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## Editorial

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### Was the Burger Worth the Tallow?

The recent outpouring of national vitriol, whether as a symptom of mad backbencher's disease or testy tabloid disease, over the BSE crisis has frankly achieved little. For the conservative government in the United Kingdom it has failed to transform itself into any appreciable lead in the opinion polls. Thus any perceived benefit of wrapping yourself in the Union Flag has failed to materialise. Moreover, for the relationship with the other 14 Member States the whole affair has been damaging in the extreme. Much goodwill has been split, and the British policy of non-co-operation has produced head shaking and frustration. It is indeed bizarre when ministers block progress on dossiers which they were keen to promote or had even been influential in shaping. Not, though, that the present government has a reputation for consistency, far-sighted initiatives in policy-making or even respect for the judicial and political process. Even the Euro-sceptics (who may know more about making name tapes than about the European Union) cannot understand why the people have not rallied to the conservative call. The answer is merely that mad minister disease is recognised at home for what it is.

Abroad it looks rather as if the perfidy of Albion is confirmed. While a framework has been agreed at Florence, the details have yet to be worked out, and if there is a victory claimed by the government, it will be phyrrie indeed. If anything, the case for majority

voting has been strengthened by the British action. What the British do today, the French did in 1965, and perhaps the Greeks or Spaniards might well do in the future. This does not bode well for consensus politics.

On the back of all this lack of European solidarity come yet more bursts of tabloid self-expression and national awareness in relation to Euro 96. It is not clear whether such nationalism is trying in a tasteless manner to express national pride, or whether it is in fact directed at stirring up enmity against other countries. The former, while mostly tasteless, may be dismissed as mere selling copy. The latter, on the other hand may be more symptomatic of a latent xenophobia among what may be called the "molos" of the Fourth Estate and certain segments of the British people. It might well be thought that we should have progressed from tasteless refuge in the past to a more human understanding of our neighbours. Unfortunately, human understanding does not sell newspapers.

Regrettably, Dr Johnson's view that patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel, is confirmed by both these instances of British obstinacy. In the long run, the British look small in the eyes of their neighbours by such conduct, which ill becomes them. If Britain is to be at the heart of Europe, this is not the way to do it. Too much tallow, too little burger.

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