

Letter From London

Living With Inflation and the IRA

By **SONNY LINDER**

Essay Staff Reporter

Because my past two articles covering the NCSA London course have dealt primarily with our academic and theatrical activity here, I feel that some words should be said at this time concerning the economic and political perspective here, too. Of course, any opinions stated here in no way are meant to imply a group consensus, although in some cases, other members of our group may agree.

When we arrived here on Oct. 2, few of us 20 students knew quite what to expect. Those of us who had been here on previous NCSA summer courses were perhaps more prepared than the novices. But to any native Londoner, it was quite apparent that we were all "tourists" — and Americans.

Several weeks were necessary to become familiar with the British currency system. During this period, most of us had the feeling that these funny new coins and bills were simply play money and treated them as such. It was not unusual to spend several pounds on a new book or sweater, thinking nothing of it. Only later did we begin to realize that five pounds was actually the equivalent of \$11.50 in American money, instead of only \$5.00. Needless to say, some re-adjustment of financial planning was in order.

To compound this problem, some of the students were told that a 28-day wait would be necessary in order to complete the transferral of funds between our U.S. banks and the National Westminster Bank here. Only through the efforts of Mr. James Dodding, course director, and Dean Pollock who kindly consented to loan us cash from the course account until the monies arrived, were several of us able to keep the proverbial wolf from our doors. (A word to the wise: Bring Traveler's Cheques or English currency if you intend to open a bank account in London.)

The inflation problem here is staggering. The English pound is now worth one tenth of its value in 1900, and it is losing ground daily. In addition, the



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scarcity of many commodities also tends to jack up prices; many items that are taken for granted in the States commands a dear sum over here. For instance, a cloth jacket worth \$20.00 at home costs at least \$34.50 in London, based on the current rate of exchange (one pound sterling equals \$2.30).

Food prices are somewhat comparable to those in the U.S., but costs for such items such as clothing, cigarettes, and gasoline are nearly triple. Transportation to and from school on the "tube" and buses averages about \$12.00 per month, in addition to approximately \$400.00 air fare from Canada, round trip.

When this high cost factor is added to the bill for our schooling—approximately \$4,000 per year out of state, \$2,000 in state—the total for this seven month period comes to practically double the total cost for a nine month period at NCSA, North Carolina.

(Before continuing, please allow me to say that I do not mention these statistics in way of complaining—I only attempt to point out some of the harsher realities of a civilization less affluent and more overcrowded than our own).

Similarly, certain everyday conveniences so much taken for granted in the U.S. do not exist in England. Such services as hot running water, central heating, and unlimited private telephone use are all extravagances for the people such as us who live in "bed-and-breakfast" accommodations.

In our rooming houses, or "digs", it costs about 20 cents for enough hot water to fill a bath tub. (Fortunately, there are free hot showers at Morley College.) In at least one of our women's residences, the electricity for heating and light shuts off after two hours unless 15 cents is shoved in a meter on the wall!

For the British, calls on private residential phones cost about eight cents apiece, plus the monthly fee. And as Mr. Dodding can testify, there is now a two to three year wait just for telephone installation in the London area!

On the political scene, the prospects for Great Britain look pretty gloomy, according to the London press. Along with inflation and shortages, the infamous Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.) is creating havoc for the British imperialists who still try to control Northern Ireland.

Explosions and terrorism, until recently confined to Ireland, have been occurring here in London; last week Mr. Dodding found it necessary to call an assembly in order to inform students of the procedure he would implicate in case of bomb blasts.

Dodding and other staff members will be phoning all student residences whenever any explosions take place in the London area, in order to make sure one of us was not injured—or killed.

The possibility of such a distinct menace to one of our own lives is a feeling most of us have never had to think about. At times like this, life in America seems surprisingly safe and secure.

Finally, the problems of housing, nationalized medicine and transportation continue to plague this largest of English cities.

Recent strikes by landlords in protest to the hotly disputed "Rent Act" have left thousands of Britons homeless. The new law, which is decidedly in favor of tenants, is now working in direct contradiction to its intended purpose, resulting in bitter disputes between the two factions. In some areas, squatters are becoming a common occurrence, and everywhere people are questioning a

government whose increased march towards nationalization has resulted in massive problems for its citizens.

Except in emergency cases, such as Connie Kincaid's recent operation, there is often a three month wait to see a medical specialist in the large urban hospitals.

In all fairness, however, none of us have had any trouble when visiting our local "surgeons" (general practitioners); there is a "surgery" in every borough—free of charge, and we also have a very competent medical advisor specially for the NCSA program.

As most Londoners will agree, although the government run "tube" system does try hard, there are frequent problems. In addition to IRA bomb threats and delayed trains, it is not uncommon to be practically suffocated, squeezed into an underground car like matchsticks during rush hour.

Obviously, many U.S. cities have similar headaches. In a city as densely populated as London, overcrowding and limitation is inevitable. I only attempt to point up some of the less glamorous aspects of life here in an attempt to show another angle of the monthly picture I have been trying to paint for our readers.

Certainly, in most of the London students' lives, the opportunity to work and play in such a "theatrical" environment is well worth all financial and physical inconveniences that arise. Indeed, the museums, shops, night life, historical sites, and the people here are numerous and varied. And, in spite of our heavy work-load, our course directors are continually encouraging us to "get out and see London."

Just this week (previous to a marvelous and mellow Thanksgiving dinner arranged especially for us by Mr. Dodding and his assistant, David Wynne), a questionnaire from North Carolina was distributed to each student. On this form were such questions as "name three advantages and three disadvantages of the London program," and "do you plan to return to NCSA after this year?" Each of us filled out his or her sheet and handed it in to be sent back, presumably to some board meeting or self-study committee or Board of Trustees.

I wonder what the results will prove.....

Are Practice Rooms "Poor"?

By **CRAIG WEINDLING**

Essay Staff Reporter

The old classroom spaces of James Gray High School have been rated from terrible to suitable by those who practice in them, but never good.

The Essay attempted to get student comments on the practice rooms but found most musicians in the rooms (primarily string and piano) felt that although the rooms could be improved, they were tolerable. However, most commented that for certain students, such as brass and wind majors, the acoustics were poor. Kurt Eslick, a french horn major, commented that with certain notes "the walls vibrate and the ventilators play harmony with you."

"I've been teaching here for seven years and it's been a problem for seven years. They're not ideal, but it's what we have and what we'll use," stated Robert Listoken, clarinet faculty member and member of the Clarion Wind Quintet.

Phillip Dunigan, flute instructor and member of the Clarion, feels they are too small for flute practicing. He has forbidden his students to use the rooms, holding that because of the size, a flutist "cannot find the focus of his tone."

Joseph Robinson, oboe instructor, and member of the Clarion believes "the worst problem is the fact that the available practice spaces (whether dorm rooms, hallways, closets, studios or practice rooms) are so 'live' as to be completely misleading to a student developing tonal sensitivity." His students have complained frequently to him about the accessibility and acoustic

suitability of the practice rooms.

The rooms, which have just been painted, are eight feet by eight feet with worn carpet on the floors and thin walls. The hardness of the rooms make them acoustically "live" and sound from instruments will bounce around excessively in them so many mistakes cannot be recognized. A small part of the problem has been alleviated with the teaching studios, but the problem is still very real. The studios have covered walls to help absorb the sound and also have carpeted floors. Studios are made available to musicians when lessons are not scheduled in them. However, the majority of studios are used constantly for lessons, leaving practice rooms or dorm rooms as the only alternative.

No Problem

Scott Schillin, assistant to the dean of music and piano instructor, maintains that there is no problem. There is enough space and adequate rooms." He stated that no faculty member or student had complained to him about a problem of this sort. He conducts a weekly meeting during lunch with representatives from the various divisions in the music department and has not been approached by anyone of these representatives either.

He commented that a new addition for the music department will be completed within two years, including new practice facilities.

Nicholas Harsanyi, dean of music, has said that he has not received any complaints about the acoustics of the practice rooms. He says, "If our practice room facilities are shared equally, there

should not be any problem for our students to find enough time and space to work. They (the rooms) are no better or worse than the practice rooms in any other school."

According to the Institutional Self-Study Report, prepared earlier this year, "the existing practice rooms were too few, poorly lit and ventilated and acoustically poor for practice..." It went on to say that some of the problem had been lessened by the renovation of the Main Building, including the construction of the six office-studios.

Committee Needed

Brought into light even more through discussion of quiet hours at SCA meetings, the acoustics of the music practice rooms have been the subject of controversy. At the meetings, D & P students volunteered to help put carpeting on the walls and floors, if it were made available, in order to help the rooms carry a better tone. According to students, an arrangement of this type would definitely help relieve the "live" atmosphere of the rooms, although to what extent is not known. To date, no committee has been set up to study or organize such a project.



From Warner Bros.

Sunday, Dec. 15 at 8:00 p.m. in Crawford Hall.