

# THE STATE OF THE NATION

## 1970

The 1960's was a pivotal decade. The last vestiges of the aristocratic elite intent upon control was ousted by a rising liberal elite intent upon freedom and emancipation. New utopian visions began to emerge which were less meritocratic, less bureaucratic and more secular. As a consequence, the legislative programme took away restraint on sexual freedoms and encouraged the emancipation of women, the acceptance of multi-racialism, the breakdown of class divisions and the rise of equality of opportunity. It set in motion the major cultural changes which were to dominate the rest of the Century.

Much of the change was propelled by the technological advances in communication and mass media which now invaded the lives of almost everyone. Life in 1970 was far more 'edgy'. People were better informed than ever before. News no longer permeated through society, it blasted through! Bombarded by opinions from all directions, issues became less black and white and more coloured and complicated. The new tendency to sensationalism was prone to pervert the truth to achieve maximum impact. Media probes too easily erred towards propaganda and invaded the privacy of those in authority who were publically scrutinised as never before. They were now forced to tread a minefield knowing that a false step could have devastating consequences. The collective results were de-stabilising to society. Trust was thrown into contention. There was a growing lack of certainty and a weakening of confidence in the system. Politicians once revered and respected were now derided and diminished, and, along with most other authority figures were forced to build a bureaucracy of protection. There is a sense in which politicians especially were compelled to tip-toe around problems rather than face them squarely to avoid a media barrage and widespread public reaction. There is no doubt that mass media was gaining power and influence.

Working life was also nowhere near as assured. By 1970 the economic situation was worsening. The short-term benefit of the 1967 devaluation was being swamped by a surge in inflation. The structural changes necessary to solve the Balance of Payments difficulties failed to keep pace with events. The key traditional industries – Coal Mining, Iron and Steel, Shipbuilding, Textiles etc. were all contracting as foreign competition undermined demand. Whilst new Trading Estates were emerging to house the new Tech. industries they demanded entirely different skill sets. Retraining skilled workers in their 40's and 50's was not popular. Neither was the disintegration of the declining communities in which they lived. The tide of dissatisfaction grew. The Trades Unions took up the baton and readied themselves for the fight. In 1969 the Coalminers escalated the war.

Caught now between the power of the media and the militant Trades Unions and faced with increasingly severe economic problems the Government began to flounder. It was visibly losing control. Public apathy towards government grew. With growing affluence the machinations were becoming less and less significant to their lives. The political balance

wavered, the situation worsened still further. Whilst in 1957 Prime Minister Macmillan was declaring “you have never had it so good” by the early 70’s people were feeling that ‘they had never had it so bad’! Britain was being referred to as ‘the sick man of Europe’!