Brexit, the law and parliament
by Simon Belt

The Brexit vote in June 2016 in favour of Leaving the EU has had a fabulous impact on politics in the UK, rejecting the practise that previously aloof institutions could treat the electorate as a blob to be managed rather than represented. For the last couple of decades politics has been increasingly narrow and mangerial with very little programatic difference between Labour, coalition and Conservative governments.

There is a change in that recent consensus, with the Brexit vote being both an expression of that change, but also a heartening catalyst in shaking things up. Some have suggested that it was also a catalyst for the Trump victory, though more likely that the trend for rejecting the stasis in politics was already widespread in the US long before Brexit.

Ms Gina Miller became a figure of hope for campaigners wanting to thwart the triggering of Article 50 to Leave the EU, and something of a Bete Noir for those campaigning for the UK government to act on the will of the people who voted by a majority of over 1 million to Leave the EU. Initiating a challenge to the government triggering Article 50, first in the High Court and then the Supreme Court, the legal case was presented as ensuring that Parliament only could decide if Article 50 to Leave the EU. Many Remain campaigners supported the intervention of these unelected judges to decide on whether the government should be restrained in delivering on the Brexit vote.

This was a truly illuminating period as people actively discussed the case with strangers as well as their usual sparring partners. That MPs had previously voted to let the public decide the matter through the referendum initially seemed to pass many Remain supporters by, citing the supremecy of Parliament when they were campaigning throughout the referendum for the EU to be supreme over Parliament, and berating the Tories for offering the public the chance to decide on the matter. As the initial enthusiasm for potentially overturning the vote wained in the face of how undemocratic that would be, only a rump around the Liberals stuck their neck out to oppose the triggering of Article 50.

Parliament voted by a majority of 384 to *allow* the government to trigger Article 50 and begin the negotiations to exit the UK from the EU. Clearly the majority vote in the referendum has begun to sink in with MPs who opposed Leaving the EU, and the consequences of ignoring the electorate after asking them to decide weighed heavily against continuing to ignore their wishes. This isn't a great moment in democratic revival and debate about how we can gain greater control akin to any revolutionary period in history, but it is a moment in politics where things are opening up after a long period of stasis and managerialism.

The moment of cracks in the mangement of the electorate by those who know best (or thought they did) has solicited a reaction that should alarm every democratic though, and ensure they

double their efforts to hold politicians to account. The Speaker of the House of Commons has just intervened in the debate about Brexit to say that he would strongly oppose the elected President of the United States of America from addressing the Houses of Parliament because his "opposition to racism and sexism", crudely implying that Trump was racist and sexist. This is quite an odd state of affairs, given that there's nothing particularly different about the US administration led by Trump as opposed to Obama other than style and presentation.

Given that Obama's administration was responsible for deporting more foreigners than all previous US administrations the singling out of Trump as uniquely bad only serves to whitewash the Obama administration and absolve from doing such bad things. The wall that Trump declared he is going to build between the US and Mexico already exists in fence form, largely built and enforced by both Obama and Clinton. Again, Obama and Clinton were supporters of more bombing raids against some of the poorest countries, yet it's Trump that's tarred with being nasty to foreigners and potentiallyb eing a destabilising force around the globe. Fingering Trump as uniquely bad is playing with fire and historical record that makes Newspeak look amateurish - what a shock many liberals will get when they realise it's them that are whitewashing History.

The use of Brexit discussions to try and paint Trump as racist is only going to backfire if we have an honest discussion about Fortress Europe that sent back 11,000 refugess last year and has actual Israeli style walls at its periphery that Trump can only dream of. Campaigns against Trump as a character whilst leaving the very real actions the EU are involved in at its borders and paying African nations to prevent its people from trying to get to Europe are only going to make engaging people in open and honest discussions about politics harder. The genie let out of the bottle with Brexit should not be put back in the bottle, and we should endeavour to open the cracks in our complacent political institutions further, in order to be left with a healthier democracy.