

ADEPT View from Westminster January 2020

The United Kingdom has left the European Union. Transition ensures, for the moment at least, nothing has really changed in any practical sense. The symbolism is obvious however and, perhaps most importantly, Remainers now must decide if they become Rejoiners. Whatever one's thoughts on it all, there is no denying the moment is historic.

There is something quintessentially British about three years of intemperate debate concluding with rhetorical fisticuffs over the wording on a coin and the merits of Big Ben's Bongs. The coin, as regular readers will recall, has been with us before and suffered the embarrassment of being pulped to prevent a dose of premature circulation. Its reappearance provoked predictable controversy, although contestation focused not on its fluffy language or mere existence, but the absence of the Oxford comma. It really doesn't get more British than that... As for Big Ben's Bongs, it is perhaps sensible to leave readers to make their own innuendo-laden joke as personal sensitivities see fit... However, one cannot help feeling that a descent into debating whether what is essentially a piece of scaffolding should chime suggests public discourse has a long way to climb.

However, for all of that, here we are. Britannia is again sailing on its own steam. Whether it's Horatio Nelson or Uncle Albert in the crow's nest depends on your presupposed politics (evidence long ago walked the plank). There's little else to add on a subject done beyond death, other than to note with humour that the Conservatives have informed their membership that they can celebrate the momentous occasion by purchasing a Boris Johnson branded tea towel. Let capitalism reign!

Elsewhere, the business of running the nation trundles on. Select Committee Chairs have been elected, with exiled Mayites finding haven in their warm embrace. Jeremy Hunt and Greg Clark are just two of the previously prominent who find themselves marking both their own homework and that produced by those chosen in preference to them. The choice before them is to either keep the bodies buried or dig them up for public dissection. To help or not to help, that is the question... Whatever the choice, securing such prominent positions keeps the limelight shining and, for the likes of Mr Hunt, politics might be a long-term game.

The Labour Party meanwhile is threatening to awake from its post-election slumber, even if the leadership contest engulfing it has yet to truly excite...well, anyone. In the red corner is Rebecca Long Bailey, or "Becky" as she is now known, the continuity candidate who scored Mr Corbyn as a 10/10 leader. In the slightly less red corner is Sir Keir Starmer, whose pitch to the working class is to suggest life was tough growing up in the mean streets of the Surrey commuter belt. Lisa Nandy and Emily Thornberry remain on the undercard ready to go primetime should the opportunity arise. Jess Phillips has long departed the ring, but there will surely be a role for the outspoken moderniser on the shadow frontbench when the dust settles.

The Liberal Democrats have, amusingly, announced that their own leadership contest will take 6 months to run. Such a lengthy process would be commendable if the options before them were many and varied. Alas, the party now has so few MPs they'd only need two taxis to attend the hustings. We'll revisit this one in the summer when either Sir Edward Davey or Layla Moran is crowned.