

# Editorial

## Trusting Mr Howard on Europe

Mr Michael Howard, addressing the Conservative party conference (05.10.04), was insistent that Mr Blair has lost the trust of the people and that he, Mr Howard, deserves it. He called for the repatriation of powers to the United Kingdom from the EU, specifically mentioning the Social Chapter and the Common Fisheries Policy, though not the Common Agricultural Policy. As governed by treaty, the Common Fisheries Policy is part of the legal requirement of EU membership. The EU is under no obligation to revise any treaty. There is no obvious advantage to the federalising majority in the EU in trying to propitiate an anti-federal member; any revision would certainly be opposed by powerful interests within the EU, would involve long-drawn-out negotiation and would hold out the prospect, in the very unlikely event of its resulting in the Conservatives getting their way, of setting a precedent that would rightly appal all “European” politicians. Mr Howard knows all this. If politics is the art of the possible he knows that renegotiation of EU treaties is not politics. In the same speech Mr Howard promised if elected to arrange a referendum on the “European” Constitution within a few months. The Conservative Party opposes the EU Constitution. What need then is there for a referendum? Why not just promise that an incoming Conservative government would immediately repeal any Act which has ratified HMG's signing of the treaty? Well, perhaps that would lose a few votes. Some people might generally support the Conservatives and yet hope for a yes vote in a referendum. And that the Conservatives should call a referendum and lose it is after all imaginable, and what would then become of the programme of repatriating rights? or of Mr Howard's new government? Mr Howard also emphasized—in a long speech—that unlike Mr Blair he is not all talk, will be “accountable” and will “deliver”. He could quite imaginably deliver more than he offers: he might lead the country out of the European Union. But he knows that he cannot deliver what he is promising, the revision of treaties within the EU. Could it be that here is yet another case of a politician with a hidden agenda? It would not even be the first time that a politician had tried to smuggle in his agenda under the cloak of trustworthiness. But can this succeed when the subterfuge is so easy to discover? Or are we meant to trust him to be untrustworthy and deliver independence? Why, on this showing, should we trust him at all?