

# THE FABRICATOR

## Comment

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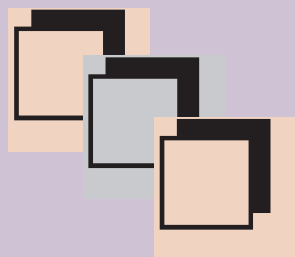
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So was that the rattle of a can being kicked down the road? The Chancellor's spring statement promised that we will all be better off by £500 a year; it also promised a £6.8bn boost to the economy putting housebuilding at its highest in over 40 years, £13bn of additional capital spending and £2.2bn in defence spending. But apart from defence, which is due now, this is all scheduled to happen by 2029/30.

“...the Queen said: “The rule is, jam tomorrow and jam yesterday – but never jam today.”\*

Now I obviously wasn't listening properly because all I have heard since is how much she is going to take away from people on disability benefits. When the shadow chancellor got up to reply I heard a great tirade, he really went for it, I could hardly understand a word, barely a full stop, certainly not a paragraph. I don't think he stopped to breathe. Maybe, being a Conservative, he doesn't need to breathe.

Shortly after, I saw the shadow treasury minister, Gareth Davis, telling Jo Cockburn on Politics Live that he didn't think that Rachel Reeves had gone far enough in cutting welfare spending. And everyone thought it was a Conservative budget!

The other thing is Labour's building plans: 1.5 million new homes with a £2bn cash injection to get things moving. So that's how many and how much, but who's going to build them? The construction industry is pretty confident but it is seriously short of bodies at the moment. Fix Radio the national radio station for the construction industry, highlights in its National Construction Audit significant workforce gaps.

The audit shows that 65% of Brits were not encouraged into trade or construction professions during their education. For years emphasis has been on university and gaining degrees which are often quite worthless in the employment sector. While there is a move toward apprenticeships the news here is not particularly good.

Apprenticeship starts have declined significantly. In 2022-23, there were 337,140 apprenticeship starts which is a sharp drop from over half a million in 2011-12. There is also a high apprentice drop-off rate and a self-employment rate of 37%, complicates efforts to build a stable workforce. Couple that with the fact that 35% of construction workers are over 50 and we are faced with a potentially shrinking workforce.

I still think that we needed the tough medicine. Labour inherited a pretty disastrous situation after years of incompetence and corrupt practices. A few concert tickets for ministers pales into insignificance beside the PPE scandal with ministers awarding their, mostly incompetent, chums contracts to make millions out of supplying, often inadequate, equipment to the NHS.

Labour had barely taken their seats before the pundits were after them and Rachel Reeves seems to be the prime target right now.

To be clear I am not a Labour supporter. I have little time for any of the political parties and in around five decades I have voted for all of them as well as a few independents. (In all that time I only ever failed to vote once.) But under Labour's watch it is really a lot quieter than when Boris was doing his stand-up act in the House of Commons. I think that we still need to give them a chance, after all nothing much is going to happen today and it seemed pretty chaotic yesterday, so maybe it will all come good tomorrow.

\**Through the Looking-Glass; and What Alice Found There*, Lewis Carroll, 1871

John Roper