

## Tom Greco's Letter from London

London's grey, chill November drizzle can depress one's spirits. But somehow the bustle of the city, the crowds surging into and out from the Tube, provides some comfort, perhaps as reassurance that life yet thrives beneath the pall.

Lodging at one of London's five hostels (this one rated as the "five star") I have the chance to mingle with other transients, many of them youngsters, and to experience a neighborhood that's off the beaten tourist track. One evening, I wandered into a pub in the neighborhood of Bermondsey. I was the only patron, except for a white-bearded man and a pale, thin, forty-ish woman, both very drunk, who were seated together at a table opposite the bar.

As usually happens in such situation, patrons will sooner or later get round to introductions. "ee's from Airy-zona," she kept repeating, as if it were a mantra that could conjure up some sort of escape from her drunken fog. "ee should marry me and take me to America," she said to no one in particular, but uttered in the general direction of her drunken companion. I, the whole time wearing my friendly foreigner smile, paid it little mind as I sipped my pint, glanced up at the telly, and chatted with the bartender. If she had been the least bit attractive, I might have made some attempt at conversation, but she wasn't, so I didn't. Anyway, conversation with drunks is something I've always found difficult.

Ten days into my stopover, the cold I caught the second day in England has just about cleared out. I suspect that the rapid changes in climate and diet that I've experienced over the course of my journeying may be the shocks that account for my frequent periods of illness. Fortunately, I've always managed to recover, and except for the typhoid episode, my impairment has not been severe. Still, I marvel at the seemingly endless issues of mucous that I cough up, spit out, and blow from my nose.

There are, of course occasional breaks in the English gloom. My arrival in England on November 12 was met with chilly winds under sunny skies, a sharp contrast to the heat of India that I had left just 12 hours before. After dropping my excess luggage at Hugo's small midtown flat I made my way to Trafalgar Square where I joined the lunchtime crowd and tourists enjoying the warmth of the noontime sun. *St. Martin in the Fields* sits opposite one corner of the square. That was the prearranged meeting point with my friend Peter Etherden.

Peter and I have known each other for more than 20 years and that was our first meeting since 2002 when I visited him and his partner Connie on their sailboat in Rye harbor. That was the occasion of a memorable crossing of the English channel and a three day stay in Boulogne harbor where we lounged around and acquired enormous stocks of French red wine that we bought in five liter brown plastic jugs for something like five euros each. I doubt that bargain remains, and even if the euro price remains the same, it would cost sixty percent more in dollars at today's exchange rate.

For the first three days of my visit, I enjoyed the hospitality of my old friend the Rev. John Papworth at his home in Wiltshire, a couple hours west of London. John is a unique phenomenon. Multitalented and accomplished in many areas, he is, at 85, still fit, sharp witted, and active. He fed me well with a bit of the remaining produce from his own garden and a nearby organic farm, cooked up the most delicious and wholesome of meals, provided me with eggs from his hens, whole grain bread baked in his own kitchen, Damson plum jam from his own trees, and entertained me with his remarkable recitations of Shakespeare's plays and Samuel Johnson's letters.

Upon my return to London, I've had occasion to meet up with various colleagues, correspondents, and supporters, many of whom have been working on the "money problem" in one way or another for years. There is a group called the Christian Coalition for Monetary Justice, that has been very active, and who have a regular weekly "Open Table on Monetary Justice" at the Friends (Quaker) House opposite the Euston Road underground station I'll be posting a few photos on my blog sometime soon.

Today I had to move from my lodgings at the Rotherhithe hostel in east London to another over near Earl's Court. (The former had been pre-booked for the weekend, but the latter had one remaining bed). Earl's Court is a livelier neighborhood with many cafes, restaurants, and pubs, but in either case, close proximity to the tube makes it easy to move quickly (usually) to any part of the city.

Tomorrow (Saturday), I'll attend an all-day public meeting of the *Global Justice Strategy Forum*, entitled, *What's Wrong with the Global Justice Movement?* I expect it will be a lively and productive gathering.

Sunday will be my last day in London. I'll be moving over to a hotel that will give me easy access to Heathrow airport in preparation for my flight back to San Francisco on Monday. Fortunately, the \$150 tariff will not further deplete my available cash because the booking has been arranged through *Bartercard* and will be paid from my Universal Currency (UC) account.

UC is a private credit system that enables commercial trade exchanges ("barter" companies) to transact business with one another without using conventional money. I am an exception in that I have a personal account. My credit balance came about when I accepted UC instead of cash for my honorarium that was paid when I delivered the keynote speech at the 2006 *IRTA* convention.

*Bartercard*, which started in Australia, has extensive operations in the UK. It is one of the largest (among many) cashless trading operations with franchisees in several countries around the world. While cashless exchange based on credit clearing remains mostly unknown, here is evidence of viable, highly developed structures that are being used today to mediate the exchange of significant amounts of valuable goods and services internationally.