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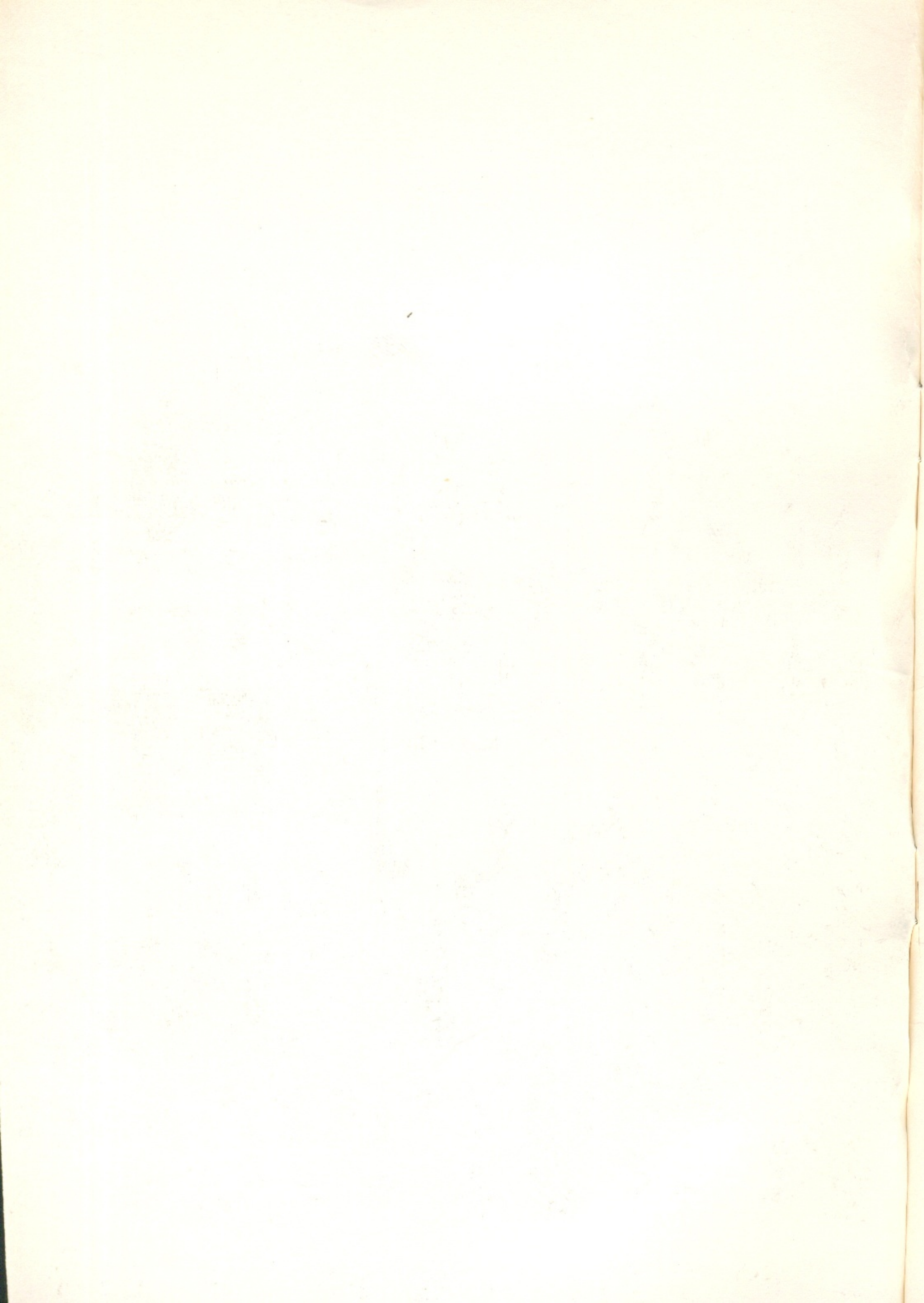
RUNDOWN

SEIZE

OUR

HERITAGE

A NORTH KENT REPORT



Stop the rundown Seize our heritage

Introduction

No one could claim that our area is lacking in natural resources. An industrial area, we are surrounded by the orchards, hopfields, rich agriculture and pasture of the 'Garden of England'. Dartford, Northfleet and Gravesend enjoy the added advantage of lying on the main highway into London, the Thames. We are ideally placed for controlling river traffic, supplying cement for building, and making paper for Fleet Street and the City.

Of the Medway towns, Daniel Defoe wrote in 1723: "The river and its appendices are the most considerable of the kind in the world, being the chief arsenal of the royal navy of Great Britain". This river, the world's "safest and best harbour", had such extensive and highly organised building yards, docks and warehouses that he compared them to a "well-ordered city". Of Maidstone, we read that "London is supplied with more particulars from that town than from any other in England - large Kentish bullocks, timber, corn, hops and cherries, paving stones, white sand for the glass-houses, and Kentish runnets and pippins". Defoe says that North Kent as a whole is "embarrassed by business".

In the 1830s and 40s, Gravesend grew prosperous as a resort, with a million daytrippers a year arriving by ferry from London to enjoy the promenade and gardens. Then the railways were built and industry flourished. In this, an especial landmark was the opening of the Imperial Paper Mill in 1912, then the most advanced anywhere, now threatened with closure. On the banks of the Thames and the Medway was built an unequalled concentration of paper mills. The cement works at Northfleet are the largest in Europe.

On such developments was based the relative prosperity of the 1960s, and in this period, the population grew with newcomers from London and elsewhere. But, at the same time, Reed International, Bowaters, GEC and the rest ploughed most of their profits abroad, to wherever conditions were easier and the workforce tamer. Grown fat on wealth we created for them here, they built vast empires overseas.

And our area is rapidly becoming an industrial graveyard, with once busy mills closed down, and the landscape scarred with abandoned quarries. Where is there provision for the future?

Alongside the rundown of industry, we witness a deterioration in all aspects of welfare for our people - in education, health, social services, transport. Nowhere does this arise from shortage of resources, material or human. Indeed, in every trade there are many unemployed, prevented from using their skills for our common good. And after ten years of schooling, nearly half our school-leavers cannot find work.

What of our future? And our children's? Will we allow our assets to be squandered by the monopolies? Will the skills and labour of the men and women who built up this area be wasted, and the next generation live in poverty in a ruined nation? Can we accept this as 'fate', an inevitability, one of the recurrent tragedies of a capitalist society? It is not fate, but wanton destruction. It is not inevitable, for we can prevent this rundown - if we are prepared to seize our heritage.

* * * * *

It would be a full-time job to keep track of the rundown of industry in our area. New reports of closures come in daily. The following are just a few examples:

- Thorns, Rochester, producing radio and TV valves. Production moved to the Continent. 450 out of 600 employees to be made redundant.
- John Howard, for Phillips Petroleum, at Frindsbury. Construction of oil rig stopped half-way, moved overseas. Official reason "slowness of British workers". Men who took up new work in Rotterdam find work there quicker because of sub-standard welding and dangerous working conditions.
- Tilling-Stevens, Maidstone, Chrysler subsidiary, closed. Total 600 jobs lost.
- Atlas Stone, Greenhithe, making paving stones. A quarter of plant to close.
- Courtaulds to close shift factories in Sheerness and Sittingbourne. 140 jobs.
- J.W. Greer, engineering firm, Sittingbourne, producing food-processing and paper and board machinery. To close on decision of Mitsubishi, Japan, the parent company.
- Sheerness. 1 in 10 adults are registered unemployed.
- Kent's register of "professional and executive unemployed" reaches 2000.
- Port of London Authority announces it now has 1250 dockers "surplus" to requirements. Expansion at Tilbury will absorb only some of this.
- Chatham Dockyards to "phase out" 400 jobs.
- Sheerness docks expanded to import Toyota cars. More employment, but obvious repercussions on British car industry. (Move to Bristol now likely.)
- IPM Gravesend. 800 men to go. Complete closure a possibility.
- Isle of Grain. Work on biggest power station construction site in Europe is brought to a standstill, ostensibly over the refusal of Babcock's to afford protective clothing for men working in glass fibre dust. 850 sacked, the rest locked out.

Of course, there are examples of expansion, but they are isolated and small in comparison. Often, expansion is either short-term, or forms part of a general pattern of rundown of British industry. The decline is absolute, recovery only relative. This is illustrated most clearly in the demise of the major industries central to the future of North Kent.

The destruction of industry

PAPER AND PRINTING

It is difficult to imagine a civilised society without a flourishing paper industry. Without it, goods could not be packed, administration would come to a standstill, science and education would cease. Ten years ago, the industry was full of potential. According to investment journals, "the outlook is good, and the increase in world demand will far outweigh competition from Scandinavia."

But since then, throughout the country, 50 mills have been closed down, hundreds of machines stopped, and 20,000 men thrown out of work, not to mention short-time working and three-day weeks. In 1964, UK monthly production of newsprint was running at 63,500 tonnes, with 57,000 tonnes being imported. In 1974, UK production was down to 31,800, with imports at 111,000 tonnes. Home production halved, imports doubled.

Paper making and its associated trades is the fundamental industry of our area. Within the half mile or so of the Northfleet 'pit' alone, there were several years ago two large newsprint mills, Imperial Paper Mill and Bowater Thames; one tissue mill, Bowater Scotts; and a large printworks, Fleetway.

Two years ago, Bowaters closed their Thames mill, offering their workers new jobs near Sittingbourne. Many did move, only to find themselves on short-time within months. (The mill they moved to, Kemsley, used to be the largest newsprint mill in Europe, until it closed its two largest machines in 1971, with a loss of between three and four hundred jobs.) Now it seems IPM is about to share the same fate.

Reed International

The employers claim that the mills are uncompetitive, that the market has collapsed, but this is blatantly false. If IPM is uncompetitive, this is due entirely to the owners starving it of investment over many years. What has happened to the profits made from workers there? They have gone towards developing the owners, Reed International, into the tenth largest company in Britain, and then towards gaining monopoly control of the paper industry over many parts of the globe. The Reed Group's subsidiary companies number hundreds - in Britain, IPC (periodicals and glossy magazines as produced at Fleetway) and the Daily Mirror, Crown wallpapers and paints, Polycell, Spicers, Kimberley-Clarks and others. Overseas, there are 71 companies in

Australia, 45 in Canada, 44 in South Africa and recently many inroads into the industry of the Common Market. This year, they paid out £25,000,000 for control of Nampak, South Africa's largest packaging firm, and £13,000,000 for the Dutch corrugated packaging manufacturer, De Hoop. The reasons for running down IPM were certainly not a shortage of cash.

Nor can it be claimed to be the result of market factors outside of the company's control, for most of these are directly or indirectly controlled by Reeds. Part of the story is the decision to move the Daily Mirror out of London. New facsimile transmission processes allow it to be set up in Fleet Street, transmitted to Portsmouth and printed there, with cheaper labour, and possibly on imported paper.

Bowater Scotts

A similar pattern is evident with Bowaters, Britain's fourteenth largest company, with a capital of £542,000,000. Here, the pattern of expansion has included buying up a whole series of merchant banking houses, under the name of Ralli, from Slater Walker, including their German holdings. In addition, the Iena merchant bank, one of the largest in Paris, was bought several months ago. Through these banks, capital is exported, or invested in less vital industries for short-term gains.

But despite this, attempts are made to convince us that there is financial crisis, that the pockets of British capitalists are empty! The most ridiculous example of this propaganda comes from Bowater Scotts, who last Christmas informed their workers that they couldn't afford the usual children's party, and then handed out two toilet rolls and a box of tissues as a Christmas present.

The "shortage of resources" myth

Another excuse frequently used is shortage of natural resources in Britain for the manufacture of paper, yet this is by no means the leading factor, except in that it shows up the inability of capitalism to plan for the future. For a start, the climate is not to blame. Suitable trees grow six times faster in Scotland than in Scandinavia. Expansion of the industry in Scandinavia is falsely put down to the availability of timber, since half of Swedish paper is now made from wood-free raw materials, and this quantity is due to double by 1982, while the wood-based paper making remains static.

46% of our paper is made from recycled paper; local councils used to supply this to the mills, which had recycling equipment, but two or three

years ago they were told it was no longer wanted. More could be used, and in fact waste-paper is actually exported in large quantities from the Northfleet wharves. When Bowater Thames closed, it was said that Scandinavian paper was available more cheaply in Northfleet from off the ships and juggernauts than from straight out of the factory gates. This only shows that our people have been prevented from using their abundant skills to develop a modern technology for our own benefit.

CEMENT

For decades, stretches of farmland from Stone to the Cuxton side of the Medway, and as far south as Sevenoaks, have been dug up, one after the other, by the British monopoly APCM. Acre upon acre has been bought up, torn up and then abandoned. No attempt has been made to restore the workings. So the landscape of our area is now scarred by sixty-nine unworked quarries. Even though sufficient chalk reserves exist within present pits to last out the century, APCM is bent on opening up new land. The Tunnel Cement and APCM works at Thurrock have been closed, although these nine hundred acres could supply Northfleet and Swanscombe works for twelve years through pipelines already built under the Thames. APCM's argument - it is less profitable to continue these works than to open up new areas.

The same criteria are used in all their operations. Short term measures maximise profitability whilst the pattern is of general rundown. Deliveries fell this year by 6.8% (to 4,900,000 tons) and exports dropped by 30.7%. APCM's profits however soared to £24,200,000. The firm's policy is one of 'stringent economies' as it reduces its British commitment, intensifying exploitation of both land and labour. Hence the closure of works in Bedfordshire, Wouldham and Kirton Lindsey, and the shutting of kilns with an annual capacity of seven million tons of cement locally. Consequently, five hundred workers are threatened with redundancy. Although local directors claim that the firm is 'hanging on by the skin of its teeth', the fact is that as British development diminishes, APCM is expanding its interests in Australia, New Zealand and South America.

ELECTRICITY

Electricity is the muscle-power of modern industry, and cutbacks here reflect the rundown of industrial production overall. In 1969-70, the Electricity Council had forecast that peak demand would reach 54,000 MW (megawatts) by the winter of 1975-76. In fact, only 41,000 MW were used, with many power stations virtually idle for weeks on end. Present capacity is about 44,000 MW; another 12,500 is under construction, commissioned in the last ten years and due to be completed for a planned demand of 56,500 MW by 1978-80. But the latest official forecasts expect a demand of only 45,000 MW by then. It is likely to be less, so even after the closure of out-of-date power stations, this still leaves most of the new capacity (due to the decreasing level of industrial production). As a result, throughout the area, at Littlebrook, Belvedere and the Isle of Grain the policy has been one of provoking disputes to halt construction. **Rundown on the cheap!**

Isle of Grain

On this site, where 3,500 men were employed in constructing five boilers, each several times as powerful as Battersea Power Station, the strategy of the rundown of our industry is especially clear. For the price of two dozen pairs of protective overalls for ladders involved with fibre glass, the Central Electricity Generating Board have effectively shut down a £387,000,000 project designed to be the largest power station in Europe. CEGB through their sub-contractors had engineered dispute after dispute to force workers outside the gate, and having provoked the strike they desired have sacked the workers, served legal injunctions forbidding re-entry onto the site and rid themselves of 850 construction workers (from Babcock & Wilcox) without losing a penny in redundancy money. Since then, a picket has been maintained under constant police surveillance, and in spite of written notices of dismissal, up till now (October 1976) the men have been refused unemployment benefit. Subsequently, men working for other contractors on the site have been laid off. The combined force of the State is organised against over 1500 men to delay construction of Britain's greatest new power station.

Power for the EEC

If and when at some point in the future, it suits the needs of capital to complete the £287,000,000 project, it is certain that there will not be the industry in Britain to make use of it. And so Dungeness B, Littlebrook D and the Grain power stations, between them amounting to half the new electrical power under construction in the whole of Britain, will be used to export cheap electricity from their convenient location on the Channel coast across underwater cable which the CEGB is construction to France. Thus billions of pounds of public money will have been used to provide cheap electricity for British capital's newly acquired factories in the Common Market, and Britain itself will be like a colony which exports raw materials to support industrial production elsewhere. There is no promise of future prosperity for our people in this strategy.

ELECTRONICS AND ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING

The fate of this industry in our area is almost entirely bound up with one company - GEC. The General Electric Company, worth £1000 million, is the largest private employer in the UK, and the third largest electrical corporation in Europe. It was set up between 1966 and 1968 through a series of mergers and takeovers from GEC, AEI, English Electric and Elliott Automation. The mergers were organised and sponsored financially by a Labour Government, guided by Wedgwood Benn, with the aim of 'rationalisation' of the whole industry, to help us "meet with international competition".

"Rationalisation" has meant, in practice, nothing other than closures. On average, the Company has made thirty people redundant in each day of its existence. One of its first acts in our region was to sack five thousand men at AEI Woolwich. And during this period of cutting its workforce by a quarter, the profits of the company doubled. And now, GEC have begun yet another programme of "rationalisation" of production, covering the South East from Lewisham to Gillingham, which under the guise of 'progress' will lead to many further redundancies.

But that is only part of the damage. If British Rail make a loss, this is due largely to the profits made by GEC, who supply them with 90% of their locomotives and other traction equipment. If electricity prices have soared, this is largely because GEC supply them with 70% of their grid

switchgear. If telephone and postal charges have gone up, then it is no coincidence that in January this year, news leaked out that GEC had joined with two other companies to form a price-fixing cartel. Far from "yielding substantial benefits to the national economy", the GEC mammoth has been guilty of crippling it.

The main involvement of GEC in North Kent is at Northfleet (AEI Cables and GEC-Henley) and Rochester and Chatham (Marconi-Elliott Avionics). Northfleet has traditionally supplied cables and sub-station equipment to the CEGB, with a portion for export. But, as shown in the previous section, the CEGB's policy of rundown has meant that AEI is now no longer primarily concerned with servicing the needs of British industry. Increasingly, all production is geared to export - servicing the expansion of industry abroad, wherever the profits are highest. Most of AEI's cable is shipped off to Dubai, Kuwait and the rest of the Gulf sheikhdoms. Over the past year, GEC-Henley's exports have risen from a quarter to over half their total orders. Thus GEC, after helping to bleed our national economy dry, is engaged in supplying the shiekhs.

In the case of electronics and electrical engineering, it is clear that apparent expansion in particular factories is a temporary phenomenon. Why? It would not be the first time that the setting up of parallel industries abroad had been the precursor of closures here. Only fifteen years ago, in Lancashire, engineering firms were thriving on the export of textile machinery to India and Egypt. A rundown of investment led rapidly to the closure of cotton mills, and soon those firms building the machinery were closed, replaced by new engineering plant overseas. The Northfleet factories will share the same fate, as soon as Britain's industrial base is secured in areas like the Persian Gulf, where labour is cheaper.

At Marconi-Elliott's, the advanced skills of 3000 workers specialising in digital and analogue electronics are being applied to producing missile-guiding gyroscopes, submarine detection equipment, and chiefly military avionic control devices. The 21st Century skills, producing miniaturised control networks which could be applied to automating our industry, are employed in supplying military technology to the rulers of the USA, NATO, South Africa and the Middle East as weapons of oppression.

Not only does GEC abuse such valuable skills for the present, but - beneath the lies of "shortage of money" and "shortage of orders" threatens

the survival of large sectors of this industry, by making many of its highly skilled workers redundant, thus undermining our future.

DECLINE OF THE MANUFACTURING BASE

What is happening in North Kent must not be seen in isolation, but as a part of the national picture. There are no local, unavoidable or natural reasons why our area has ceased to be prosperous. What has taken place merely highlights the systematic rundown taking place throughout Britain.

Ever since the War, British manufacturing industry has been in need of huge capital investment, a complete overhaul. But the owners of production were so intent on reaping vast profits, that this never occurred, and so industry remains largely ill-equipped and out of date. Figures from Britain's major industries illustrate this:

Steel :Production since 1970 has been cut by nearly a third - 8,191 tonnes. Britain now imports 4.5 million tonnes.

Textiles :Production has fallen rapidly. The number of spindles has fallen from 13 million to 6 million (1963-73). Imports have risen. Forty per cent of woven cloth and synthetic fibre used in Britain in 1970 was imported. By 1974, it was 57.3%

Coal :In 1955, 221 million tons were mined. Today - 126 million tons. Coal is now being imported at prices higher than those at our own pitheads, many of which are now standing idle.

Shipbuilding :Once, more than half the world's ships were launched in British yards. Now the figure is 3.6%

Export of Capital

Worse still, as we have seen locally, the flow of capital abroad is increasing to the further neglect of British industry. In one year alone (1972) more than £1,450 million left the country. Much of this capital nests in Europe, where British property firms have £12 billion of land holdings. In Portugal, Britain is the largest investor, with over 200 companies there. This is more than the 'natural' flow of capital between states, for capital moving from Europe to Britain is less than a fifth of that flooding out. Britain is the second biggest overseas investor, even holding six billion dollar investment in the USA.

At the same time, internal investment is on the decline. In 1970, investment in the private sector amounted to a mere 3½% of the Gross

National Product, yet by 1972 this had dropped further to $2\frac{1}{2}\%$. Since 1971, capital investment in Britain has decreased by a massive 53%.

The rundown is not from shortage of funds. It is clear that the British monopolies are abandoning Britain. Whilst we are asked to make more sacrifices in 'the national interest', their capital knows no nationality. It has stripped us of our assets and left us to decay. No short-term boards or commissions can disguise the fact that, throughout Britain, the foundations of industry are being torn up. Skilled trades are not being replaced.

The rundown of the public services

To shore up the gap left, the State has had to intervene: attempting to create more jobs, propping up lame ducks, becoming investor and purchaser, seeking to create the conditions whereby private industry will return to our shores. It has acted out of necessity and it has been a costly business, driving our nation deeper and deeper into debt. The State hands out our money to just those firms who have exported our wealth already, with no guarantee that more jobs will result, no guarantee that the profits accrued will stay in Britain. To acquire this capital, the Government attacks our Public Services, slashing provision in all sectors. The monopolies run down industry - the State runs down the public services to serve the monopolies.

Education

The rundown of education in Kent is rapidly gathering speed. Kent has always been among the least generous Education Authorities in the country. A recent survey shows that it has the worst pupil:teacher ratio in secondary schools, and is marginally above the bottom for primary schools. There are over four hundred classes in the county with more than 35 pupils.

But even the meagre standards have now been abandoned. The KCC budget for 1976-77 included cuts of over £600,000 on maintenance of school premises and the upkeep of grounds, and over £400,000 on furniture, stationery, and equipment.

It is claimed that school staffing standards have remained constant. In at least one local area, Gravesham, they are known to be falling. In this area there are already thirty-seven classes of over 35 pupils. Now the overall pupil:teacher ratio in primary schools is to worsen by one point, inevitably leading to more oversized classes. And this is happening at the very time when there are 20,000 unemployed teachers looking for jobs!

The school building programme has also been severely hit. Plans for thirteen new nursery units have been scrapped, along with six primary schools and a secondary school - all much needed improvements to our ageing school system.

Higher and further education is also being drastically reduced, particularly the colleges of education. Sittingbourne College, opened just six years, is to close. At Dartford College of Education, the intake of students has been cut from two hundred last year to forty this year. The government obviously feels that the solution to teacher unemployment, is not to employ more teachers, but to stop training them.

There is worse being planned. The Kent Education Committee has agreed to undertake "a detailed review" of expenditure with "a view to achieving economies" next year.

The Health Service

Within our own area three hospitals are at present scheduled for closure - the Livingstone and Mabledon Hospitals in Dartford, and the Memorial Hospital Sittingbourne. At the same time, the Darenth Park Hospital is being cut back and the number of acute case beds in Gravesend and Dartford is being reduced.

Meanwhile the reduction in places for the mentally ill and handicapped is said to be "avoiding institutionalisation". This would be fine, if sufficient money was spent on facilities for Community Care. In fact, many of the four hundred patients who have left Darenth Park have been pushed out into cramped and unsafe boarding houses, up to four to a room, with inadequate back-up services.

Even without closures, the health service in North West Kent is on the point of breakdown. In Medway, the Community Health Council stated that nearly every aspect of health care provision is still grossly deficient.

Take these examples:-

- There were 3,900 births in Medway last year, but only eighty-one maternity beds, all in old wards!
- Sittingbourne and Sheppey have just twenty-five maternity beds and thirty-five general beds between them, with no twenty-four hour casualty services.
- At Medway Hospitals there are waiting lists of forty weeks for orthopaedic treatment, thirty-five weeks for ear, nose and throat treatment, twenty-four weeks for gynaecology and up to thirty-five weeks for general surgery.
- At Gravesend and North Kent Hospital, trainee nurses were recently told there would be no jobs for them there on completion

- Because of the closure of accident departments, anyone who has an accident at night in Gravesend or Dartford has to travel thirteen miles to Gillingham - twenty miles to Woolwich!

Social Services

The Social Services face a rapid rundown in facilities, particularly in residential facilities for the old, young people at risk, and the disabled. In the recent KCC budget, it was decided to close three old people's homes and four Community Homes for young people in care. Here again, under the guise of progressive community care, much of the service is being dismantled. One new scheme - "Special Family Placement" (professional fostering of very disturbed children) - is claimed as a great success. No wonder, when each child costs £72 per week in residence, but about £45 per week with foster parents! Trained staff have lost their jobs and amateurs, without the rights of an employed person, have taken over!

Transport

In public transport, cuts and fare increases follow each other with remorseless logic. On the railways, the fares paid by commuters in this area increased by 80% over the past eighteen months with another 15% increase forecast for early 1977, a much greater increase than the general inflation rate. It has now been predicted that fares will rise by 7½% each year on top of inflation for the next five years, if the Government's plans to reduce subsidies are carried out.

Along with the fare increases go cuts in services. British Rail recently put forward a plan which involved Sunday closing for stations on the Southern Region, including Northfleet, Higham, Stone Crossing, Greenhithe, Swanscombe and Halling. This plan has probably been defeated following protests led by ASLEF, but there will still be reduced services - indeed three North Kent commuter trains have already been axed, and two more kept on only because of Union pressure. For the longer term, British Rail has also made a precautionary study involving the possibility of a hundred stations being shut down in the next five years.

On the buses too, cutbacks have become almost routine, especially in rural areas. Services from the Medway towns to Cliffe and from Gravesend to Cobham have recently been scrapped. The 701 Green Line service to London has been cut.

Even roads, long considered a first priority in spending, are now being cut. The KCC budget reduced maintenance by £250,000 and provision for improvements by £300,000. Among the problems this will cause are the complete abandonment of some minor roads in this area, and some major roads road schemes are being stopped, including the planned Northfleet Industrial Link Road.

Cuts in services will not help industry.

Everywhere we look, the welfare of the people is being sacrificed. It is officially claimed that these cuts are short-term, and necessary for our future prosperity. To believe that cuts are short-term is impossible once we recognise in particular the closure of teacher-training colleges and the 'pruning' of our railways: in the first case, the closure of two-thirds of the country's colleges (38,000 places in 1972, down to 12,000 by 1978) and in the second, the railway unions' estimate that British Rail plans to reduce track mileage from 11,000 to 4,000 miles.

And how can such wanton destruction help the industrial development of our country? Cutbacks will not solve the crisis in our manufacturing industry. It is not a choice of either/or. For the crisis of manufacture does not come from spending too much on essential social services - but from the export of capital, and the failure to invest. Since cuts entail unemployment, and unemployment means less money to spend, this will accentuate economic depression.

Indeed, the long term effect is far worse! For education, health, social services, transport, housing are no luxury; they are essential to an industrial nation. What industry can survive without a healthy labour force? What indeed is industry without an educated labour force? It is nothing! How can we regenerate industry by cutting back at its source - the skills of the people? We cannot afford to allow a de-skilling of our children to accentuate the present decline in industry. Our nation's future does not improve by producing an illiterate, unhealthy, homeless generation who will be unfit to work.

The wastage of skills

The result of this whole consistent rundown of our area is one of the chronic wastage of our capabilities.

In Britain, the backbone of industry, our major resource, is people - or more precisely, human skill. It was the skill of the British workforce that has made us the most advanced industrial nation. But the appalling fact about the rundown of our economy is that now, even human skill is allowed to rot unused.

Unemployment is the clearest example of such wastage. The numbers of unemployed are rising sharply throughout North Kent. The July 1976 figures showed that in Gravesend almost twice as many people were out of work than in 1975. In May 1976, over 1000 schoolleavers joined the Medway dole queue, out of 1337 known to have left school. Many have since drifted back, but by September 28% were still registered.

Human skill is wasted when qualified workers cannot find work, or where they have to take a job which does not make use of their particular abilities. Two glaring examples of this are construction and teaching. Who could say such skills are not precious to us - who could say we had enough houses or schools in North Kent? But now, in the context of the run-down, these skills are not profitable.

Our skills are wasted further when our schoolleavers are not trained. Throughout North Kent, firms are taking on fewer and fewer apprentices. Apprenticeships in papermaking and construction are also rapidly diminishing. Last year, there were only two motor mechanic apprenticeships in the whole of Medway. School leavers who would have qualified for engineering apprenticeships have had to accept semi-skilled training. Even those who decide to forego wages and take a College course are often no better off than before. And the new retraining courses amount in practice to turning an unemployed unskilled worker into an unemployed skilled one.

It is worth remembering that only two or three years ago, IPM, Gravesend virtually abolished apprenticeships, turning their apprentices into underpaid machine-hands working shifts. The prelude to shut-down.

Obviously it is not in our interests to allow jobs to disappear by redundancies, natural wastage, voluntary retirement, or transfers. Whatever the individual safeguards, these measures mean one less job for our children, one more nail in the coffin of the working class.

The abandonment of Britain

Why has this dramatic shift in our lives been brought about? The factors are many. We shall have to understand Britain's position in the world. We shall have to see British capital in relation to the changing pattern of economic and political control in Asia, Africa and South America, as well as Europe. In particular, we must see the rise of China, Albania, Vietnam and Cambodia, and the forces of socialism throughout other nations. The shrinkage of markets, the drying up of sources of raw material have played a part in making this situation so critical in Britain. Such international considerations, which show the absolute nature of the crisis of world capitalism, are of great significance. (See "Congress '76".)

But the crisis is more than economic. More than the inability of the ruling class to maximise its profits in Britain. To fully understand the abandonment of Britain, we should examine the main contradiction in our internal situation about which all else hinges: that between capital and labour.

For we find ourselves in a situation today where the ruling class can no longer rule as it used, and the working class won't lie down and accept to be ruled as it has been. The abandonment of Britain is now a strategy, not a series of coincidences. It has been brought about by political necessity.

It is a strategy brought about, not by the strength of capitalism as sometimes it appears, but through its inherent weakness. The situation is most critical in Britain, precisely because we, the people who built up this land, have always been proud enough, strong enough and organised enough not to be trampled down by the dictates of profiteers, landlords and userers. Our strength has forced the ruling class of Britain to admit that it can no longer control its labour force.

The attack on Trade Union organisation

Our unique Trade Union organisations, founded in conspiracy against the law, have proved more than a match for the world's oldest capitalist class. Flexible, ready and able to advance on one front when baulked on another, we have never given our employers a moment's peace.

In recent years, our Unions have defeated 'In Place of Strife' and the 'Industrial Relations Act', bringing down the governments that sought to shackle us. In our area, we have seen many Unionists acting against the imprisonment of dockers, the Pentonville Five; involved in backing up rent strikes; and demanding more and better facilities in our towns. Workers at Fleetway printers, AEI Cables, the Isle of Grain, ambulance-men and doctors have successfully waged economic struggles, and the battle for improved conditions has been constant.

As the crisis has intensified, so response to the rundown has grown. In February 1976, students and teachers marched on the Council Chambers in Maidstone to oppose cuts in educational expenditure. In March, white-collar Unions united in a lobby against cuts in public services. NUT members have thwarted attempts to shift teachers around from school to school, and are taking action to bring down class-size and stop teacher unemployment. Doctors at Livingstone Hospital, Dartford, have set up an action committee to fight the closure of their hospital. Groups have been formed to resist the idea of cheap 'phased care' for the mentally handicapped. ASLEF, NUR and Transport 2000 have held meetings throughout the area protesting against cuts in transport, and through industrial action, the rail unions have prevented several cuts in Southern Region. AUEW and UCATT, under the leadership of the joint shop-stewards committee, have violently opposed the employers' machinations at the Isle of Grain site. It is such past strength and growing resistance to rundown that capitalism must destroy if it is to survive.

Capitalism's fight for survival

It would be foolish to think that the monopoly-capitalists have relinquished all design for Britain's future. After years of minimal investment, after exporting capital throughout the globe, they have had to adopt the EEC as their new base. They look to the combined strength of a "United States of

Europe" to shield them from working-class revolt, they hope to cure their economic ills by centralised planning of production coordinated in Brussels. We know already what this multi-national planning involves: the destruction of our advanced agriculture, the organised waste of the "beef and butter mountains", the rise in food prices, the accelerated flight of capital, new taxation, and a European level of unemployment. We will suffer increasingly the effects of the limiting of production by the "quota system", the loss of national sovereignty, and the menace of European labour laws.

In destroying our national economy, they hope to transform Britain into a satellite state of the Common Market, supplying mainly oil, electricity, some raw materials, and a nomadic demoralised labour force. A successful transition to this would require our increasing poverty, increasing obedience, increased oppression. We would have to accept that whatever are the needs of this declining system, we should adhere to it - as if we could not otherwise survive. Even though it involve our own destruction as a people, we are asked to agree.

This is the import of the situation before us, the fundamental shift in our lives. Capitalism has adopted a policy of running down Britain because of working-class strength. To make their plans work, they have to build in Britain a state strong enough to break our strength - a state-controlled capitalism safeguarded by the laws and powers of corporate rule. They have to attack us from all sides, making enemies of us all. Capitalism attempts to impoverish our class by wage-fixing, whilst allowing prices to rise. To demoralise us by creating a huge pool of unemployed. To blackmail us into submission by destroying our currency through speculation, and then taxing us to the hilt to repay newer and bigger loans from the same speculators to shore up the pound. It seeks to break the whole quality of life we have fought for. To crush us by sowing divisions - skilled against unskilled, young against old, black against white. To destroy our organisations of self-defence.

Incorporating the Unions

The Trade Unions are our main defense. For this reason, the ruling class seeks to render them impotent, by incorporating them into the machinery of State, thereby taking them out of our control and turning them into a weapon against us.

Hence the Social Contract, an end to struggle, an end to collective-

bargaining, an attempt to end the sovereignty and effectiveness of our Unions. Conferences and committees must become rubber stamps, and the Unions' branches must be rendered powerless. We are to be governed by a clique of 'Labour politicians' and 'labour leaders'. Decisions are to be reached between the triumvirate of State, CBI and TUC. All dispute, all opposition is to be suppressed in the interests of preserving capitalism.

The Corporate State

Moving from the relative calm of a fading bourgeois democracy, the ruling class constructs around it the machinery of collaboration, developing increasingly to rule by one party. The convergence of policies of the major parliamentary groups reflects this. This awesome shift necessitates a curtailment of civil liberties and 'rights', and is supported by increasing powers of the State. The police force is expanded, their rights of arrest and search extended. Conspiracy laws are redrafted. Picketing and occupation become criminal acts. Anti-terrorist laws are used to break resistance and the Army is trained in 'civil warfare'.

Fascism in Britain?

Yet the establishment of a powerful corporate rule does not come inevitably! It is what capitalism must impose upon us if it is to survive - yet it can be otherwise. A Corporate State begins to take effect not with the stamp of the jackboot on the door, but only when we agree to accept such a force, when we succumb mentally, when we accept its growth as inevitable, when we give up our right to assert our interests in the face of such apparent strength.

The working-class of Britain loathes Fascism - yet appears to understand it little. Fascism is founded upon a corporate economy. It is more than racism and thugs. It is a policy of regulating state capitalism, whose rule has to repress more in order to control production.

And yet we have not as yet begun to reject the establishment of corporatism here. Why? Is it ignorance of the facts - or reluctance to accept them? The main stumbling block is within us!

The rundown of North Kent, of Britain as a whole, is political in essence, a reflection of a political crisis. That political crisis is reflected in our thinking. For we have created a situation which we have not yet consciously taken in. From the time we first organised resistance to capitalism, through the world's first Trade Unions, began the process of

capitalism's decline. By our constant struggles, we have brought about a qualitative change in Britain, whereby the capitalist class can no longer rule in its old way. But we have not developed a conscious response which is able to meet this new situation. The situation has changed, but we keep to 'the old faith'. It is as if we were sailors on a ship, who have made it impossible for the officers to run it as they used to, whilst making no move ourselves to take over the helm.

Why should this be so? Because we still adhere to a predominantly 'social-democratic' outlook. Social democracy sees everything as day to day, without interconnection, sees things partially and one-sidedly. It embraces gradual and relative ideas of change only.

The bankruptcy of the Labour Party

A prime example of this is our adherence, rapidly diminishing, to the Labour Party. How many times have we heard "If the Tories were in, there'd be millions marching in the streets". And yet we allow the whole weight of capitalism's counter-attack to be imposed by a 'labour' government, which claims to represent the interests of workers. Nothing could be further from the truth. Labour, Tory, Liberal and all other parliamentary parties are equally committed to the defense of capitalism. It couldn't be otherwise. They are the executives of the State. As we have seen locally, the State serves the monopolies. How could they also serve our interests, which are opposite?

Still we do not challenge the idea that we must stand by capitalism or we will starve. Indeed, we're told that 'only if we regenerate capitalism can we have socialism'. What nonsense!

The struggle of ideas

So long as we are willing to limit our choice of future to the Labour Party as the 'lesser of two evils', there will be no limit to corporatism. As long as a belief in reformism, gradual progress within capitalism, remains, then corporatism will succeed. And to wait for an upturn in the fortunes of capitalism to solve our problems is self-deception. Such an upturn will be at our expense, not for our benefit.

We must throw off the idea that change can only happen under capitalism. This economic system is not permanent. It did not always exist, and it has never been shakier than now!

There is crisis within us, within our class. A crisis not of lack of power, but of lack of understanding, a failure to adopt an ideology that could take us forward beyond the bounds of capitalism, to socialism.

The fight to seize our heritage

From Defence to Attack

There is no solution to the rundown within the bounds of capitalism. Every time we oppose 'cuts' or unemployment, we raise demands that capitalism cannot meet, we are in reality saying no to a future under capitalism. But breaking with capitalism must mean replacing it by an economic system that can meet our needs and aspirations - that serves us, that we control - the creation of a socialist state. With this must come the recognition that a socialist order in Britain. could never, and cannot now, evolve from capitalism. Capitalism will never willingly allow us to take control of our resources. It will not shuffle meekly off the stage of history. It will fight like a thing dispossessed to retain its power by every means at its command.

To claim our heritage means that, throughout Britain, we shall have to wrest control from those who engineer this decline. And to do so will mean taking on those who will defend such theft, such wastage - taking on the capitalist state itself.

This cannot be done without adopting an understanding of revolution. We can no longer see our efforts to stop this decline as purely defensive, as a response to a capitalist attack. This would confine our actions to still fighting within the system we can no longer afford. Once and for all we shall have to break with the philosophy of capitalism in our class - social democracy - and replace it with the philosophy of socialism. This is our true perspective, the distilled experience of workers the world over - Marxism-Leninism. We shall have need of such understanding, the most advanced political science of our era, if we are now to succeed.

There is no other way. No let out. No blinding light solution. Is it Fascism or Socialism? It is socialism. If it be socialism, we must direct all we do, our organisation, our tactics, our strategy, from now to revolution.

An End to Trade Unionism

We must start from within the trade union organisation, but recognise the awesome change taking place here. As the ruling class seeks to transform our unions into corporate negotiating committees, so we must see that for us too they have outlived their usefulness as defensive

organisations - they are in decline. We cannot simply preserve them as relics, but recognise that we will need more than they.

From this vast obsolescent machinery, we must claim the accumulated knowledge, experience and discipline of the people, as well as the material assets stored. We must use the branches of our Unions as a base, a centre of organisation and communication from which to marshal our forces. From here we must fight every twist and turn manoeuvred against us - not as isolated battles, but as the opening shots in a protracted offensive whose ultimate is the securing of control of our nation directly for the working class. From within the unions too, those real leaders will emerge, who have the clarity to lead such an offensive, to break with the sufferance of custom, who will not accept a diet of the fruits of decline, who grasp increasingly the tactics of revolution.

Tactics

Already, such genuine leaders are emerging in our area. We have skilled tacticians capable of turning any situation to advantage. Great flexibility and ingenuity has been demonstrated in recent struggles. Printers at Northfleet responded to suspensions by taking over the works, locking out their employers for weeks, and conducting their occupation with the precision of a military campaign. Student teachers at Dartford took over their college in their fight for employment, and from there, mobilised support from parents and teachers within the local schools. At the Isle of Grain, the oil refinery was shut in response to attacks on the power station site, and other power stations were brought into the fight by flying pickets. Junior doctors have employed overtime bans to fight attacks on the health service. At AEI, white-collar workers prevented the removal of cable from the shop-floor - always the guerrilla principle of pitting strength against weakness has been triumphant.

We must learn to adapt to the particular situation and develop tactics that recognise the qualitative change in our struggle. We can no longer simply employ the old ways, the old tactics once successful at an earlier stage. For old tactics can be turned against us. An all-out strike is no longer the best course of action if an employer intends closure. It merely leads to redundancies, and control of that industry for us is lost. Tactics must be more flexible than ever. Always thought must be primary.

Not all struggle is good. We must seize every opportunity for tactical

victory, but every struggle must bring us nearer, both in thought and in deed, to the point where we can achieve our strategic goal.

Our class response

Despite the gravity of our situation, the groundswell of resistance in our area has begun. Everywhere there is attack; everywhere they seek to divide us. Yet everywhere, there are the signs of response from our class, beginning to forge a new unity. A recent conference in Canterbury involving Trade Unionists from all over Kent rejected the Social Contract and called for a County-wide organisation of Trade Unions to mount opposition to cuts and unemployment. Demonstrations have been called throughout the month of November to reject the rundown.

Policies of "natural wastage", transfer and early retirement are increasingly being recognised for what they are - one job less for our children's future! The idea of a fixed number of jobs is being rejected - employed workers are beginning to force more jobs from their employers to help the unemployed. Such actions destroy the plans of the destroyers, and unite our class more firmly through deeds rather than words.

In all sectors, measures like the "Job Creation Scheme" of the Manpower Commission whereby we pay employers to employ us must be exposed as part of the growth of Corporatism, rather than any philanthropy to the unemployed. We demand the right to do useful work for the good of our people, at decent rates of pay. Not the insult of "job creation". And in the public services, we should not only reject the cuts, but demand more, not less! We must preserve the quality of provision for a socialist Britain.

Increasingly, we will have to broaden our response, recognising the attack on the factory down the road as an attack on our own. So with the services, these are our collective responsibility. We must mobilise throughout our area in active defense.

Events will move fast, and we must be the masters of change. We must know our area, our people, the laws that govern the changes wrought upon us. Our actions must be based increasingly upon the study of scientific socialism, and our organisation must be coordinated by a truly revolutionary party.

Leadership and the Party

In the face of capitalism's attack upon our country, we must bring together the energies of all those who will not succumb to the designs of capitalism in decline. In effect, we must build not just a defence-force, but a

conscious revolutionary army throughout Britain. Only thus can we claim to be fulfilling our task of asserting the interests of our class. Only thus can we ever achieve total control over our resources for our people.

The question of leadership now lies with us. Our organisation must be founded upon a party of our own, that we, the working-class, directly control. A party built from the finest amongst us - the skilled leaders in all industries - uniting the forces from each sphere of our labour into one common direction.

Whatever our trade or profession, our needs and aspirations reach beyond capitalism. The direction of society must be wrested from Capital. And we, the working-class, led by our Party, the Communist Party of Britain, must direct our lives to this end.

The situation is fraught with danger. We will be hounded and harassed by those who espouse the corporate line. But the decay, the decline and decadence of capitalism cannot withstand the force of the inheritors, the guardians of all progress - us, our class.

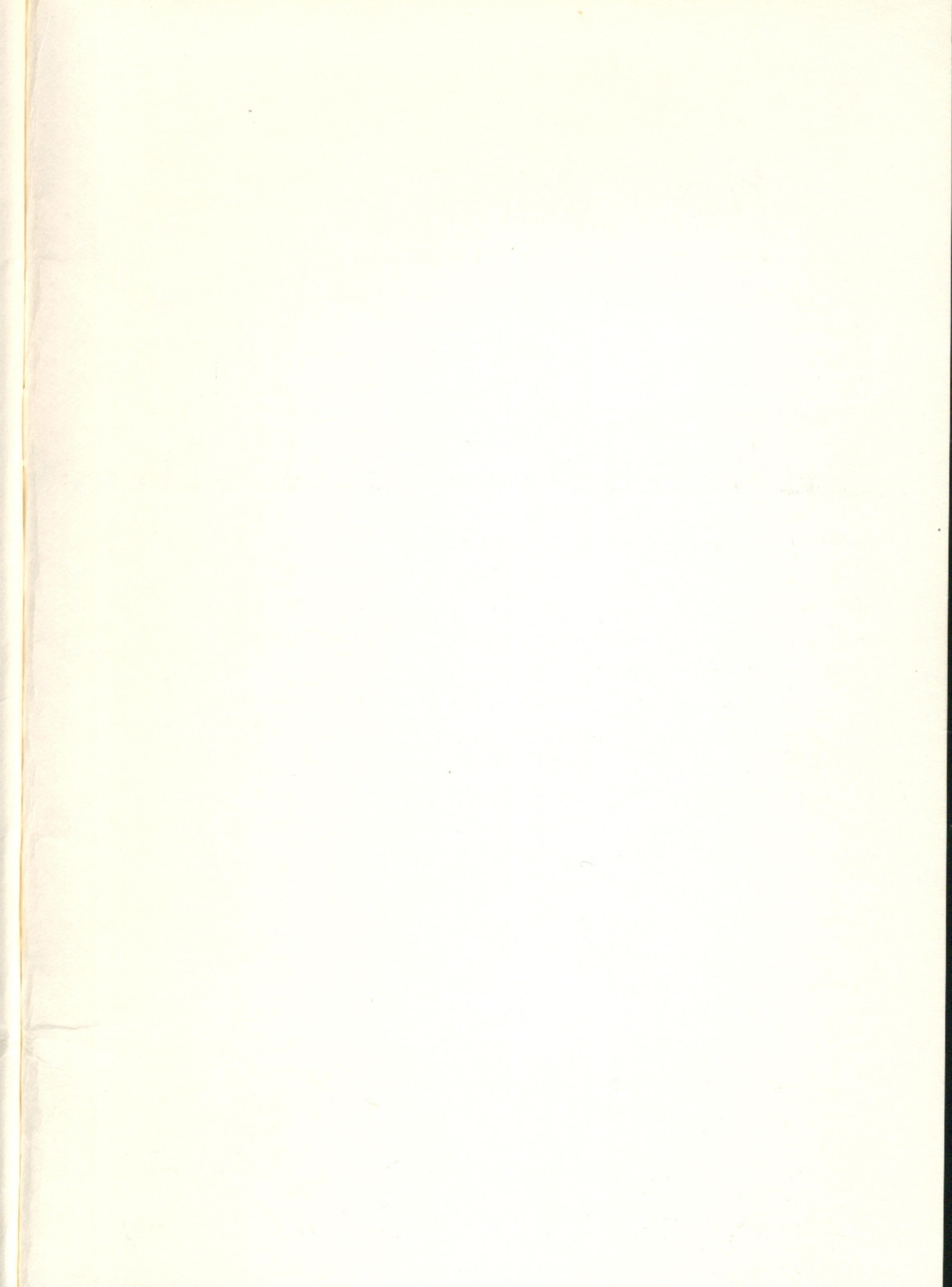
The future in our hands

Wherever we stand in North Kent, all that we see, all nature that is harnessed to the needs of man, all that is industry, the towns, the buildings - all activity they house - has been created by the skills and ingenuity of the workers of this area, by our labour. All wealth now created is created by us. This - all the vast resources, material and human, - is our heritage. What can we not achieve? Our resources, our services and skills, organised in the interests of the people, not profit, will build a great and glorious future for this Britain of ours.

The lessons of the Socialist order, in China and Albania, shine before us. Throughout the world, the working class and peasantry are rising.

The old order has nothing further to offer, its possibilities are totally exhausted, the new world beckons.

We have one clear task - to strike down this corrupt and immoral system that destroys our land and people, and to establish, here in Britain, the first State of the Working Class to be founded in an advanced industrialised nation. Workers of North Kent, workers of Britain, the future is in our hands. The time is now. Under the leadership of the Communist Party of Britain(M-L), let us stop the rundown! Let us seize our heritage!



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