

View from Westminster

Reshuffles have an enormous amount of stress associated with them. Special Advisers get handed P45s as their ministers get dispensed to the backbenches; civil servants, having successfully housetrained one set of ministers, must commence the laborious process all over again...and lobbyists can be found consoling themselves in the nearest public house as meticulously obtained powerful contacts are fired. On reshuffle days, there are plenty of tears before bedtime.

This reshuffle successfully hit the sweet spot of being substantial enough to represent change, but not so sweeping as to convey panic. Out went Gavin Williamson, who, it could be said, perhaps more than anyone in SW1 unfortunately, represented the personification of the Peter Principle. Robert Jenrick joined him, leaving his post as Local Government Secretary and Minister for the Today Programme. Robert Buckland was booted out from Justice for seemingly no fault or error committed, but to make way for the sideways movement of Dominic Raab. Rishi Sunak unsurprisingly remained Chancellor. George Eustice perhaps more surprisingly remained DEFRA Secretary (almost every journalist had him out of post on the day). Grant Shapps stays at Transport and Michael Gove replaces Robert Jenrick in the rebranded Department of Local Government & Everything Else That Is Currently Deemed Vaguely Important. Mr Raab might hold the nominal title of Deputy Prime Minister, but if one wishes to observe where real power now lies in the post-Cummings era, it's with the Aberdeen raver.

The media understandably focused on the big winner (Liz Truss) and the frankly curveball appointment (Nadine Dorries). As is standard in reshuffles however, some of the most interesting stuff occurred below the line. HMT lost all its junior ministers aside from John Glen...which should make preparations for the forthcoming CSR interesting. Rachel Maclean left DfT for the Home Office, to be replaced by rising star Trudy Harrison. Oliver Dowden moved into the Party Chairman role to begin the long march to the ballot box. George Freeman, one of the most radical parliamentarians on the Tory benches, is back at BEIS with the science brief. It is however the revamped local government department where the real noteworthy moves were made. Michael Gove leads a ministerial team that includes cabinet minister-in-waiting Kemi Badenoch, safe pairs of hands Victoria Atkins and Christopher Pincher, alongside the brains of Johnsonism, Neil O'Brien. It is one of the most radical thinking and reformist departments since the Tories took office in 2010. Change is gonna come...

Labour, meanwhile, have been holding their annual shindig in Brighton, reminding those in attendance that a succession of zoom meetings might actually be preferable to cramped rooms filled with warm wine and people familiar with the phrase, "it's more of a statement than a question". Starmer commenced proceedings with a 14,000-word preface that could be neatly summarised as "I'm not Jeremy Corbyn and I don't think the private sector are all evil; please vote for me". Unfortunately, his love bombing was somewhat undermined by the John Prescott of modern socialism. I believe it's the chapter added in the paperback version of *How to Win Voters and Form the Next Government*.

There is, however, some serious politics going on in Brighton. The Shadow Chancellor has announced a long overdue review of outdated business rates and hinted that mass nationalisation of certain commodities cannot happen as any magic money trees that might have existed are currently in intensive care on the Covid ward. Unfortunately, it's being lost in the noise as Shadow Secretaries of State resign over points of process and pretty much everyone tears themselves into ideological knots over gender and identity politics. If the champagne socialists are clinking glasses in Brighton, it's nothing compared to the sound of laughter coming out of Downing Street. Watching and waiting are Andy Burnham, Sadiq Khan and Dan Jarvis - three current mayors with powder kept very dry. And with the opinion polls saying hung parliament, maybe life isn't quite so bad in Starmer's world after all.