

Impressions of London

Laurent Murawiec visited policymakers there in June

More than the contrast between monuments of imperial splendor and today's poverty, what strikes the visitor to London is the austerity, the economic offspring of Mrs. Thatcher.

No need to launch raids into the country's ravaged economic areas, just watch what British television has to say and show. Turn it on and watch "News at Ten," and no day will elapse without this kind of report: 2,000 workers laid off in the Wales collieries; the giant British Steel (BSC) may well go into receivership, and will now sack 50,000, as much as already fired; a film shot in a classroom in Wales, where the teacher leads a course on unemployment: "How many of you think they will have to leave the town to find a job?" Thirty hands up, to a man. Thames TV announces that one out of every three houses in London is unfit for habitation. Inflation is above 20 percent. The day this visitor arrived, news was announced that unemployment had topped its postwar record, and was now going to the two-million mark.

Not all the blame, of course, should be laid on the current Prime Minister. She inherited, and decisively aggravated, the effects of strategic decisions taken after the war—to deindustrialize Britain. But it is she and her monetarist guru Sir Keith Joseph, the Industry Secretary, who decided to shut down schools and have parents pay for busing, shut down hospitals and cut their employees' pays, increase transport fees, health costs, local taxes, in the name of fighting inflation, of course. The musicians' union is leading a strike and demonstrating in protest: the BBC is disbanding five classical orchestras. They protest in front of the House of Parliament, playing Handel's Water Music. Police motion them away so that the honorable parliamentarians will not be unduly disturbed by the mob.

Is it necessary to point out that the British population is poor? Of course, it has been imbued with the proud notion that it partook in *Rule Britannia*—racial superiority over the subjects of the Empire, the Wogs, and those beyond the Irish Sea and the Channel. Belonging to the Empire should make up for material deprivation.

Worse perhaps is the cultural deprivation. Beyond

crumbs of imperial glory, who would wish to identify with the Duke of Marlborough, a.k.a. Sir Winston Churchill? Has there been a great national design, a de Gaulle to uplift the nation's morale? The British population has been offered Queen Elizabeth and Prince Charles. Her Majesty's subjects have been left with the Beatles and rock culture. Yellow- and green-haired punks roam the streets in large numbers.

A special program commemorates the first anniversary of the death of the Earl Mountbatten of Burma, cousin to the Queen, former Viceroy of India, former First Lord of the Sea. "Uncle Dickie" who educated Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales, and sent several million men to their bloody death in his partitioning of India in 1947, spoke loud and clear in his last earthly speech against the insanity of "limited" nuclear warfare, warning with his soldier's experience that it would immediately turn into global war. One expects the man himself somehow to reflect this healthy, realistic assessment.

The long BBC interview taken shortly before his death quickly dispels any such notion. The Earl exudes aristocracy through all pores, explaining: "I've always been very self-assured. Conceited I am not. Well, perhaps I am." The Earl makes it clear that playing polo and playing with a few million men's fate is the same game.

Subjects, not citizens

Off-the-cuff conversation in a snack bar on Cannon Street in the city. The man is fiftyish, presumably a higher clerk with some broker.

Visitor: As a foreigner I'm really amazed that you still have a monarchy.

Man in the city: What's so amazing? We have a queen and most Britons like her and her family a great deal. They are a great symbol for the country.

Q: You see, in our republics we elect our presidents, our premiers, but you seem to have the same families in power for centuries. . . .

A: Well the Queen's powers are very limited nowadays. The wealth and money of the aristocracy, they don't have it as an aristocracy but they work, they earn it, aside from the tiny group in direct line for succession to the throne. All the others produce wealth, they are in banking, business, in the press. We do have national figureheads. But sadly, we have not been doing well. People are greedy, they don't really want to work, the young especially, they just want more money. There are plenty of jobs around. If anyone is out of a job it's his fault. If you want a job, change your trade and find a job where and how there is one. The unions are greedy for power, for money, for influence . . .

He just said what he thought. One could call the British a submissive society. Each man in his place. The Queen at Ascot, the Duke of Edinburgh at Lord's shaking hands with cricket players and the unemployed on the dole queue.

The resignation, the passivity and fatalism which decades of postwar stagnation and especially the post-1970 disaster have afflicted the population with are carefully nurtured. If the welfare state is dead, there is still one product the state is delivering:

Here comes Sir Keith Joseph, the disciple of Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman. The sanctimonious creature is interviewed: what do you think of the British Steel Corporation chairman warning that the concern may well go bankrupt? The hypocrite, gently shaking his silver-haired head, sadly intones that he had warned "strikers and the unions that a strike was not the best manner of improving things, alas, as many redundancies as are required will have to be put into effect to bring the company back in the black."

Inside the city

Behind the walls in houses where no brass plate reveals the identity of the occupants of the premises, sit those men who play with the world like Mountbatten played polo. While their mouthpieces of the media may print any "line" they see fit to impress the population with, they have their own thinking. On the quiet, they debate. Their conclusions are passed down as gospel to dozens of influential institutions worldwide.

In one of these noise-proof offices, one man serenely explains that a social explosion in England is inevitable, something will have to give. As well, the Middle East *will* explode. "Africa is starving, there are famines spreading all over," another says. "The Americans, the State Department, they have written off Africa," he pants in a burst of rage, "they want to turn it into a hellhole. And they are writing off Brazil, and Argentina. . . ." But, sir, was it not "British brains?"

"The Club of Rome is dead and the Brandt Commission is a PR operation," says the old man, who paints an apocalyptic picture of Soviet domination of the sea lanes. "They don't have to fight World War III, they won it already." Where were the British brains? Should not those British brains repudiate the New York Council on Foreign Relations policy of neo-Malthusianism if they want to escape the consequences of Soviet strategic superiority?

Others play it dumb. Yes, of course this is all true. But it is so difficult for us Britons to intervene in that fascinating, if complex, U.S. electoral process. He does not want to tell you of decisions taken by the family, and in fact the family is still groping at a decision. But some reality is making itself felt: the families were so

unanimous about neo-Malthusianism in the U.S.A., and "the Russians" who did not swallow an inch of this line are now superior, starting with brute force—aha, that's a language one understands.

But for all the signals which reality sends clicking in the eyes of the gentlemen in the city and "the nobs," as the British population calls its rulers, decisions have not yet been taken. Disarray, creeping fear, grudging recognition of Soviet military-strategic superiority, but Mrs. Thatcher has not been told to come off it. She still feels free to support the Brzezinski follies, from China to the Muslim Brotherhood, from Menachem Begin to maneuvers in the Caribbean. Lord Carrington, an Olympian descended on the earthly matters of government, and a man more able to decipher signals from the real world, does not have the upper hand. The extremists, Joseph et al., do.

There is a great debate raging in the inside avenues, the inner corridors of power. "The U.S.A. is the country where the degeneracy of the elites has gone deepest," complains an old insider. He adds that the rock-and-drug culture must be done away with, standards of rationality in society upheld and enhanced, high educational standards restored. Their erosion started in the 1890s, with Nietzsche, the late romantics. But wasn't it you British who did it, you British brains? The man does not protest. What he fears is a war in the 1980s, "a major war." He sees Soviet superiority lying in their long-term planning. "The spirit of Richelieu blows in Moscow, not in Washington."

Not all are equally realistic. In Tavistock Street, in the West End, where Jack the Ripper officiated, sits the International Institute for Strategic Studies, that prestigious institution which sets so much of the tone of strategic-military debate in the West, boasting of a one-thousand-plus membership among influentials of all sorts throughout the West.

One meets with a tall young man, whose features are not dissimilar to those of the late Reinhardt Heydrich. His hair is shorter. On the shelves of the crammed little room, lots of books, a jogging suit and—unconcealed—a tube of vaseline. On the wall opposite, an autographed picture of Zbigniew Brzezinski. Very much at ease, the young man says no one should worry about the great strides of Soviet science in the last decade; the economic depression in problem; the 8,500 U.S. servicemen arrested on drug charges last year merely reflect the normally low morale of occupation troops. The U.S. economy, the R&D potential of the West, are superior in any case. Let us have more conventional weapons, more small nukes. The Russians would only fight in global thermonuclear warfare. Never anything under that threshold? Who can be sure? Nothing's a problem. I'm all right, Jack.