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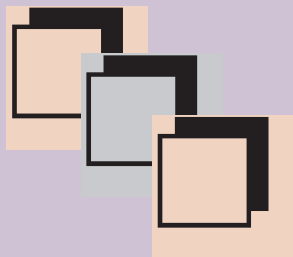
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Comment

Maybe it is just me but 2024 feels a bit dull. On hold, almost. This time last year it was feeling like lockdown was finally over and we were back to normal. Things were happening, there was stuff in the diary. And not just the FIT Show which, after ten years, seems, finally, to have settled into its original proposed frequency of a biennial event.

But 2024 finds me with a feeling of waiting.

Maybe it is the prospect of a general election. Possibly in the autumn but it could be as far away as 2025. The actual date of a general election has always been in the gift of prime ministers. Prime minister Cameron did introduce a fixed term of four years for a parliament but Johnson rescinded that so we are, once again, in the will-he-won't-he-when? situation.

Of course on a global scale there is much to keep a prime minister distracted from the little domestic matter of an election. You can't beat a good war to make a politician feel important. Look how Boris Johnson hi-jacked the war in Ukraine. Lots of photo-ops striding through Kiev.

The problem is, it is not doing the economy any good. Inflation may be down but interest rates are high. And while we of an older generation can remember them being higher our mortgages were smaller because, proportionately, property was cheaper. I bought a house 37 years ago that I couldn't afford to buy now. This in spite of the fact that my income is, proportionately, far higher than it was then. The mortgage I would need would be disproportionately more than I earn. I also suspect that the gap between people at the top of the earnings scale and the minimum wage bottom is wider than it ever was. If this leaves people struggling to pay for the basics – rent, food, energy – then that won't help the economy grow.

On top of this Brexit is about to bite us again. Expect prices to go up, especially food prices. New import rules are likely to delay not just food imports because the delays on the continent and at Dover will hold up everything. Expect the M20 to become a car park – again.

I hesitate to say that all politicians are stupid. There are many hard-working back benchers who are far from that. It is just when they get into power. Or, at least, the ones that get into government, are the not so bright. If the polls are correct then the Conservatives will lose the next election. Risky, like many before him, seems to be hanging onto power, no doubt in the hope that things will improve or some other miracle will happen. It is generally recognised that the Falklands war saved Margaret Thatcher for another term. It seems to me though that the longer this government persists the worse the economy will get and the more seats the Conservatives will lose.

That will not be good for anyone but is something those in power never seem to grasp be they ancient kings fighting battles to keep their throne, presidents refusing to admit defeat or British prime ministers reluctant to jump off of the gravy train. *John Roper*