

## **Parliament must decide**

The Government has pulled off a massive confidence trick. It has convinced everyone that Britain has decided to leave the EU. The public, the political parties, the press and the broadcast media, the EU itself and the governments of the EU countries all believe it. But it's not true.

**Britain has not decided to leave the EU** – not yet. That is a decision that only Parliament can make.

The UK's High Court ruled on the question, on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2016. It said loud and clear that neither the Government nor the people through a referendum has the power to make the decision. Unless and until the Supreme Court overturns the ruling on appeal, that is the law of the land. Nobody should be surprised by it; anyone who knew a bit of British history, from Magna Carta onwards, knew it already.

Several mass-circulation newspapers have helped the Government pull off this trick. Their competition for a certain readership has led them to fan the flames of anti-EU sentiment with unbalanced and distorted reporting, immoderate language, and vicious attacks on anyone who dares to suggest that the referendum vote does not automatically lead to Brexit. They have gone so far as to challenge the rule of law by attacking the judiciary: one actually used its front page to display photographs of the High Court judges over the screaming headline "Enemies of the People".

We have come remarkably close to the state Germany was in when Hitler came to power, where newspapers made an almost identical attack on judges and in the end a whirlpool of lies and brutality dragged the country into dictatorship. The question about Brexit, important though it is, is now overshadowed by a much greater one: do we want to be ruled by our democracy and our law?

Parliament must insist on its right to make the decision on whether or not the UK remains in the EU. It must not allow itself to be fobbed off with a vote on details of how Brexit is implemented – on when to give notice to the EU or on negotiating strategy. That would trick Parliament into declaring indirectly that a decision to leave has been made. Parliament must insist on its right to make the fundamental decision in a clear vote on the proposition "that the UK shall leave EU". It must amend any Bill presented by the Government until that proposition is stated directly and clearly in it.

Parliament must then do its duty, with each member voting according to their conscience for what they believe to be in the best interests of their constituents, regardless of party affiliation or personal interest. They must carefully inform themselves about the actual benefits of being in the EU, the supposed benefits of being outside it, and the very great costs of the process of leaving.

They will, of course, be voting in the light of the referendum result: but they must not be intimidated into believing that they are bound by that result. They must remember that the majority was very small, and that many of the Leave votes were probably anti-Government votes by people who really preferred Remain. Parliament will be making the most important decision that Britain has faced in 75 years.