

London letter

Cian O'Neill foretells a new ash cloud descending from the northern wastes and in the meantime looks forward to summer japes by the pool!

Sun-dazed, grog-flushed, the packed public parks a brocade about its tipsy heels, London stumbled amiably into the impact zone of the ConDem coalition government's June 22nd Emergency Budget. That is when the fun stopped and the happy children of the sun stood up on freshly-goosebumped legs to get a better look at that big and very bad thing coming southward over the hills of Highgate, London being its own petit-monde, incorporating an archipelago of demi-mondes, it takes a time before the truth of things elsewhere in the country reaches back, due mainly to a pervasive disinterest here in having the news from there, particularly when that news cannot be good. The sun, for its part, anaesthetises, and so the summertime shires tend to burble along, pausing only to pick pansies strewn along the fields of inquiet wheat, or prick up an ear at those louder, and oddly dull popping sounds coming from the direction of Cumbria.

The coalition's government's Self-righteous Brothers – that's Mr. David OnCamera and Mr. Nikolai 'Horsetly' Clegg – worked hard to shoo away all that specious jive of 'hope' that so belaboured The Election campaign, and to prepare the public instead for a five-year war of attrition on the public finances that may reduce the debt as it will also leave many families and communities as good as dead, with hope deferred. What happens on January 4th when the new 20% VAT rate takes effect and the English realise that it ain't simply the perennially 'leisure-wear' clad neighbour who may lose out, is anyone's guess. Trafalgar Square does form an amphitheatre of sorts, and with a big screen erected upon which people could watch their spoil gladiators be beaten by more talented foreigners in the World Cup – agape, agape! – timely distraction should keep the greater public from irrupting into protest directed at what actually matters – which is the action on

that stage at the foot of the square, known as Westminster.

The former head of BP advised on, if not the plumbing, then the budget cuts, which, on this astral plane at least, can help only Labour. If Gideon Osbourne's knifemark-through-cream smirk was kept hidden away during The Election, it can only be presumed that he will now be forced at gunpoint by the Mr. Horsetly into what was formerly the 'Broom's deep bunker at No. 11, within which the young whelp may snigger, and smile, forever. Poor old Iain Duncan Smith – yes, he whose initials resemble those of some STD – was trotted out to announce cuts to benefits and pensions that would make him a fall guy once more for a party which never respected him and a leader whose face of carved gammon could never stretch to the required look of feigned empathy. 'Let Iain do it!' the Old Boys crow.

Winter, which seems so far off now, will chill the bones. An upward bounce in inflation is possible. The BP Gulf of Mexico spill may hit pensioners here, through lesser / suspended dividend payments to policyholders of heavily invested UK pension funds. Public sector jobs will be slashed and so contribute to a surge in unemployment to three million. The VAT rise will hit the poor hardest and so further entrench social division. A dark cloud approacheth, no question, and as it moves down country it will shed some rain as it snags on all those currently sleeping steeples and spires.

Until then, much japes by that pool known as the Mediterranean: Mr. Al'hadmydindinjihad is bristling bristlingly about the new UN sanctions, as only a polyester-mix anorak-clad man jabbing his finger westwards in 40° heat can. Israel, meanwhile, is making the international waters off Gaza a great fantasy trip for all the placemat-on-head boys who feel cheated because their forebears never got round to playing Sinbad the Sailor, being as they were – histori-

cally – too busy with usury, patronage of the arts and the eating of Christian's babies. Rumours that Walt Disney are in talks with NetanYahoo about making the whole 'Pirates of the Israeli Defence Force' experience an amusement park for the Middle East are unsubstantiated at time of going to press, mainly because of the doughty dominance of the extant competitor, one long and tedious roller-coaster ride which trades under the name, 'To Hell in a handcart'. A cute little phrase, that, which could be applied to the summertime London Underground, a subterranean stagecoach of fainting commuters and supernumerary tourists who insist on standing still on the elevators that lead upwards out of the dark, towards the light, towards the sun. If it gets too hellish hot out there, well, that's why God created chilled wine. Just ask the bums – they'll tell you it straight.

