

And then . . . ?

So . . . a small majority (of more than a million) voted in favour of leaving the EU and the British establishment don't know what to do next. As we remarked in an earlier column, the Vote Leave victory has brought about the very bad situation that negotiations for exit will have to be approved by a parliament that doesn't want to leave at all.

About three quarters of MPs are firmly in favour of remaining in the EU. (As far as they are firm about anything.) Parliament with royal assent can override many matters, including the result of a referendum which under our constitution can only be advisory. If they have the courage of their convictions all the MPs have to do is ignore the result of the referendum and continue as before, and leave us to call them to account in 2020. (David Lammy M.P. advised this course on 26 June. "This madness" [= national independence] could be avoided in the way just suggested.)

This is unlikely because about the same three quarters believe in "democratic legitimacy", which is understood to mean that if the People has spoken, parliament must obey the "democratic imperative". The usual EU remedy in such situations is to re-run the referendum in the hope of producing a more correct, less populist, less extremist result. This too is immediately being suggested: more than two million people have signed an on-line petition. But the British establishment, though their most recent prognostications have been disproved by the event, is probably savvy enough to guess that any re-run would produce a much bigger Vote Leave majority.

There is a solution to this problem—which we have not invented, having just heard it on the radio as a possibility, though one that was mentioned as far-fetched. (Our calls to the UK, over the last forty years, to leave the EU, have also been called far-fetched.)

There ought to be a general election. Unlike referendums, general elections are not, of course, conducted on single issues. But if we had an election now, the EU question must predominate, and candidates would have to say where they stood. Then if the Remain camp managed to get a parliamentary majority, they could with a good conscience ignore the result of the referendum. If the Leavers have the majority the exit negotiations will surely be better conducted. The hope of the Leave side would be that the more stubborn and genuine remainers would lose their seats. UKIP could support the dissolution of this parliament with good hope of being better represented in the next. Current law puts difficulties in the way of snap elections: the need for a two thirds majority in the Commons and so on. They can be met or evaded, if necessary by repeal. A new parliament would be much better placed either to enact our leaving the EU or our remaining in it.

One thing is already clear. It has been said that what the UK does is of very little significance in the world, the UK being (in the words of a French cabinet minister) about as important as Guernsey. If so why have the Japanese yen and the gold price both risen strongly? and why have the stock exchanges in Spain and Italy fallen far more than in London?

These are tactical matters. What is of real importance is that if the nation regains its independence that should be understood as having to do with its character, with what makes it possible to love the nation. Nobody loves the EU.

Ian Robinson