

# More Tory embarrassment over Europe

✖ In the space of less than 24 hours, the Conservatives have suffered two major embarrassments, both related to the European Union.

Firstly came the immigration statistics. The 2010 Conservative manifesto pledged to bring net immigration down to below 100,000 by the end of this Parliament. Immigration data for the year up to September 2014, published on 26th February, showed that no fewer than 624,000 people came to the UK but only 327,000 left it. Net migration, in other words, amounted to almost three times the numbers the Conservatives promised and 98,000 more than the previous year.

This is not just an EU-related issue. Migration from outside the EU, over which the Government has some control, rose significantly, with 190,000 more people from the rest of the world arriving than leaving. However, the arrival of a further 108,000 EU citizens is something which David Cameron can do nothing about and he has been forced, in as many words, to admit it. His putative talks of trying to restrict freedom of movement as part of the proposed UK renegotiations were dismissed out of hand by other EU heads of state and the European Commission almost as soon as he raised the subject.

Meanwhile, the smoke and mirrors game played by George Osborne regarding the Government's response to the £1.7 billion extra surcharge inflicted on the UK by the EU last year has been exposed by a Committee of MPs. There was never any chance that our spineless government would have told the EU to get stuffed, but Osborne told Parliament that he had succeeded in reducing it by half. However, the Treasury Select committee said: "The suggestion that the £1.7bn bill demanded by the European Union was halved is not supported by published

information.” In other words, Mr Osborne has been telling porkie pies. That would certainly be a reasonable paraphrase of the comments made by Chris Leslie, the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who said, “He must now apologise to taxpayers for making this completely false claim.”

Some hope! However, at a time when opinion polls are pointing to a slender Tory lead and a decline in UKIP support, once again EU-related issues have flared up with a vengeance. The Conservatives’ failures over Europe have been laid bare once again and may well cost them dearly at the ballot box next May.