**ADEPT View from Westminster January 2019**

Brexit.

Never has a word in the English language crushed a soul so brutally, relentless and inexorably. Stoical political veterans with icy veins and pitiless hearts can be observed weeping inconsolably at the mere mention of this simple two syllable word. It’s so sapping of life from all those forced to encounter it that I’ve just assumed it’s a Horcrux (ask your children) … Yet amidst this tortuous saga that lingers around Westminster like an unwanted smell we have a potential way forward.

Yvette Cooper has been the catalyst. Her amendment proposed to give the Government until the end of February to come up with a plan. Should it fail, Parliament would then take back control (copyright all Brexiteers c2016) of the process. It was an amendment that, for reasons too terminally dull to discuss here, would have driven a battering ram through centuries of parliamentary precedent. One should however not let such minor matters concern us. And anyway, it spooked the Brexiteers into action. Sir Graham Brady tabled his own amendment proposing to reopen the Withdrawal Agreement. This suffers from the problem that the EU might tell Parliament to bugger off. Nevertheless, the DUP, government and ERG rowed in behind it. Mrs May therefore heads to Brussels with an amended withdrawal agreement and the support of Parliament. She can look Mr Junker in the eye over his crate of wine and say “take it or WTO it”. The ball, for the moment, is in the EU’s court.

As for the Government… it has sent around the departmental memos effectively saying all non-urgent stuff is on hold until we’ve sorted Brexit out. My God it shows. The rest of this column could be summarised in one sentence: Nothing is happening of any note at all. Over at HMT, Spreadsheet Phil has been threatening resignation again should the government embrace no deal. The fact he did so from the snowy alps of Davos is a gift to the Brexit hardcore that keeps on giving. Personally however, I think the most amusing part of this is he talks as if anyone would notice or care… From a policy perspective, the department has been focused on ensuring the self-employed have completed their tax returns (insert expletive here) and the headline story on the HMT website is still the Budget…

At Defra, Michael Gove gave one excellent speech in the House winding up the No Confidence Vote debate and has become second favourite to succeed Mrs May. That’s all it takes these days. Just get up and say something about Jezza liking terrorists and your stocks rise. On a policy level, the department has found £3.5m for some albatross conversation projects in our overseas territories… and that’s about it really. At DfT, Chris Grayling is, understandably, pushing through more powers to tackle those pesky drones… and, although not Premier League politics, the digitisation of blue badge renewals is a positive thing. As for DCLG, they’re splashing the cash a bit. Town centres are invited to bid for up to £50,000 to renovate them, whilst 20+ coastal landmarks have been given £1m to share to help bring them up to their former glory.