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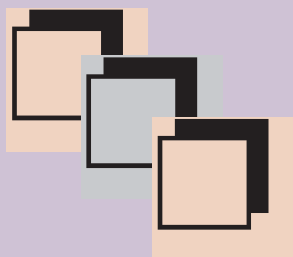
The Fabricator is published in the UK by Profinder Media Ltd.

Opinions expressed in The Fabricator are those of the contributors and do not represent editorial policy. The Fabricator accepts payment for colour pictures. Subscription rates: UK £45; rest of EU £60; worldwide £105

The Fabricator Vol 20 No 6
ISSN: 1752-2145

www.thefabricator.pro

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THE FABRICATOR

Comment

Recently someone suggested that this column was, sometimes, too political; perhaps it should talk more about the industry.

Certainly I have never hidden my view of the political classes. The words 'lying' and 'corruption' are frequent visitors to my lexicon. But politics affects everything and I can't help taking the view that we need to take account of what is happening in parliament and consider the machinations of the parties.

Take Brexit. Probably the worst thing that has happened to our economy for decades and it happened because the electorate were manipulated by a few self-centred politicians who have a skewed view of the world and the United Kingdom's place in it. It sometimes seemed that a few of them thought we are still in the 17th century and the East India Company was still roaming the seas. Fun fact, the East India Company's army numbered 260,000 against our combined forces which, as of April this year, stood at a total of 183,230 (MOD).

Brexit had a huge impact on the fenestration industry. There has always been a strong cross-continent trade, especially since the 70s when PVC-U windows were first introduced into the UK market. More especially after the 80s replacement window boom. Before Brexit it was possible to move goods between member countries without lots of paperwork and especially as we all agreed on standards. Essentially, the EU is one country commercially but we are no longer part of it. The same applied to movement of people. Whilst we were not a member of Schengen, companies could bring in personnel from the continent to work here or send people to other branches in Europe without needing visas and such.

Now we have had a general election but, so far it seems, nobody dares use the 'B' word.

(Actually, the Green party mentions rejoining in its manifesto while the Lib Dems want to: 'Fix our broken relationship with Europe' and the Labour manifesto seeks to 'improve the UK's trade and investment relationship with the EU' Now it is the government we will have to see how that plays out. So far No mention of movement of people, key to an easy trading relationship, by anyone.)

So politicians do affect our businesses. Through regulation, through taxation, their policies can change the economy. Consider what Liz Truss's economic plan did almost overnight and we are still living with that debacle several months later. Even with falling fuel prices and inflation people are still coming to terms with higher food prices, many of which are still high, and seeing their mortgage payments rise. All of which leaves less disposable income so non essentials like property refurbishment such as new windows, go onto the back burner. We hear a lot about the top end of the market and how it is buoyant with demand for big garden doors and expensive windows. But these are not the bread and butter of the window industry. That comes from much lower down the market chain. The aluminium sector in particular is, as always, confident about its prospects but it is worth remembering that aluminium covers commercial work as well as domestic and the latter tends to be at the top end of the market.

So with the Brexit headbangers mostly gone and with Labour's decent majority, perhaps we will be able to have a rational conversation about our closest market. Perhaps the government will have the courage to ignore the irrational rantings of the Farage's of this world. Perhaps, eventually, we will all be able to travel again. Perhaps, perhaps...

John Roper

The Fabricator 2024