

ADEPT View from Westminster September 2019

It's the season for substandard canapés and warm wine consumed in stuffy rooms filled with the hot air of "it's less a question, more an observation" contributions from the gathered masses. Party conference season is a thrill-a-minute politics fest where the liberals and socialists enjoy the seaside and the Tories enjoy...some protesters and pelting rain in Manchester.

The Liberal Democrats always put on the surrealist show, and this year was no exception as anyone who saw footage online would testify. However, they will be delighted with their recent political captures. People like Chuka Umunna and Sam Gymiah are genuinely talented and will enrich a party undergoing something of a resurrection following recent electoral obliterations. Their flagship policy was to announce that they'd pretend the referendum never happened by revoking Article 50. The inevitable remarks about such actions implying their moniker represents a breach of the Trades Descriptions Act will not deter Jo Swinson, who has her sights firmly on simultaneously stopping Brexit and enlarging her party. With much ambition now on her backbenches however, she'd do well to focus on securing her own position as much as building for the future.

The Labour Conference is the bastion of earnestness as they often debate the rulebook, although some attention rightly remains on the lingering antisemitic language some members still occasionally use. Their conference started with a failed attempt to abolish Tom Watson (so to speak), something the master plotter successfully rebuffed. It ended with them adopting a Brexit position so absurd that it feels at home in the anarchic modern political landscape. Effectively, it might see Mr Corbyn negotiate a deal only to then put it to the people with a suggestion they reject his efforts. It's quite some policy and I suspect it will be challenged moving forward.

The Brexit Party haven't bothered with a conference and have instead been touring the nation holding rallies. The Farage/Tice double act has lost some of the novelty established at launch, but it remains stubbornly there from the Conservatives perspective, ready to shout betrayal should a deal be inked, and with it, demands for a clean break Brexit.

The Conservatives have gone all out to render the Brexit Party ineffective. Polling suggests they've made some headway, but at the expense of alienating those upset by the industrial rhetoric needed to demonstrate Brexit credentials. Their conference has taken place with delegates as optimistic as they've been since Cameron was ready to waltz into Downing Street. Quite remarkable given the government has misplaced its majority, suffered a thumping loss in the Supreme Court and has its Prime Minister operating under the cloud of sexual allegations. And that's before the Benn Act is even mentioned...

Away from Brexit where the lines are so familiar, they don't require repetition, the big news from the Government was confirmation that austerity is over. To misquote the Beatles, Prudence is no longer playing...In its place is the location of the magic money mountain (we're well beyond trees). In excess of £50bn has been pledged to build hospitals, upgrade roads, improve the bus network and build more houses. Much of it is jam tomorrow and funded by the end of EU payments. The cynical eyebrow is somewhat arched, but perhaps

this is the moment when medium term pledges do actually become more than manifesto commitments.