

Today was a work day, but I started out with a delightful breakfast from yesterday's marketplace acquisitions. Yum yum! After work I settled in for dinner and then to catch up on some news you may not have heard about.

First off, as I mentioned a few days ago, England is gripped with the Exes Scandal. This refers not to ex-spouses, but to expenses. In particular MPs allowance expenses. Members of Parliament are supposed to domicile in the constituencies, but really need to keep an abode in London in order to attend Parliament. Back in the 1970s, MPs earned a relative pittance, and so adopted an expense reimbursement system which would pay rent or mortgage offsets against a secondary residence, as well as allow for maintenance and upkeep of those. The idea was that if you hail from Bath, and needed to pay for an expensive London flat so as to attend Parliament, the taxpayers should help pay for that. Over the years, however, this privilege has evolved into a massive slush fund.

Well, the scandal has dragged on for 9 days now. The Telegraph, a reliably Tory paper have been serving up little bits of the story in daily doses for over a week now. So far there have been at least three MPs, cabinet ministers or aides who have resigned, and several are under investigation by one or another law enforcement group.

We haven't heard the last of this, yet. Elections loom just three weeks from now...

Next up in the news is a little scandal of large proportions. I'm speaking, of course, of what is locally dubbed the "Tempest in a D cup," the Marks and Spenser Bra pricing debacle. A while back, Marks and Sparks decided that since bras larger than D cup require more material and more expensive architecture they should carry a £2 premium. The ensuing outcry was just too much for M&S to ignore, and last week they finally caved. "We Boobed" declared the full page ads which ran in all the papers, in front of an amply filled bra.

In order to make amends, M&S, who celebrate their 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary next week, will for three days sell 20 products ranging from ties to bags, scarves, make up and others for pennies (reflecting their start as a penny retailer). I plan to be there, at the Oxford Street flagship store, when it all starts on Wednesday morning, with celebrities and big bras in attendance.

Lastly, tonight is the Eurovision Song contest final. England is more hopeful than ever as this year's entry is Jade, a protégée of Lord Andrew Lloyd Webber. She has been all over the press these past weeks, and the best thing to come from tonight's show is that this phenomenon will hopefully end quickly in the wake of a final decision.

If you're not familiar with Eurovision, it is a contest to find the best of the banal. The songs which compete are almost all of the monumental anthem class, at which Lord Webber so excels. You would think that this would make Jade, whom Lord Webber will accompany on piano for tonight's performance, a shoo-in. Not so fast. Eurovision has complex rules, entirely new this year after last year's winners, Russia, were chose with huge advantage from almost all former Soviet bloc countries. Up till this year the voting was entirely by the public, with each country's citizens intelligible to vote for their entrant. Now, given last year's scandal, half the weighted vote will come from industry insiders.

The Russians, as last year's winners, are hosting tonight's event. They have spared no expense, reportedly spending upwards of \$30 million to stage the event in the 30,000 seat stadium built for the 1980 Olympics. They claim that fully 30% of all LED screens in existence are being used in this production. From what I have seen so far, they're right about that. The staging is lavishly over the top.

I cannot watch this at my local, as I hate this type of music, and could be counted on to say the wrong thing at the wrong time in a public house. So, I will suffer at home, and silently root for Jade, and her ilk, to fail in favour of some more palatable sounds from some other country. The French entry is singing now, and I like her. Sounds like Marianne Faithfull might if she were French... of course, "everyone hates the French," as the morning papers reminded us all. This audience, from the sound of the applause, didn't read those stories.

Ta!