

# Time for radical political reform?

*We continue to look back at some of the messages from this year's CIB Annual Rally. Assuming Brexit is eventually delivered (a big 'if'!), a key issue for Brexiteers will be how to ensure our sovereignty is never again surrendered without a popular mandate, as it was when the UK was taken into the EEC in 1973. In this article we give an overview **Niall Warry's** presentation on the **Harrogate Agenda**, a movement to restore popular accountability to our political system. The full video of Niall's presentation can be viewed at the end of the article.*

Our present system of government, as it has developed over centuries since Magna Carta (1215), delivers some power to the people on election days. But after each election the power then passes to the party (or parties) with a parliamentary majority, which is unchallengeable until the next election.

The voting system makes it very difficult for new parties to get into Parliament. So the system needs reform to make sure that Parliament recognises and responds to the sovereignty of the people on a continuing regular basis, not just infrequently and intermittently. It was, for instance, this unrestrained parliamentary power which took us into the EU without any mandate from the people.

The Harrogate Agenda is a political movement, not a party, which aims to bring pressure for reform in the same way that the Chartist Movement of the nineteenth century influenced the then existing parties to grant reforms over several decades.

The same principles would be applied to local councils which would be made responsible for raising their own revenues, thus

reducing the power of central government. Authorities would be based on our traditional counties, cities and boroughs. As independent legislatures, any proposed boundary changes or amalgamations of authorities would be a matter for their own people – not for central government.

Both the Commons and Lords could be reduced in number, as many matters now decided by central government would become local responsibilities. The Prime Minister would be directly elected and nominate the cabinet for parliamentary approval, as in the American system. Members of Parliament would have to resign their seats if they became ministers – “an office of profit under the Crown”.

As in the Swiss constitution, referendums would play a greater part. The Chartists demanded but never attained annual general elections. Under the Harrogate Agenda, these would be replaced with annual referendums on taxation and the government's proposed budget. There would be advisory referendums on matters of individual policies and referendums which could challenge and halt specific legislation and decisions, as Bills went through the parliamentary process.

Such referendums would be subject to rules to be decided by a constitutional convention, to ensure that procedures are reasonable, workable and not open to abuse. The constitution would be codified to define the boundaries of central government and local responsibilities. A constitutional court would be established to oversee the workings of the system. The position of the monarch would be unaffected.