

THE STATE OF THE NATION

1980

After a decade of turbulence there was little left of the 'Great' in Great Britain. The country was close to crisis and heading, once again, into recession. One disaster seemed to follow another. The plague of damaging Public Service strikes of the 'Winter of Discontent' was rapidly followed by yet another glitch in oil supply brought about by revolution in Iran. Oil prices doubled and inflation rocketed to 16.4%. The incoming Conservative Government of Margaret Thatcher faced huge challenges. Their campaign slogan could not have been more apt. Their manifesto captured the seriousness of the situation and the mood of the electorate. It stated:

"There has been a feeling of helplessness"

"This country is faced with the most serious problems since the 2nd World War"

"During the industrial strife confidence, self-respect, common sense, and even our common humanity has been shaken. At times this society seemed to be on the brink of disintegration."



It accused the Labour Government under James Callaghan of making things worse in 3 ways:

1. By practicing the politics of envy and actively discouraging the creation of wealth they have set one group against another in an often bitter struggle to gain a larger share of a weak economy.
2. By enlarging the role of the State and diminishing the role of the individual they have crippled the enterprise and effort on which a prosperous country depends.
3. By heaping privilege without responsibility upon the Trades Unions, Labour has given a minority of extremists the power to abuse individual liberties and to thwart Britain's chances of success. One result is that the Trade Union movement, which sprang from a deep and genuine feeling for the brotherhood of man is today more distrusted and feared than ever.

The election result did little to placate the concerns and confusion of the man in the street. 24% failed to vote, and of those that did, only 43% voted Conservative. After more than a decade of government and legal impotence to solve the problems they held little hope that things would improve. They had survived the ravages of extreme inflation and accepted the new order of violent confrontation and emerged better off. The boundaries of authority

had retreated and any sense of fairness had faded in the leap-frog battle for pay. People were forced back on their own devices. Any remaining sense of community spirit was elbowed aside by the need for personal survival embroidered by the satisfaction of out-doing the neighbour with the latest gadget! Little did they realise that it would become the mantra of the 80's!