

## **View From Westminster – July 2019**

British politics is a brutal arena and the swiftness with which it consumes the defeated is admirably macabre. Mrs May, the personification of defeated, was accorded the dignity of polite applause from the House before being bundled out of Buckingham Palace for a future life of after dinner speeches. In her place stumbles Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson. Blessed with a mandate from 0.04% of the population, the great clown jester of UK politics soon got extremely serious by carrying out the widest ranging cabinet reshuffle in generations – arguably ever.

More than 50% of cabinet ministers find themselves without the trappings of office. Some jumped, others were pushed. The most notable was perhaps Jeremy Hunt; a man who just secured 40,000 votes in a leadership contest, yet has been ruthlessly dispatched back to the backbenches after nine years of continuous service. In the place of the discarded come the dogmatic. We have a less balanced cabinet now and one that can unite behind a particular strand of conservatism. At its heart is Dominic Cummings, the former CEO of Vote Leave and a man widely regarded as the greatest campaigner of his generation...but also an anarchistic firestarter...A general election is surely coming...

As for ADEPT – it was all change in the ministerial department. Top of the tree is the replacement of Spreadsheet Phil Hammond with Sajid Javid at HMT. There is no doubt whatsoever that Sajid will continue to adopt a prudent economic approach and his past experience as a high-flying city worker should ensure he at least understands basic economic theory. Boris Johnson has promised a loosening of the purse strings and Sajid will therefore have some wiggle room. His instincts however are to cut...he is a protegee of George Osborne after all...and the going may not necessarily get easier with Sajid at the Treasury. Rishi Sunak will act number two in HMT, bringing some radicalism to proceedings.

At MHCLG, we see James Brokenshire departing the stage to be replaced by Robert Jenrick. It's quite the promotion for Jenrick, who had previously undertaken a junior role at the Treasury, although it should be noted that he is a close friend and political ally of the new PM. One expects a steady-as-she-goes approach from Robert in this new post, although having Esther McVey as a junior at MHCLG will no doubt raise a few eyebrows in councils across the country. Jake Berry will also be at MHCLG. All three have the right to attend cabinet.

One of the least surprising parts of the reshuffle is the departure of Chris Grayling from the Department for Transport. With the greatest of respects to Mr Grayling, it probably is time for a refresh at the department and it will perhaps experience it under the slightly surprising choice that is Grant Shapps. One of the last Cameronites still swinging, most thought Grant had had it following his dismissal as party chairman some years ago in the wake of a controversy surrounding the suicide of conservative activist Elliot Johnson. However, he diligently kept numbers for the Boris Johnson leadership

campaign and has been rewarded for his early loyalty to the cause. Grant is an excellent political operator and will revitalise DfT.

Finally, Michael Gove has moved onto pastures new, with Defra being handed to Theresa Villiers. Another close friend of Johnson and a stalwart of Vote Leave, it makes sense that such a Brexit facing department is under the jurisdiction of a committed Brexiteer. Theresa may not possess the radicalism of Mr Gove, but she is a very competent and experienced cabinet minister who will do what's needed to be done in what is an increasingly important and vital department.