

industrial environment and believe that the militant stance of Derek Hatton and Arthur Scargill are representative of political and trade union attitudes north of the Trent, they get very angry. They point to the Japanese firms that have chosen the north. But the Japanese build from the bottom up, employing almost exclusively school-leavers and graduates. There is, I believe, promise in small-scale enterprise, but in terms of numbers, relying on the Japanese and one-man enterprises is like trying to drain the North Sea with a bucket. It is hard to escape some pretty bleak conclusions.

Denis James, Slough's planning committee chairman, told me that people from Coventry had recently arrived in town to sell pictures made from silver paper door-to-door. From Coventry! The symbol of Britain's post-war resurgence, with its modern shopping precincts, its cathedral rising next to the ruins of the one that Hitler's bombers gutted, its once invincible car industry. That's where the unemployed of Durham moved in the thirties, the generation of the grandfathers of the boys who were now coming to Slough. Councillor James is just old enough to remember the pre-war unemployed, bringing their baked bean tins, threaded with a piece of wire to serve as a handle, to the backdoor of his childhood home to beg for a cup of tea. The Coventrians with their silver paper pictures had transported him back to his childhood. The have-nots are once again at the backdoors of the haves. Harold Macmillan said very shortly before he died in December 1986 that when he was MP for Stockton in the twenties the unemployment rate was 29 per cent; when he returned as a nonagenarian in the mid-eighties for a reunion, the figure stood at 28 per cent. It made him, he said, 'very sad'.

Chapter 4

It's No Go The Milkman

Mrs 'Smith' hadn't been out after dark for five years unless accompanied by her son — and that only rarely, since he was almost as frightened as she of the long walkways with their dark hiding places and of the lounging teenagers. Five years ago, returning with four other women at ten o'clock at night from 'a little bingo', Mrs Smith had been set upon a few yards from her front door by three 'muggers'. The youths snatched their handbags and kicked the one woman who had hung on and resisted, severely injuring her wrist. Mrs Smith, then sixty-two, who had already twice been burgled, became a hermit, scuttling out when necessary during daylight hours, but for the most part living a claustrophobic life of siege in her small maisonette — 'I have never been out at night since, never been to bingo,' she said. She gave up her work for the tenants' association, knocking on people's doors and delivering leaflets. 'I wouldn't do it now.'

Her home is in the heart of one of Britain's ill-famed inner city housing estates — those that have been dubbed 'no go' in the popular press — the North Peckham estate in the London borough of Southwark. The milkman has long since given up his milk round, the police move hesitantly in pairs, and, from time to time, doctors, postmen, social workers, deliverymen, repairmen and taxi drivers decline to venture inside. When Mrs Smith's husband was dying from lung cancer, a taxi driver refused to bring them home from the hospital. The estate was built in the mid-seventies, home to six thousand people, its flats linked by mile upon mile of asphalt walkway, and connected by bridges to other estates of equally formidable reputation. From one office, staff administer eleven thousand of the least desirable homes in the country. Seven years after Mrs Thatcher had boosted the ideal