


Why it isn't undemocratic to oppose Brexit.

©Peter Roberts, October 2017

<p>Arguments AGAINST opposing Brexit.</p> 	<p>Arguments FOR opposing Brexit</p> <p>Of course it's honourable to want to defend democracy, but just how democratic <u>was</u> the EU Referendum?</p> <p><i>Remember: leaving the EU is the UK's biggest constitutional change in centuries (yes, centuries). It will have huge economic, social and cultural implications for generations to come.</i></p>
<p>"The EU Referendum gave a mandate. 51.9% voted to leave. A tiny majority is still a majority! As citizens we must respect it – whether or not we agree with it."</p>	<p>No. A nation's future shouldn't be decided by a simple majority, and many most affected couldn't vote at all.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost all organisations need a "super-majority" to change their constitution. Usually it's about two-thirds of the vote. Why? Because changing an organisation's basic workings is a huge decision. <i>If it's good for a youth club or a golf club (and for most countries), shouldn't it apply to us too?</i> • 51.9% of those who voted is simply not enough. It's only 37% of those who were allowed to vote. On top of that, many of those most affected – 16 & 17 year-olds, many Brits living in the EU and fellow Europeans settled here – had no vote at all. <p><i>That's no mandate for leaving the EU!</i></p>
<p>"We accept the result of a General Election so we must accept the result of the EU Referendum too."</p>	<p>No. A General Election is reversible. Brexit won't be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democracy is a process to enable peaceful change, not a single vote to impose something forever and rule it out of discussion. If we don't like what MPs do we can vote them out. <p><i>With Brexit there's no way back – for us, for our kids or for theirs.</i></p>
<p>"Parliament is our servant: it must accept the result!"</p>	<p>No. UK Referendums are <i>advisory</i> not mandatory.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the UK, Parliament is sovereign (something Leavers campaigned for, by the way!). Constitutionally, it can reject Brexit at any time. It must, of course, give valid reasons. These reasons are growing more obvious as 2019 nears. • That it the referendum was advisory not mandatory was made explicit at the time. <p><i>MPs must vote with their consciences, not toe party lines.</i></p>
<p>"OK, but that doesn't mean Parliament should reject the result! It must respect it and deliver Brexit."</p>	<p>No. Referendums are alien to UK democracy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We're a <i>parliamentary</i> democracy: we elect MPs to make decisions as our representatives. They're accountable to us and should act in what they believe to be the national interest. <p><i>Remember: if they mess up, we can vote them out.</i></p>
<p>"The EU had become a massive issue. It had to be dealt with once and for all. The people demanded a say. So it was right and democratic for David Cameron to call an IN/OUT Referendum."</p>	<p>No. The EU <i>wasn't</i> a big issue before Cameron called the Referendum, and he did so in his party's interest not the national interest.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before the 2015 General Election the EU was way down the list of UK citizens' complaints. (Source: independent IPSOS/Mori poll, 2014. 2% of people saw the EU as their top concern and it was 13th among concerns overall.) • Cameron was scared he'd lose the Election. So he promised an IN/OUT Referendum to win UKIP votes and silence his party's euro-sceptics. He won the election. But of course he had to keep his promise of a referendum. The minority of Leavers in Parliament and the (unelected) press seized the chance. <p><i>How democratic – let alone patriotic – is it to bet your country's future in order to win an election?</i></p>
<p>"The Referendum campaigns set out their stalls fair and square: people knew what they were voting for. That's democracy!"</p>	<p>No. While lies and deception have always been a curse of politics, here we must draw the line.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both campaigns were poor and at times dishonest, but the promise to spend £350m more a week on the NHS, knowingly supported by much of the press, was a lie that directly affected the result. It insulted voters and it insulted our democracy. <p><i>Brexit isn't a game: the stakes are too high to let it pass!</i></p>