**ADEPT View from Westminster February 2019**

“I’ve had many sobering thoughts in my time…It was them that started me drinking.”  The wise words of Granddad from Only Fools and Horses… Perhaps the most sobering thought of all is that the UK leaves the EU this month. It’s enough to see even this committed teetotaller reaching for the Jagerbombs…

The political system is fracturing before our eyes. The Conservative Party finds itself stuck between an ERG faction prepared to bring the House down in the name of dogmatic Brexit purity and a vociferous remain faction willing to do likewise to prevent no deal. In the middle sits the browbeaten and bewildered mass of parliamentarians so confused by the whole thing they’re not entirely sure what they think anymore. So, they cheer on a Foreign Secretary who confuses Slovenia for Slovakia and a Home Secretary who might have rendered somebody stateless.

Across the aisle, the politburo continues to adopt its position of saying nothing whatsoever about the great constitutional crisis of our times.  Instead, its focused on its new favourite preoccupation of appearing consumed by anti-Semitism. And Venezuela – that touchstone issue igniting the average punter down the Dog and Duck. Chuck in a protracted debate about the merits of Winston Churchill at Tonypandy (which is not, as an elderly relative thought, Andy’s brother) and it’s been another vintage month for the comrades.

The SNP continues its descent into a parody of Braveheart, which is considerably preferable to the poor old Liberal Democrats; who continue their descent into a parody of a political party. Amidst the wreckage has roared the TIGers. The insurgent centre. Here to prove that the answer to political disillusionment across the nation is more Blairism. Dismissed as the provisional wing of continuity remain, one of the TIGers cubs surprised us all by making a bold pitch for the Alf Garnett vote. Appearing on TV just hours after TIG had been announced, Angela Smith decided that “funny tinge” was a better word to use than BME… The hurriedly posted apology video suggested overtiredness was to blame, an excuse I’m not personally buying on the grounds sleep deprivation associated with becoming a parent to a newborn has not seen me morph into Oswald Mosley. An inauspicious start, but they’ll take 11% in the polling…

So, what is the state of play a month out as chaos explodes around us.  Well, the problem with having a monthly column, is it sets one up to

make a foolish prediction about something that’s utterly unpredictable.

So here goes…

Mrs May might be in a stronger position than many of her detractors give her credit for. She has on the table a withdrawal agreement she can live with on the grounds she approved it before Christmas. She knows the EU feel the same about it. She has a House of Commons that blew it a historical raspberry in defeating it in February. The Brady Amendment implies alterations to the backstop might appease most of its objectors..

The EU, for all its overdramatic declarations of the discussions being over, knows it is about as woefully prepared for no deal as we are. It faces the same WTO complications we do and, with problems elsewhere inside the union, it could do without the headache. I therefore fully expect what has become known as Cox’s Codpiece (Photoshop imagery not required), or in more formal language a small concession, to be offered.

It will be enough for Cox to alter his legal advice to the Government.  That will be deliberately leaked or presented to the House of the Attorney General himself. Mrs May will then set us up for a showdown vote on March 12th.  Deal or no deal. Faced with the prospect of no deal, MPs will furiously back deal. The ERG will go tonto and internal party chaos will follow…but the PM will get her way. The UK Government will request an extension to A50 so we leave at the end of June.  This avoids the need for European Parliamentary elections and provides more time for the legislative backlog to be cleared.

This time next month, we’ll know.  In the meantime, pass the Jagerbombs.

**John Moorcraft**