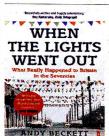# Non-fiction

When the Lights Went Out: What Really Happened to Britain in the Seventies, by Andy Beckett (Faber, £9.99)

Stagflation, pay policies, government bail-outs, nationalised banks, fears about terrorism and the state of the environment . . . it's back to the future for 21st-century Britain: "A very 70s unease has seeped back into how we see the world." The era of flying pickets, blackouts and punk rock was a time when the state seemed to teeter on the brink of collapse. "England is already a thing in a museum, a dying animal in a zoo," wrote John Fowles in 1977. Beckett's excellent political history of a decade that both the left and right would prefer to forget provides a timely reassessment of the period and some revealing insights into the key players. Jack Jones admits to Beckett that he found Harold Wilson to be "a cold, cold man, very cold". Teddy Goldsmith, founder in 1970 of the "tirelessly apocalyptic" Ecologist, predicts humankind will "probably disappear in the next 50 years". But as Beckett emphasises, this messy, complicated decade was not all doom and gloom. As Marsha Rowe (who co-founded Spare Rib in 1972) says: "We just thought that we were making our own world".
PD Smith