. I think this country has a real opportunity to be a world leader in that."


Credit: UK Parliament

Turning to Andrew's Shadow Ministerial team, I then asked the Shadow Secretary how the transition had been from Government to Opposition, particularly as the only MP from the governmental team still in the department. "It's very different, I mean not least getting used to sitting on the other side of the chamber! But also, when you're in Government, you do have a host of civil servants to help you that will prepare the briefing notes, the research work, whereas a lot of that we have to do ourselves. And we do have support from our central office and our research departments, and our individual team members like Stacy [Andrew's Office Manager], getting us the information that we need, but it is a big transition".

With his new ministerial team in the form of Saqib Bhatti (Conservative, Meriden & Solihull East) and Louie French (Conservative, Old Bexley & Sidcup), I asked whether his team were ready to face the new Keir Starmer Cabinet team, particularly as neither have prior experience within DCMS. "Continuity is equally important, but actually both Saqib and Louie bring personal experiences as well, so Louie's a massive sports fan and big horseracing fan as well, so having someone who has that sort of personal knowledge and day-to-day understanding of the issues that may be being faced is really helpful. And Saqib has spent time as a minister in DSIT [Department of Science, Innovation & Technology], so obviously things like AI and how AI may affect music and the creative industries, having his knowledge of that I think really has helped us [...] and we're also fortunate in that Steven Parkinson is still a part of the team, he's the Lords Spokesman. Steven has a huge knowledge of the theatre and the arts sectors, so having that continuity has been helpful".


Credit: Telegraph & Argus


Credit: BBC Parliament