

# Waylaid while chasing rumors of war

A wise traveller does not fly direct from Toronto to Pakistan, a punishing voyage of some 30-plus hours. So I stopped off in London to restore my jet-lagged body and see if England has changed under the growing influence of Euro-integration.

Instead of a rest stop, I stumbled smack into the middle of London's June social season.

Between morning arrival and 4 a.m. bedtime I ran across Joan Collins at lunch, looking rather cranky and irritable. Then, lots of dandies in fancy outfits. The Ascot races are on and I was invited out to the grand, imperial, royal enclosure — or something like that. Alas, I had no morning wear or top hat.

Could I come in a suit, I asked?

"Sir," I was gravely informed, "you might look out of place." Horrors. One might as well commit hara-kiri as to look out of place here.

So no Ascot. But I did see lots of ladies in funny hats, some of whom looked quite engaging and I was invited for drinks by a society lady who sported a top hat and fishnet stockings. She introduced me to a delightful elderly gentleman who spent years with the mujahedin fighting the Soviets in the mountains of Afghanistan.

Next, off for more drinks and then dinner at Annabel's. Here, anybody who is anybody must be seen by other important people. I dined with Joanna Carson, former wife of Johnny, who, though she denies it, is reportedly about to come forth with a sensational kiss and tell book that will cause lots of people in Hollywood extreme aggravation and, one suspects, a few lawsuits.

Then, big hugs for the Baron and Baroness Por-tanova who were taking Ivana Trump out to dinner as part of her new bachelor mode. Though I can't stand the media's Trumponia or the egregious Donald, I did

Eric

**M**ARGOLIS  
in London



note with approval that Ivana looked divinely skinny in a seemingly sprayed-on red dress and not at all like the press photos that make her look a bit full-figured.

Everyone else was there too: Industry moguls, Arab zillionaires, winsome young ladies who were a bit nervous, and jaded British gentlemen with mauve hankies tucked up their sleeves. Many of these distinguished nabobs did not seem particularly interested in the comely ladies who accompanied them, so I guess things have not changed that much after all in England.

To my chagrin, I had to turn down a flurry of party invitations in order to make it to Pakistan, where it's 120 in the shade and, as a bonus, the Pakistanis and Indians are rattling their nuclear weapons for a war that's expected any day. Nor was I particularly delighted by our dinner bill — a mere \$900 for four, and this with only one bottle of wine and a few nips of vodka.

With prices like this, you don't need to go to Tokyo to go bankrupt in an evening. Hotels here, as always, are outrageously expensive and irritatingly inefficient. Decent rooms costs \$600 a night and breakfast can set you back \$30 in the blink of an eye. Why everything is so expensive here eludes me.

Among the high and mighty, there's growing worry

that the long era of Conservative rule could be nearing a close. Margaret Thatcher's popularity is at an all-time low and the Tories are filled with gloom. At the same time, the Labor party has finally managed to purge its crazy, Marxist fringes and to sound fairly reasonable.

In spite of such gentle noises, many well-off Britons don't believe Labor has changed its militant stripes at all. Or that Labor's bedrock support in the run-down north of England won't have to be given all sorts of welfare goodies by any socialist government. This would mean the regrowth of the welfare state and Labor intimidation of industry that caused Britain to face near economic ruin in the dark days before Maggie Thatcher.

As a result, big money is beginning to flow out of Britain and into safer refuges on the continent. This, in turn, spells bad news for Britain's capital markets and continued economic growth. A few years of Labor rule and the U.K. could very well slip into the poorer members' class of the European community.

Of course, you don't see any of this at Annabel's or at Ascot. But hints of a gathering storm are clearly visible when you ride the tatty underground or see the hostile looks from groups of belligerent poor who increasingly infest the streets of London and England's smaller towns. Up north, the high-living south is looked at as a foreign country filled with decadent fops and profiteers. The violence of England's football hooligans shows just how much tension is seething under the surface. Class warfare has not ended, it's merely been on hold.

Meanwhile, England remains a sort of giant theme park for American and Japanese tourists and the Queen Mum is preparing to celebrate her 90th birthday. And I'm getting ready to head off to Kashmir and the Northwest Frontier where turbans and AK-47 assault rifles, not top hats, are de rigueur.