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## **The Brexit Referendum: Testing the Support of *Elites* and their Allies for Democracy; or, Racists, Bigots and Xenophobes, Oh My!**

### **1. Introduction**

The result of the referendum on Britain's continued membership of the EU clearly came as a shock to many, including national and local political *elites* and those who allied themselves to the *elite* cause of the UK remaining a member of the EU. Indeed, referendum on any subject often test the tolerance of *elites* (and those in disagreement with the result who ally themselves to the *elite* cause) of direct engagement of the public in deciding on a single question of long-term policy. Yet, other established and mature democracies, with Switzerland being the notable example, are able to use referendum more extensively than the UK without a collective and sustained campaign by the losing side to overturn the result.

As a seemingly well established and mature democracy, Britain has used referenda sparingly and has also employed them almost in a plebiscitary mode to secure support for a government policy (see, Qvortrup, 2005:85-8). Indeed, the EU referendum itself could be seen as the government seeking approval to its own policy preference for the UK remaining a member of the EU, rather than a genuine desire to allow the voters to select an option that would then be enacted (a theme that will be explored in the paper). Further, the referendum in Scotland and Wales on the creation of devolved chambers, were used to secure support for a controversial policy that the then labour government wished to introduce. Indeed, there has not been a fraction of the intense *elite* opposition to the results of those referenda because the majority of the political, intellectual, cultural and business *elites* had received the result they desired. By now it is possible to critique here the use of the term *elite* as though it refers to some hegemonic and cohesive whole (which it does not) and thus the way in which that term is defined and employed is set out in the next section.

The reaction to the EU referendum result and the continuing attempts to derail or ignore the decision of a public vote and the ongoing war of words between those who support leaving the EU and those who prefer to remain a member, has shown this issue to be one of the most bitter and divisive political questions that has faced the country for some time. The damage that divisive debate and issue will ultimately do to the fabric of democracy remains to be seen overtime. But, what emerges is a sense that the vote and the reaction to it, are about far wider issues than the membership on a supranational governing institution. Rather, what lies behind the current toxic nature of the continuing campaign to remain a member of the EU, are two competing and irreconcilable visions of society and the future of the country that cuts across a simple right-left political divide.

One thing is clear the result of the referendum was unexpected by political, business, cultural and intellectual *elites* and their allies and that there is an intolerance of the result that raises questions about the nature and practices of liberal democracy and the acceptance of dissent from *elite* preferences (from now on the term elite will be used to encompass political, intellectual, cultural and business *elites* unless a distinction is necessary). The nature of a public vote is distinct from the usual mechanisms of safe release for political dissent within a representative democracy, such as marches, demonstrations and political campaigns. The public vote on a single question requires the same mechanism as the election of political representatives, which very simply put is: a campaign, a choice, a vote and the acceptance of the outcome of that vote. Thus, in opposing the outcome of a referendum, on whatever subject, we enter into the dangerous territory of attacking the fundamental mechanisms of liberal democratic representative democracy, which simply put is: a campaign, a choice, a vote and the acceptance of the outcome of that vote. The nuances of this blunt argument are explored later in the paper. One thing is clear however, that the reaction to the result from those wishing the country to remain a member of the EU brings into stark relief the questions: what or whom do representatives represent, are they delegates, trustees or politicians of whoever or whatever it is they represent and what happens when they disagree with whoever it is they represent (see, Eulau, *et al*, 1959, Manin, 1997, Judge, 1999).

There is of course a wider question about the role of unelected and elected *elites* generally within political society and the relationship they have with non-*elite* actors who, when given the opportunity of employing the public vote, are periodically and momentarily elevated to equal status with the politically powerful and influential, when it comes to casting their single vote alongside their *elite* fellow citizens. But the EU referendum has struck at something far deeper and fundamental than merely the choice of which party will form the government and it has plunged

politics and political discourse into a dark place that raises the issue of a developing post-democratic representative democracy and government.

While walking through the 'dark forest' the reaction of Dorothy, the Tin Man and Scarecrow to hearing noises they cannot understand or interpret is to attribute those noises to creatures that may wish to eat them – they continue their journey skipping while chanting: Lions, and tigers and bears, oh my! In a similar vein remainers who realise that the result of the EU referendum was also a challenge to their long-established and cherished policies on internationalism, multi-culturalism and mass immigration and cannot understand or interpret that challenge, have equally been skipping through the dark wood while accusing their opponents of being the unholy trinity of racists, bigots and xenophobes, to which could be added, for dramatic effect, 'oh my!' Such a formulation of words has been used overtly in public discourse about also condensed into the short hand term of 'populist' or 'populism' (Canovan, 1991, Taggart, 2002); a use of the term that perverts the word 'popular' in popular democracy.

It is clear from the nature of the referendum campaign and the shadow campaign to over-turn the results of the referendum (or to act in a way as to negate its effect) that the issue has become one of the most toxic and divisive political questions for some time. Partly because it represents a rejection by non-elites of *elite* preferences and partly because it also represents a rejection of a wider, long term *elite* policy to change the very nature of the country. The EU referendum and what it and the result represents is a fundamental cleavage in political and civil society. It also represents the political cleavage between the voters – as much as votes display cleavages effectively – in Scotland and Northern Ireland and voters in England and Wales. The tone of the debate post-referendum however, has been to lay the 'blame' as if blame is appropriate, for the result on a nasty English nationalism conveniently forgetting that the majority of Welsh voters also voted leave. But, the argument also seems to rest on the lazy and offensive assumption that every English person voted leave for racist, xenophobic and bigoted reasons – and probably because of their fear of lions and tigers and bears, too! Such an assumption is palpable nonsense but is a key tenet of the remoaner narrative post-referendum, which dangerously points towards a post-democratic technocracy in which the people are ignored for their own good, by a liberal-left-internationalist *elite*.

It should be clear by now that the purpose of the paper is not to explore whether or not the decision to leave the EU was the correct one, or to explore the implications of leaving the EU. Rather, it is to draw out the lessons about the attitudes and reactions that have been displayed by *elites* and their allies, which backed remaining a member of the EU, for representative and participative democracy and for public engagement more widely. The paper explores what the reaction to the result tells us

about the thinness of the veneer of acceptance of popular democracy that covers the political system. The paper draws on contemporary sources, media reports, use of social media and campaign material and reports to assess the referendum campaign and the continued campaign to overturn an inconvenient result. It takes this approach as a way of exploring how such a campaign displays itself to what might be the casual voter. It may seem an impressionistic approach, but that is deliberate because the impression of the post-referendum shift to a post-democratic *elite* driven technocracy is all that the voter has to go on and it is the voter that will be effectively excluded from such a post-democratic polity. Such an approach also highlights the cleavage between a liberal-internationalist *elite* and a large proportion of the electorate that remain unconvinced of that direction for their country. The paper is therefore not a psephology study; rather it draws out the lessons for democracy of the post-referendum display of contempt for the voter by *elites* and their allies.

The next section of the paper sets out briefly the concepts used and the definitions of the terms that are employed in the paper to add clarity to the meaning attributed to each term. The third section examines and reviews the nature of the reaction to the result of the EU referendum for what it tells us about the relationship between *elites* and their allies to democracy, representation and public engagement and for what it tells us about the likely future of a democratic system that is showing the early signs of developing as a post-democratic, representative technocracy. The fourth section concludes by drawing together the main themes of the paper and lessons that can be learnt from the EU referendum and the reaction to the result.

## **2. Understanding the Battle Ground: The Nature of the Combatants**

There are four dimensions to the *elite* groupings that are referred to which need to be defined for the purposes of this paper and those are political, business, cultural and intellectual *elites*; in addition, the use of the term 'allies' to those *elites* also needs to be defined. Elite theory provides a starting point for developing the definition with Pareto and Mosca setting out the division between a governing class and those who were directly or indirectly able to have a powerful influence over political decisions and the development of political policy and those who are not. They explored how such *elites* are made up of distinct social groups joined together with the common thread of a belief in their intellectual superiority and their right and duty to govern (see, Bottomore, 1993, Higley, 2010). The influence that such *elite* groups wield within democratic and representative systems stands even though such *elites* may not be elected to any public office. Rather, they operate through social, intellectual, political and economic interests and networks to influence and shape the activity of the elected political *elite* (Lasswell and Lerner, 1952, Putnam 1976, Lasch, 1996, Mills, 2000).

There is a danger in such analysis that *elites* are assumed to be a coherent and consistent entity with a coherent and generally accepted view of policy preferences and rather than that being the case *elite* membership rests on some economic, political, social or intellectual advantage, not signing up to a consistent policy line on every issue. There is however, a sense of shared power, position, status, access to decision-makers and a sense of mutual support that exists across and within *elite* groups (See, Lasswell and Lerner, 1952) and it is not policy agreement that makes for *elite* membership, but this shared social capital (Putnam, 1971). Thus, business *elites* for example, can be divided over whether to support continued membership of the EU but not lose their *elite* status if they disagreed among themselves on a single issue.

So for the purposes of this paper the *elites* which supported continued membership of the EU and which now support overturning or negating the outcome of the vote, can be defined as an *elite* because of the power and influence they wield within the political system and because of the sense of mutual and shared support and respect that they display for other *elite* members. They are an *elite* because as *elite* theorists show they hold a position which distinguishes them from the non-*elite* (governed) class (Parry, 2005). Elites also may inhabit certain streams of activity which inter-act and interlock, thus economic, intellectual and political *elites* will confine their activities to a particular stream, but their shared characteristics and ability to influence, crosses the streams. In addition, a political consensus develops which is shared to one degree or another, across *elites* and currently that consensus is to promote and develop an open, multi-cultural, diverse social and economic base to society that rest on the ability of people to move across borders for their economic reasons and benefit. Those taking advantage of an open framework for economic migration economic (and when excuses for increasing immigration arise through humanitarian crises such as that occurring in Syria) bring with them cultural and ethnic differences which feed into the *elite* policy preference for a multi-cultural, diverse multi-ethnic society. The EU and its liberal economic, social and cultural policies which, not surprisingly reflects *elite* preferences for multi-culturalism and social diversity, provided an institutional framework and resources to further promote an *elite* vision of society and thus continued membership is central to the project of transforming the basis of western society.

We have seen, during the referendum campaign and in the continued campaign to thwart the wishes of the majority of the electorate that voted, the emergence of distinct *elites* displaying their support for rejecting the results of the referendum: a political *elite* defined here as elected members of the governing class – parliamentarians, MEPs and local government councillors (that political *elite* and its support for EU membership displays a very clear cross-party consensus); an economic *elite*

focused on business, commercial and industrial activity; a cultural *elite* of celebrities, sports and media personalities, who have forcefully expressed support for EU membership through the privileged public platform they have at their disposal; and, an intellectual *elite* of academics, thinkers and scholars. Together, these three *elite* groups have been united in their revulsion that the governed class of non-elites could have rejected their policy preference and with it the wider political project with which they are associated – but reject it they did.

But the support for continued membership of the EU and for overturning the result of the referendum, or holding a second referendum, is not just part of an *elite* response to the rejection of their policy preferences by the voting citizenry. The *elite* has a series of non-elite allies – which can be distinguished from those who simply voted remain and are now prepared to accept the result and wish the government to get on with it. The allies of the *elite* are a specific series of economic, political, social and intellectual groupings who distinguish themselves by their unwillingness to accept the result of the referendum and to continue to campaign to overturn or negate its outcome. These groupings, though well placed are not, in the strictest sense, members of a political, economic or intellectual *elite*. They are however, allied to continued membership of the EU and to the policies of the *elite* which sustain that membership: transforming the basis of western and certainly British society. They are opinion formers, thinkers, business people, political activists, the chattering classes, the twitterarti, the social media warriors and together with the *elite* they form: the remoaners!

Thus, we have a political, economic and intellectual *elite* observable in the form that *elite* theorists would recognise and we have their allies. It is now time to explore the reaction of those two groups to the result of the referendum and the nature of their continued campaign to sustain membership of the EU for what it tells us about the thin veneer of democracy in our well established representative system and about the possibility of a post-democratic technocracy arising in the wake of the result.

### **3. Rejecting the Elite Consensus: the Remoaners Respond.**

The result of the referendum to leave or remain in the European Union was clearly a devastating blow for the *elites* that had backed ‘remain’ and what is also clear is that they were not prepared for their advice to be rejected by the voters nor had any clear plan of what to do if it was. That lack of preparedness was displayed in quite sickening displays of emotional outbursts, anger, rage and insults aimed at the voters that had dared to reject not just the membership of the EU, but the long-term plan outlined above to change the social, cultural and political landscape of the country. The

first and immediate casualty of the result (a part from remainder sensitivities and ego) was the Prime Minister who resigned the day after the referendum. In his resignation speech Cameron commented that: *'The will of the British people is an instruction that must be delivered'* (Guardian 24<sup>th</sup> June 2016). Not a sentiment adopted by his remoaner colleagues across the *elite* groupings and their allies who have shown anything but a willingness to respond to the will of the people as displayed in the referendum, far from it.

The referendum campaign was a divisive, intense and hard-fought affair which saw members of the three main UK-wide political parties take different positions and campaign for different outcomes from the voter. Assessing the campaign a conclusion to draw would be that the Conservative Party was the party that expressed publically the greater difference in opinion on the issue especially between senior members (despite internal politicking or some politicians delaying their declaration of which side they backed). That is not to say that there were not differences of opinion with the Labour party – which has historically had a left-wing section (including Jeremy Corbyn) opposed to EU membership and willing to question the EU's democratic credentials. During the referendum however, the left-of-centre alternative to EU membership was noticeable by its absence, with Labour generally backing the EU membership in line with the views of the internationalists which now control the party. The Liberal Democrats were and still are the most fulsome supporters of remaining within the EU and overturning the result of the public vote, in such a way that brings into question the use of 'liberal' or 'democrat' in the party's title.

Other *elites* displayed varying degrees of unity or division of opinion on the issue of EU membership during the campaign which are visible by reviewing the media and social media coverage of the campaign and which do not require detailed research to uncover. The campaign also showed the divisions within economic *elites* from business and commerce which did display differences of opinion on the value of membership of the EU on the economic prospects facing the country. The remain elements of the cultural *elite* of media, sports and entertainment personalities were more vocal than their other (non-political) *elite* counter-parts who backed leave. But far from adding a dash of glamour to a dull political campaign the contribution of the cultural *elite* can be summed up in the sickening image of a multi-millionaire, Bob Geldof, with a crew of preening lovies, flicking a V sign to a flotilla fishermen on the River Thames displaying what EU membership had done to their industry and livelihoods. No clearer representation of the gap between the wealthy *elite* and its support for an undemocratic, autocratic, supra-national, Kafkaesque institution against the wishes and well-being of ordinary citizens, is likely to ever be found.

The support of the intellectual *elite* and experts on intellectual issues, was displayed in a Times Higher survey (THE June, 2016) which reported in June 2016 that 9 out of 10 university staff backed a remain vote. Again, showing a massive disconnect between academics and non-elites, who if they were representative of the overall population would have displayed a greater diversity of opinion. John Curtice is quoted in the article as explaining the divergence between the intellectual elite and non-elite, thus:

*epitomise the relatively socially liberal climate that you will see in most universities; that academics work in "a profession that's become increasingly globalised and has a relatively large proportion of non-UK citizens working inside it...universities have been telling us that it's in their interests to stay inside the European Union (THE June, 2016)*

Curtice's comment not only explains the disconnect between the intellectual *elite* and other voters, it also hints at the socially liberal climate as the reason for such disconnect. Indeed, academics form a vital, persistent and often enraged element of the *elite* reaction to the referendum result particularly using twitter and other social media to vent their anger at the temerity of the unformed and obviously racist voters for daring to reject their expert opinion. Indeed, the 'rejection' of informed, expert opinion and the anger and frustration expressed by academics at the result has seen a reaction from the intellectual *elite* which can only be described as 'neo-reactionary': the voters were unformed, unable to understand the complex issues and data involved, did not have sufficient access to the right information, or were unable and unwilling to commit the time to assessing and understanding the issues and consequences.

The response of the intellectual *elite* echoes the arguments against extending the right to vote to women and the working class that were deployed in the 19th and early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Keith-Lucas, 1952, Pitkin, 1972, Held, 1993, Lizzeri and Persico, 2004, Chandler, 2007) and is a shameful reaction from a supposedly enlightened *elite*. The intellectual *elite* response has been all the more puzzling as it emerges from a part of the *elite* which supports greater public engagement, greater government responsiveness from the politically powerful to the concerns of the public and a greater sharing of political power – unless of course the voters get it wrong. The Times Higher article also hints at the self-interested motive of intellectual *elite* reaction in that the receipt of EU funding for universities binds them into the EU and to supporting its integrationist policies, a tactic employed by the EU in other fields (see, Jenkins, 2005).

The political and governing *elite* which opposed leaving the EU have been no less inclined to use the neo-reactionary arguments, than the intellectual *elite*, that an unformed electorate, voting on base



and illiberal views and woefully ill-informed about social and economic issues. The political *elite* were divided among themselves as to the desirability of leaving the EU and that is still the case. There are two elements to the political and governing *elites' and their allies* campaign to overturn the result. The first is to delegitimise the result, partly through the neo-reactionary response and partly through an undermining of the use of referendum in a representative democracy. The second response is to use of parliamentary techniques to delay or prevent the government implementing the result and this is justified in the eyes of this *elite* group because of the nature of referendum in representative democracies such as the UK. Parliament's view is not to do what the people want, rather it is to govern in their best interests – if those interests can be clearly discerned. But, in a modern popular democracy of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century this antiquated and Burkean argument is losing purchase (Birch, 1993, Garrard, 2002, Dryzek and Dunlevy, 2009) yet it is an argument that is still employed when *elites* require.

Parliament and government may be the battle ground to prevent withdrawal from the EU but by overturning the result of the event which recorded the largest participation in the practice of electoral democracy in this country, Parliament would risk undermining its status, legitimacy and the trust of the voters – no matter how they voted. The remain *elite* and their allies clearly believe however, that this is a price worth paying. If the referendum was partly about sovereignty should parliament not have the final say, has been a central part of the *elite* remain narrative. That argument however, conflates national sovereignty and popular sovereignty with parliamentary sovereignty and employs the latter to undermine the two former ideas of sovereignty. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century reliance by political and governing *elites* on the notion of parliamentary sovereignty as a bulwark against an uneducated, ill-informed and ignorant electorate is a dangerous route. Moreover, to paraphrase Rousseau, if parliament wants to use its sovereignty to give its sovereignty away again to the EU, then it must be forced to be sovereign and the referendum forces it to be so by not returning political and governing power to the EU.

What we find in the review of *elite* reaction to the EU referendum result is that the *elite* groupings identified for the purpose of this paper, are using similar and related tactics and arguments which cross over between the groupings, but some *elites* have a preferred response or theatre: the political *elite* choosing parliament or local government settings for their counter-campaign; the cultural *elite* using public platforms either social media or the theatres within which they are most prominent such as sporting and media events and which in some cases is the actual theatre; the economic *elite* mirror the cultural *elite* in their chosen battleground to promote their displeasure at the result; and,

the intellectual *elite* have also taken to public forum and scholarly journals and the press to maintain their counter-campaign.

While each of our groupings have a chosen battlefield, to which they are not exclusively confined, but choose because it is known territory to them and while they have their preferred arguments those arguments are again not exclusive to each of the *elites*. What therefore emerges is a clear *elite* consensus that not only were the public wrong, they were wrong for the wrong reasons (bad, ill-liberal, racist and economically illiterate ones) and that wrongness is therefore justifiably overturned by an *elite* who has the monopoly of knowledge, wisdom and virtue. Given today's egalitarian political culture it is all the more surprising that *elites* are willingly and enthusiastically attempting to undermine the result of the referendum in almost those terms, or in a barely veiled version of them.

We see two main approaches to the *elite* reaction: the first is to de-legitimise the involvement of the public in taking part in making a decision on the issue, what has already been termed the neo-reactionary approach. That deligitimisation can be understood through the lens of principle-agent theory (See, Stoker 1998, Laffont and Tirole, 1991, Thatcher and Sweet 2002) which suits nicely a representative democratic framework. With one person – the agent - able to make decisions on behalf of the principle, the latter will have a closer relationship to the issue in hand, or at least think as much, and may find that the agent acts not in the interests of the principle but in a version of it or even in their own interests. The agent is then faced with explaining why they acted differently or what was wrong with the principle's original instructions. A clear link is made here with representative democracy and representative government (Manin, 1997, Judge, 1999) and the nature of the relationship political and government *elites* have with the voter.

What we see in the *elite* use of a principle-agent / representative democracy-government approach to the result of the referendum is vital, for their purposes, in undermining of a referendum as a decision-making tool. First, the remain *elite* narrative around the referendum quickly came to claim that the referendum had been non-binding and a series of arguments deployed to substantiate this view which rested on parliamentary sovereignty and also to generate confusion about whether the issue of the binding nature of the referendum had been clarified. Indeed, the remainder house-journal, otherwise known as the Guardian newspaper, had raised the prospect of the non-binding nature of the referendum prior to its being held (<https://www.theguardian.com>) and this argument has been deployed since (Independent 17<sup>th</sup> October 2017). The constitutional arguments about the supremacy of parliament or the voters are complex and can certainly be used by neo-reactionaries of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to argue that the people are not supreme; such arguments however, have a

hollow and undemocratic ring in today's politically egalitarian times. It is also worth quoting from a speech, then Prime Minister David Cameron made in parliament, on the referendum, on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2016:

*This is a straight democratic decision – staying in or leaving – and no government can ignore that.*

*Having a second renegotiation followed by a second referendum is not on the ballot paper.*

*And for a Prime Minister to ignore the express will of the British people to leave the EU would not just be wrong, it would be undemocratic*

(source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-commons-statement-on-eu-reform-and-referendum-22-february-2016>)

It is to the remain *elites* eternal discredit that they cannot follow such a basic interpretation of 21<sup>st</sup> century popular democracy. If however, such an interpretation is undermined and the result of the referendum, overturned or negated then this has worrying implications for the nature of our current democratic system. Cameron's statement also weakens the second argument used to undermine the referendum – that the issue is somehow non-binary. Cameron makes it clear above and that the decision is simple: in or out of the EU. To argue that the EU referendum was non-binary, presumably because of the multi-layered nature of EU membership and the constituent parts of the leviathan that are involved, again deliberately complicates a straight forward choice by denying that choice exists. But voting to leave, was quite clear in its meaning and result: we leave the EU and all its constituent bits. The argument about the non-binary nature of this issue is a smoke screen for a more worrying tactic of delegitimising the referendum as an authoritative statement of the public decision. Moreover, if membership of the EU is non-binary then the choice before the voter at a general election is even more non-binary and complex and maybe the voter should be excluded from that choice too. But, if the referendum on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2016 was non-binding then so too was the referendum on 5th June 1975 and parliament need not have voted to give its sovereignty away after that result.

Probably the most shameful part of the reaction of the *elite* and their allies has been the call for a second referendum either straightforwardly to overturn the June 2016 referendum or to agree or reject any deal that the EU might offer us on leaving. The latter simply providing the political *elite* in parliament with opportunities to campaign against any deal thus ensuring, if they can win that vote, then leaving the EU is delayed permanently. Between the first referendum on membership of the

Common Market on 5<sup>th</sup> June 1975 and the second referendum on 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 2016 on leaving the EU, the institution had not just changed its name but had changed beyond all recognition to that which the country had originally joined. But voters, over 41 years are entitled to change their mind. A third referendum is therefore entirely right, but only after a similar period of 40 or so years and not next week!

The principle-agent / Representative Democracy / Government arguments deployed by *elites* to overturn or justify their campaign to overturn the referendum result and to ensure the country's continued membership of the EU are summarised in figure one, below:

**Figure one: The EU Referendum and Arguments for Undermining Popular Democracy**

Principle – Agent Arguments	Representative Democracy / Government Arguments
<p>Neo-Reactionary. Leave Voters:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Were uninformed or insufficiently informed</li> <li>2. Were under-educated</li> <li>3. Lacked sufficient resources and information to make a reasoned judgment</li> <li>4. Gave emotional rather than intellectual responses to the campaign</li> <li>5. Had divergent goals and objectives to the <i>elite</i> which were incorrect or did not reflect their own best interests</li> <li>6. Acted illegitimately in that they voted for the wrong reasons</li> </ol>	<p>Representative democracy negates need for referendum because</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Complexity of the issues militates against public involvement</li> <li>2. Non-binary nature of the issue</li> <li>3. An advisory not binding process</li> <li>4. Detailed and careful exploration of the issue needed which is impossible in a referendum</li> <li>5. Second referendum is needed to give the voters another chance to get it right or to agree on the deal offered</li> </ol>

What we have seen in the review of *elite* arguments should worry anyone who would claim to be a democrat or to express the need to engage or involve the public in decision-making who wishes to see political power shared more equally. The *elite* groupings identified in this paper as promoting continued EU membership and also promoting various ways of overturning or ignoring the inconvenient result of EU referendum, display a rejection of popular political power which can only be tolerated if the voters are restricted to competitive *elitism* – choosing who will choose - in other words, the role of the voter is to decide on the elevation of *elites* to positions of power through their sporadic input at general elections. In liberal democracy the political role of the citizen is restricted to infrequent electoral activity and the selection of political leaders. Anything more than the use of elections for the public to produce a government cannot be tolerated because the electorate lack the intellectual sophistication for wider political involvement in more complex issues (Sartori, 1962, Schumpeter, 1974).

What the *elite* and their allies' reaction shows to referendum on continued membership of the EU and the connected rejection by the voters of their wider associated project of mass immigration and multi-culturalism designed to bring about a fundamental shift in the nature of society in this country, is the usual intolerance of a spurned *elite*. Yet, it is not solely an *elite* of the right-wing that has shown that intolerance. What has also been revealed is that left-wing political, economic, cultural and intellectual *elites* are equally intolerant when the voters reject their policy preferences. As a result of a rejection of their preferences, *elites* will spring into vocal defence of those preferences which without a dose of popular sovereignty they would otherwise not have to do.

As has been noted, *elites* are not necessarily fully unified in their views especially around issues such as EU membership, although a clear preference for membership exists across the *elites* examined in the paper. As *elites* are not unified, neither too are the voters and it is clear that the result of the referendum was close, certainly in per centage terms, and voters have different opinions. But, the popular vote is a powerful implement in modern democracy – which is why *elites*, especially in this country, fight shy of its use or seek to leave the final decision with parliament where they can be better assured of support for their preferences. But the intensity of the reaction and of the counter-campaign to overturn the result by *elites* and their allies is something less recognised among the ordinary voters – many of whom, no doubt are confused and confounded by the *elite* reaction. Indeed, remain voters often display a more sophisticated and accepting approach to the result than the *elites* and their allies.

The reaction of the political, business, cultural and intellectual *elites* also point to a sharp turn away from the development of a post-representative democracy based on a liberal view of public engagement in politics and government, to a post-democratic technocracy where the input to the public is only tolerated inasmuch as it expresses support for *elite* views. The paper now concludes by exploring the possible future of popular sovereignty (rule by the people, or at least authoritative and powerful input by the voters into governing decisions) and even representative democracy that the *elite* reaction to the inconvenient result of the EU referendum might lead.

### **Conclusion: Does Popular Sovereignty and Government have a Future? A Post Democratic State.**

The paper has reviewed the nature of the *elite* approach to the referendum to withdraw from membership of the EU and the reaction of the *elite* and their allies to the result. It also noted that the *elite* groups active in the campaign and counter-campaign to overturn, delay or ignore the outcome of the vote fall into political, business, cultural and intellectual categories of *elites*. Thus, not only do elites not form of cohesive, all encompassing illuminate style world government, but

*elites* may disagree on specific political issues, yet they are identified by their privileged access to political power, resources and avenues for influence and articulating their policy preferences – which they have done on the issue of continued membership of the EU. The paper explored how those *elites* and their allies have sought to delegitimise both the referendum as a tool for allowing the public to take part in the decision about continued EU membership and have subsequently sought to de-legitimise and overturn the result. So, what do those actions tell us about the likely future of the current system of democracy and of popular engagement in political decision-making?

First, that there is a very thin veneer of democratic acceptance of popular involvement in democracy among *elite* groupings and their allies. Moreover, the thinness of that veneer is demonstrated when non-*elite* involvement in decisions about high level political issues reject *elite* opinion and that when this occurs *elites* and their allies have no political or democratic qualms in seeking to overturn or reject that decision or to delegitimize it and those expressing it. The EU referendum result levelled a challenge not only at a central tenet of *elite* thinking but it also struck at a long-established liberal-left consensus over issues such as immigration and multi-culturalism (also accepted by the mainstream right). Thus, by rejecting EU membership and the political consensus which underpinned it the voters were indeed, for many racist, xenophobic and bigoted and thus their reasons for voting were bad and wrong. The implication is that representative democracy and competitive *elitism* may need to be refined and remodelled so that large scale popular involvement in democracy is curtailed over-time.

Such reshaping leads to the second lesson we can draw from *elite* reaction to the EU referendum result and that is how the representative part of representative democracy may be further distanced from the voter. That shift implies the possible emergence of a post-democratic technocratic state where the opinion of the intellectual *elite* expert is preferenced over that of the voter. Expert opinion and values are more, rather than less, likely to shape policy on major long-term political decisions than is currently the case. But as we have seen intellectual *elites* are not politically representative or diverse when it comes to the opinions they hold. The reaction of much of the intellectual *elite* to the EU referendum has been to claim a monopoly of wisdom (and virtue) while at the same time engaging in a political debate that displays all the emotion, rage, and lack of appreciation and understanding that it is claimed motivated the views of those who voted to leave the EU. Thus, expertise, independent knowledge, intellectual proficiency will be increasingly elevated above the base and emotional instincts of the voter, as though expertise is never tempered by value judgments and disagreement between experts themselves.

Third, that the political, intellectual, cultural and economic *elites* discussed in this paper will see the interaction between them as groups strengthened as they focus on derailing or preventing Brexit and therefore a stronger *elite* consensus cohesiveness develop around a set of policy objectives. Those policy objectives are unlikely to be tested by popular democratic mechanisms and very likely to be presented in the future, more and more as political and governing *fait accompli* or, simply developed overtime without the need to expose such policies to democratic testing, much like the *elite* consensus around the virtues of immigration and multi-culturalism. Popular democracy is likely to become less popular and less democratic.

Fourth, supposing the *elites* are successful in derailing or overturning the referendum result, or are successful in pushing another referendum within the next year or so (rather than the 40 year gap between the initial and second referendum on EU membership). We could hypothesise that the very same people who over-turned the referendum will continue to try and compete, during that referendum, and future general and local elections, for the votes of the same voters they have just ignored. What remains to be seen is what levels of alienation, disenchantment and disengagement are generated for the non-elite citizen by the *elite* reaction to the EU vote and to the possible overturning of that result through once mechanism or another. Such a betrayal of the results of popular democratic engagement in a decision about a single issue could fundamentally undermine public faith and engagement in the representative and participatory processes more generally. The *elite* may further strengthen their *elite* control and status by ensuring that the wrong people have their apathy intensified and fail to participate in politics (See, Morris-Jones, 1954).

The refrain, '*if you don't want to know the answer, don't ask the question*' is simply not good enough to justify excluding voters from complex political decisions at the outset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While referendum may have their weaknesses (see, Qvortrup, 2005), not least that the result may disagree with *elite* preferences, in a mature democracy the idea that the issue is too complex, not suitable for large-scale electoral input or that the voters cannot be trusted to react appropriately, are dangerously anti-democratic. So too is the attitudes among *elites* that if only the voters had a bit more information and wisdom they would come to share the *elite* view. But, more dangerous still is the *elite* assumption that if we do ask the voters and they get it wrong, that *elites* of one sort or another have the right to dispute, delay and or over-turn the results of the choice of the voters which do not accord with *elite* policy preferences. What is clear is that asking citizens to vote on issues, such as membership of the EU, is likely to only be used only for those issues where *elites* can guarantee plebiscitary approval of their policy preferences. The strength of a democratic system, it appears, is not in the tolerance of the public to being ignored by the *elite*, or in their willingness to

consent to be governed, but in the nature of *elite* reaction to a defeat by the plebs and in the latter we are currently left wanting and indeed worried.

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