Dear Ed,

The first Brexit referendum was a choice of one option: “The EU, take it or leave it?”  The Lib-Dems proposal for a second referendum would be a slight improvement, a choice of two options: “The EU or May’s negotiated arrangements?”  Would it not be even better to hold a multi-option ballot, that is, to ask an independent commission to draw up a list of viable options on, say, “The EU, the EEA, May’s arrangements or the WTO?”

Unfortunately, the British (like the Irish) have never moved beyond binary ballots.  New Zealand was the first in 1894 with a three-option plebiscite, and many other countries have used multi-option voting procedures, as is only appropriate for a pluralist democracy.  The methodologies are well established; after all, the first person to propose preferential voting, a certain Ramón Llull, did so some 800 years ago.  And he, by the way, was a Catalan.  Other ‘inventors’ of this more accurate points system of voting have been several: a German in the 15th Century, a Frenchman 300 years later, next a Dane and a Briton and finally an Irish citizen.  Alas, many politicians prefer binary ballots, because if the political leaders can restrict the voters’ choices, they are more likely to get their own.  Hence the legacy of binary ballots: Napoleon, Lenin, Mussolini, Hitler, Duvalier, Khomeini and Saddam Hussein among others.

Yours