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The Production of Industrial Strategy

by Robin Murray

Institute of Development Studies
University of Sussex
Brighton, BN1 9RE, England

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In this paper I want to discuss two contrasting experiences of producing regional industrial strategies with which I have been involved over the past few years. The first was with the Greater London Council, the second with a group of eight district authorities in the South East of England. In each case, the concern of the public authorities was to reverse a process of de-industrialisation, and expand employment. The interest in the comparison lies in the contrasting size and powers of the public authorities in each case, in the varied industrial histories, and in the differing political circumstances in each of the regions. I will deal with them in turn.

The Greater London Council

The GLC was set up as a strategic regional authority covering the Greater London area in 1965. It undertook some service delivery - in waste disposal, public transport, fire services, housing, in the arts, and in the management of parks and other facilities, but by and large the main municipal services were undertaken by the 32 London boroughs, and by the Inner London Education Authority. The GLC's focus was intended to be strategic.

In 1981, a new Labour administration was elected with a programme of expanding strategy and service delivery into new fields, notably industry and employment. This had traditionally not been a local government function, beyond limited policies designed to attract footloose industry, and to provide property information and a limited level of advice to small firms. However, London had been severely hit by the decline in manufacturing industry. Between 1961 and 1981 manufacturing employment fell from 1.43 million to 0.66 million. In the early 1980s the process speeded up. In 1979 there were 150 factories with more than 500 workers; by 1982 there were only 75. At the same time unemployment rose, from 132,000 in 1979 to 390,000 in September 1982.

Labour's 150 page election programme, devoted half of its space to industrial and employment policy. It proposed to set up a new economic strategy unit within the GLC, and a new investment institution, the Greater London Enterprise Board, to put the strategy

into practise. There was thus to be a clear distinction between policy and implementation.

It took 9 months to set up the Economic Policy Group, principally because of resistance by existing departments to an independent unit staffed by new recruits. The EPG was to report directly to the Director General of the GLC, and its unit head to have a place on the GLC's executive board. The original EPG had five people, out of a total GLC staff of 25,000.

Within three months it became clear that the EPG could not remain purely a strategy unit. First, the programme of grant aid to employment related voluntary organisations (part of the GLC's policy of decentralisation), ran into difficulties because the career officials administering the scheme had no direct experience of this part of the voluntary sector. Attempts by the EPG to work with voluntary groups in respect to strategy were frustrated by the fact that these groups were either being refused funds by another section of the GLC, or had received no replies to their applications. The grant programme (which by 1986 covered 200 organisations and involved funding of £5 million) was therefore transferred to the EPG.

Secondly, a senior career civil servant responsible for the establishment of the Enterprise Board, and the administration of other parts of employment policy was judged by the political administration to be promoting alternative policies to those contained in their Manifesto. The differences centred on the role of property led development, the extent of direct intervention by the Enterprise Board, and the extent to which the Enterprise Board should concentrate on small firms. In each case the Policy Group had produced papers suggesting one policy, while the administrative arm was following an alternative one. The crisis came to a head over the terms of a reference and structure of finance of the Enterprise Board. It was resolved by transforming the EPG into a Directorate, responsible both for strategy and implementation, including the establishment of the Enterprise Board.

The structure of the Industry and Employment branch as it emerged over the following 12 months (to mid 1983) is shown in Figure 1. The

segments in the lower half of the diagram were primarily concerned with policy, the upper half with implementation. The Greater London Manpower Board (later Training Board) funded training projects; the project development unit dealt with the employment grants programme; there was a unit concerned with harnessing the pension funds of the GLC and other public authorities in London for industrial investment purposes, particularly through GLEB; there was an innovatory Contract Compliance Unit established to use GLC's purchasing power (of £3 billion p.a.) to improve equal opportunities in the supplying firms; there was a large capital programme, mainly of advanced factory units; and there was an Inner City Unit which co-ordinated programmes of Government grants for economic and social purposes on a London wide basis.

Yet even within this structure the policy/implementation distinction became blurred. The Manpower Board found they had to develop policies on training. The project development unit produced a set of policy documents in order to provide the criteria for priorities on their grants programme. The Pensions Unit produced a London Financial Strategy to explain their approach to the Pension Funds. At the same time the policy units quickly found themselves proposing projects which they themselves had to take the initiative to implement. The health strategy led to number of health projects, the area unit started local area offices, the food unit started the London Food Commission and so on.

Part of the reason was that with the nature of specialisation in growing branch, there was no other body to carry through the projects proposed as part of a strategy. Those who had developed the strategy had the knowledge of the field and the commitment to be effective in carrying forward the proposals.

But perhaps most important was the fact that each of the strategies was developed with groups in the areas and industries concerned. This was explicitly the case with the popular planning unit, which was started in order to work with groups of trade unionists, residents, users, and domestic producers, in the production of strategy. The work on retailing was done from this unit, as was parts of the food industry, London Transport, public construction,

motor assembly, childcare, telecommunications and the regeneration of the Docklands area. It used variety of means to broaden involvement in strategic planning: public enquiries; day workshops; public hearings; local planning offices staffed by residents involved in community groups; paid time off work; sector newspapers, as well as a general industrial newspaper which by 1986 had a circulation of 100,000.

But such 'popular planning' was not confined to the Popular Planning Unit. The team that produced a number of major strategy documents on cable, held a series of public hearings and conferences in different parts of London, and produced a special newspaper; there were a succession of large conferences on what came to be called the cultural industries (cinema, TV, video, music, publishing, the theatre). The work on the photographic industry led to the formation of a Europe wide standing conference of trade unions working in Kodak, with representation from 20 plants.

In each of these cases, the fact of developing strategy in this broadly based way, meant that the mechanisms set up to develop strategy often became the means of implementing it. The GLC officers were necessarily involved in both parts of it; working groups had often got going on strategy because they felt there was a promise of practical results at the end of it, and the GLC strategy workers could then hardly pull out and hand over once the strategy had been completed. Nor, of course, did they want to. For this reason the strategy/implementation distinction did not make sense: there was an interplay between them as the sector projects developed.

Many of the sectors I have mentioned were not in GLEB's sphere of operations. Many were in the public sector - like energy, and health, or television. Others were subject to the most effective influence through other parts of the GLC. This was true of road freight, of the range of cultural industries (through the GLC arts policy), of public sector construction departments, as well as London Transport itself (which employed 57,000 people). In the case of large branch plants of multinationals, GLEB was too small to intervene effectively, and the most effective form of action was found to be through an early warning unit, set up to identify

closures as early as possible, coupled with political pressure, and support for trade unions in the plants concerned. These means of influencing employment had not been envisaged in the administration's original Manifesto, which had concentrated its focus on GLEB.

GLEB itself was most effective with medium sized firms - with between say 25 and 200 workers, in industries ranging from traditional industries like clothing, furniture, footwear, food processing, foundries, and printing and publishing, to newer ones such as computers, and electronic engineering. Here again the problems of divorcing strategy and implementation led to a change of plan. Early on we found that it was difficult for those in the industrial units at the GLC to develop strategy at a detailed enough level to be of use to the investment staff in the Enterprise Board. GLEB itself required strategy, and began to develop its own alongside the work being done at the GLC. It was decided therefore to move the Industry Unit at the GLC down to work in GLEB, alongside the investment staff. Once there, staff who had been employed as strategy researchers, soon found themselves involved in the investment projects, and requiring training in order to be able to do so. Industrial strategy took a major step forward as a result, not least because the experience of these sectors suggested a number of trends which were found to be common to a range of industries, pointing to quite new strategic paths.

In the same way the technology unit was shifted from the GLC to GLEB, since the Technology Networks which had been set up generated a number of investment projects for which GLEB rather than the GLC was the most appropriate unit.

The first major lesson from the GLC experience, therefore, is the need to link strategy formulation and implementation. It need not necessarily be in the same individual, but those working on strategy need to be near the industrial front line, and with people directly involved in the industry. A Development Bank (or Enterprise Board) is one of the best such places for the relevant market industries.

Yet developing industrial strategy within a development bank has its own problems from the viewpoint of public policy. The GLC saw the

issue of industrial policy in terms of restructuring, but a restructuring which could be undertaken in a number of alternative ways all consistent with competitiveness. In particular, we came to see a clear choice between a strategy which attempted to extend and make more efficient a mass production model (through rationalisation, amalgamation, cutting back on wages, linking up as sub contractors to large mass production retailers or assemblers) and one which aimed at a policy of flexible upgrading. The latter required greater resources for training, multi skilling, investment in design and quality control, and a capacity to react rapidly to changes in market demand. In clothing for example, we found low wage London factories being heavily out competed by unionised, well paid, and skilled labour in factories in the North - factories which had modern machinery, and were part of an enterprise system which used computers to integrate design, cutting, assembly, warehousing and sale. Given these alternative paths, the GLC's policy was to promote those which ensured good quality working conditions and wages, which invested in skill, promoted equality issues within its labour force, and produced quality, and useful products. These factors were often referred to as social in contrast to the economic, but it was a principal theme of the GLC's work that the economic (by which was meant market viability) was necessarily linked to the social (the pattern of industrial relations for example) and was compatible with alternative forms of the social. Any investment project had an economic and a social component: the question was what kind of social arrangements you followed.

There were strong pressures in the Enterprise Board to restructure in traditional ways. This was in part because they were required to ensure the commercial viability of their investments; this was in any case difficult when investments were in industries which were collapsing because of the effects of national exchange rate policies and quality competition from abroad. Many of the projects coming to GLEB had suffered from long periods of under investment, and poor management. Issues such as training, enterprise planning, and equalities within the workforce were often considered secondary in investments of this kind. Furthermore, the staff of the Board were largely drawn from the commercial field, and while some understood the GLC's policy, many did not, and saw the 'social' aspects of the

broader policy as contradicting - if not undermining - the commercial ends. Officers were appointed in GLEB to further the so-called social goals. There were specialists in these fields on the GLEB Board. But overall, the magnetic pull of the short term balance sheet tended to swamp the broader and longer run considerations, and affected strategy as well.

None of the above argues against locating industrial strategy units within the development bank or enterprise board. It only highlights certain inevitable tensions between the commercial and the social. To minimise these tensions it would help to have distinct funds for some of the so-called social investments. It would help to have more extensive internal training programmes - of the strategic planners on the one hand, and the investment managers on the other. There is also the need to avoid the more general danger of under-capitalisation, which can so often lead to cash flow problems dominating everything else in the early stage of a project.

A further issue which was gradually clarified both in the GLC and GLEB was the argument between generic and sector strategy. By generic I mean strategies which are concerned with the size of firm, with technology, with area development, with property or the broader matters of manufacturing versus services. These generic issues had been at the forefront of the debate on industrial strategy at the national and regional level. There were national policies favouring small firms, investment in new technology, or new industrial property, and in services rather than manufacturing. Others argued the contrary - that manufacturing and larger firms should have priority, save where the small firms aided the employment of disadvantaged groups.

In contrast there was a view that industrial strategy should be based on sectors. This was the way in which the industrial economy was by and large organised, and both development banking, and more general public support would be more effective if it ran with the industrial grain. The more detailed arguments in favour of a sector approach are presented in an accompanying note. What is important here is to register that the I & E Branch gave a priority in its structure to

sector strategy, and that GLEB itself had a sector strategy unit as on its principal divisions.

Yet it ran alongside divisions and units concerned with generic issues. In GLEB for example there was a co-operative unit, a property division, a technology division, an investment division, while there were strong pressures to establish a Black Business unit and a Black Bank. Similarly the Industry and Employment Branch had an areas unit, a training board, and a labour unit which were not organised sectorally. The labour unit for example dealt with issues of pay, health and safety, local labour markets, and equalities rather than with labour issues in any one sector.

In both the IEB and GLEB the formal structure was that of a matrix organisation, so that sector strategies fed into the generic issues, and vice versa. This worked relatively well in the IEB. Thus the area strategies developed for East and West London were centred on particular sectors, and the promotion of industrial districts. The Training Board considered training needs in specific sectors. But in each case this was primarily because those in the units were themselves following a sector strategy approach rather than the fact that project teams were working effectively according to the model matrix formula. The same was true of GLEB.

The lack of a sector strategic focus was least serious in the field of technology investment. Here the operation of networks led to the identification of projects where the people involved rather than the sectors themselves were the key issues affecting the success of the ventures. But in other areas the lack of integration was more damaging. For the investment division there was a danger of responding to project requests rather than initiating an investment strategy based on sector specific expertise. This was particularly true of small firms, and black businesses, where both the applicants for funds and the investment managers might know little about the contours of the sector, nor could they develop links between enterprises which would strengthen the small firm units in the sector.

My overall view is that sector strategy should inform all other aspects of policy, since questions of firm size, technology, property and so on will involve different answers according to the sector. In the cultural industries for example, the sector strategy identified weaknesses in distribution: relatively small investments in record distribution for example, or in video, would help producers more than further investment in production. This went against the more general GLEB policy of investing in medium sized firms in the manufacturing sector, and required a modification in the investment guidelines under which GLEB operated. Again and again we found that the initial policy emphasis on manufacturing investment was misplaced in as much as the control in the industry had passed to retailers, and that increasing competition in retail was the most valuable contribution that could be made to manufacturing in any one sector. More generally, within the GLC we found that the sectoral approach allowed links to be made between different parts of the regional authority around a common policy. The food sector, for example, can be influenced through public purchasing, catering, planning and property policy, the environmental health officer in the Boroughs, as well as public training and educational programmes run by the Inner London Education Authority.

I have already mentioned a variety of ways in which the GLC sought to involve those connected with any industry - whether as workers, managers or users - in the strategic planning of that industry. The principle reason for this was a democratic one. It was a theme of the Labour administration's manifesto, and was a response to the public industrial restructuring in the 1960s and 1970s which had often been experienced by those working in the industries affected as no different to that practised by private employers. But the practise of wider involvement in the planning process yielded benefits additional to the democratic ones. First the plans were given much greater detail than was normally the case for public sector strategic planning. Secondly, by involving a wide range of interests they were able to present alternative paths of restructuring to those generated solely by commercial criteria. Third, they provided managers, trade unions, user groups, and public authorities with strategic capacity support which they otherwise lacked. This was notably the case with the unions, whose resources

did not allow sustained strategic planning. But it was true also of industrialists. The London furniture industry for example was so hardpressed by the competition of the 1980s that they had had no time for strategic thinking, and regularly approached the GLEB furniture strategist for policy advice. Fourth, participative planning speeds up the process of implementation. This is a point emphasised by the Japanese. We found it to be equally true in a regional context, where a range of agencies would be involved in the implementation of any strategy.

What such a process did require, however, was time and resources. Local authorities, trade unions and smaller firms have tended to minimise the resources devoted to strategic planning, let alone to its wider discussion. The GLC's experience showed the benefits that can be yielded from 'popular planning'. Many of the policies that came out of this process have come to have a significant influence on national policy: in the cultural industries, in food, in energy, in health, in public transport, and in the process of industrial planning. In the industrial sectors, they informed both industrialists and GLEB in their investment decisions.

The units that produced them contained by 1986 some 80 people involved in strategic planning, much larger than any other regional or local authority, but no more than the size of an investment analysts department in one of the larger stockbrokers in the city. Indeed one of the results of the GLC's work was to realise how small was the public sector strategic capacity relative to the private sector, with an estimated 375,000 people working in London on some aspect of design, planning, and strategy for the private sector, with a further 800,000 support staff.

In 1986 the GLC and 6 other metropolitan authorities in the UK were abolished by the Government. Some functions were centralised to Whitehall, some were passed to public bodies, some to the boroughs, and others were dropped altogether. The boroughs attempted to continue the work of strategic planning for two further years, but they simultaneously faced a severe cut in their funds, and the successor unit was disbanded in March 1988. GLEB and the other

regional enterprise Boards remained however, their funds and their capacity for innovation restricted, but their structures in tact.

SEEDS

Outside London, the rest of the South East region had shown the strongest growth in Britain, centred on the defence industry, business services, distribution, and production geared to the European market. During the 1980s the South East has become one of the hubs of European growth. Nevertheless there are parts of it which have suffered in ways similar to London. De-industrialisation hit a number of industrial towns to the North of London, and contributed also to the decline of the East Thames corridor and the coastal region (see Table 1 and Figure 2). In December 1986 there were 356,000 people on the unemployment register in the region (395,000 on the 1982 basis of registration, with more than one quarter of parliamentary constituencies having over 10% unemployment, eight of them with rates over 15%, see Figure 3).

In April 1986 three new towns set up an organisation to produce a regional economic plan which would address the economic problems which they faced. The organisation known as the South East Economic Development Strategy Association of local authorities soon added a further five members (see Figure 4). Its aim was to produce a forty sector plan over 4 years, each part of which would indicate policies to be followed locally, regionally and nationally, and which taken together would provide a basis for each towns local employment strategies, (see Figure 5).

The sectoral approach was similar to that followed at the GLC, as was the general perspective of outlining alternative ways in which restructuring could take place. What was different was that the organisation was run by eight separate small towns (with a total population of just under one million) each with limited resources. The initial subscription was £10,000, giving a total budget of £80,000. With this a central office was set up in Stevenage, with a co-ordinator, a researcher, and one support staff, accounting for 50% of the budget. The other part of the budget was allocated to consultants, working on sector studies within a time budget of 40-50 days.

To date nine studies have been produced (on Energy, Heat Planning, Bus Transport, water and sewerage, the cultural industries, British Rail, retailing, land privatisation, the defence industries,) together with a number of working papers, and a further seven are due for completion by November 1988 (on airports, the Channel Tunnel, development pressures, women's employment, tourism, new technology, and direct labour organisations).

The first thing to note about the programme so far is that the studies are primarily focussed on public sector industries. This is because it has been necessary to show that the work has immediate policy relevance for the participating councils, both for officers and members. Since the towns lack resources or an enterprise Board, their scope for intervening in the market economy is limited, and this is reflected in their work priorities.

Secondly, in order to be relevant, each study contains case studies of the member towns. But the budget necessarily restricts the time available for such work. In some cases, therefore, a working group of officers has been established and works with the advice of the consultant (in women's employment for example). In others the form has been a working conference (as with direct labour organisations, and technology). In the case of energy planning, a model for conservation investment was run for two towns, Harlow and Brighton, for others to follow if they so wished. What is striking, however, is that even on so small a time budget, many of the studies have had a substantial impact (particularly where they have cut across traditional council divisions of responsibility like energy). They, too, have fed into national debates (retailing, and the cultural industries) and have been notable as the only work on the sectors at a regional level.

Thirdly, however, the budget has meant that they have had limited input from those involved in the industry. In some cases there have been public meetings in the towns concerned. But the fact that most of the towns have only one or two officers devoted to economic development limits the scope for organising such work on a systematic basis.

The next stage of the work is therefore to gear up the SEEDS resources with other sources of finance - to allow fuller local studies, and a greater degree of popular planning. The research model of a small core staff supported by a network of sector specialists will continue, with the market sectors approached through a team of consultants working in each town and at the regional level over a period of two months.

Conclusion

Within many market sectors it is strategy which has become central for enterprise survival. It is even more necessary for development banks, and public policy more generally. In local and national government there is limited strategic capacity, and what there is is too often organised in such a way as to separate it from the experience and priorities of those working in the industry, and using its products.

In this paper I have talked about the production rather than the substance of strategy. This is because work on strategy is a production process, requiring skills, resources and forms of organisation which encourage creativity. Too often so called strategic units are separated off from the industries with which they are concerned, and are part of traditional bureaucratic structures quite unsuitable for innovative research. If industrial policy is to be effective, then the first requirement is popular strategic planning. This requires new structures, and skills, and will be built up on the basis of the successes and failures of the many local and regional bodies now working in this field.

FIGURE 1

STRUCTURE OF THE INDUSTRY AND
EMPLOYMENT BRANCH

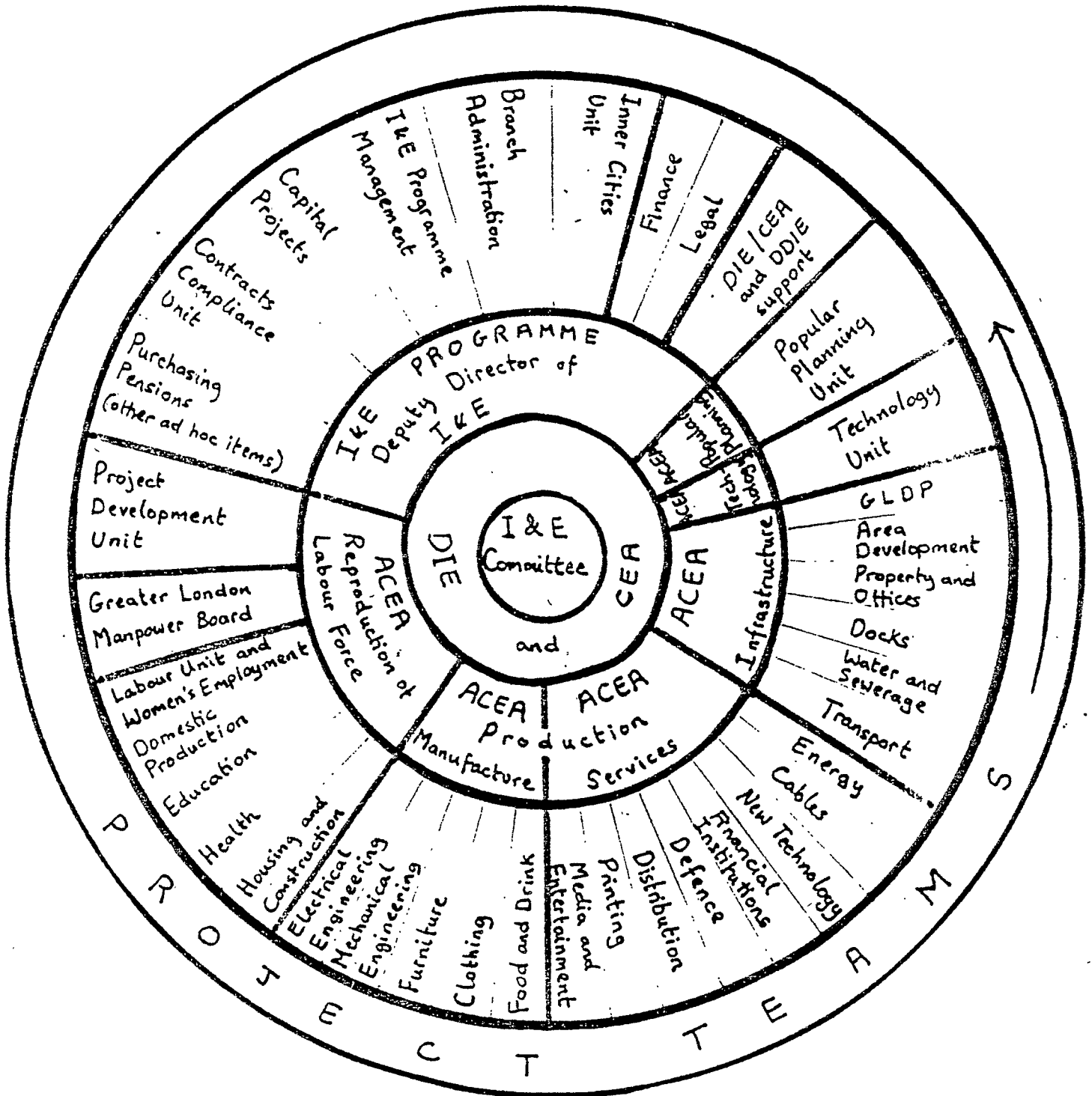


TABLE 1

Change in employees in employment 1971 to 1981 and forecast change in employment 1980 to 1990 (Thousands)

1968 SIC	1971 -1981		1980 - 1990	
	London	ROSE	London	ROSE
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	+1.5	-18.2	0.0	-16.6
Mining & quarrying	+2.8	-0.1	+0.4	+0.3
Food, drinks & tobacco	-39.3	-6.7	-29.9	-6.0
Coal & petroleum products	+0.4	-1.5	-2.1	-2.0
Chemicals & allied industries	-17.4	-1.7	-27.7	+9.9
Metal manufacture	-12.4	-5.4	-5.1	-3.1
Mechanical engineering	-30.3	-31.4	-23.4	-28.4
Instrument engineering	-16.5	-3.2	-8.5	-8.1
Electrical engineering	-59.7	+19.3	-12.4	-3.3
Shipbuilding & marine engineering	-3.8	-11.5	-1.0	+1.6
Vehicles	-16.2	-34.7	-3.7	-17.2
Metal goods n.e.s.	-31.3	-7.2	-29.1	-4.6
Textiles	-3.5	-4.1	-3.6	-4.1
Leather, leather goods, fur, clothing & footwear	-48.3	-10.4	-17.0	-5.3
Bricks, pottery, glass etc	-9.2	+11.5	-3.6	-11.2
Timber, furniture, etc.	-19.6	-7.1	-17.8	+0.3
Paper, printing & publishing	-43.8	-12.4	-19.4	-2.5
Other manufacturing	-27.9	-12.0	-10.8	-24.0
Construction	-33.1	+14.3	-31.9	+15.1
Gas, electricity & water	-19.7	+0.4	-23.0	+1.9
Transport & communication	-65.9	+25.4	-73.2	+15.6
Distributive trades	-54.1	+91.2	-89.8	+48.2
Insurance, banking, finance, etc.	+49.6	+84.9	+18.2	+69.1
Professional & scientific services	+93.0	+176.4	+1.2	-48.6
Miscellaneous services	+43.3	+129.7	-47.2	+152.2
Public administration & defence	-52.6	-39.8	+36.0	-37.9
TOTAL	-414.0	+345.7	-424.4	+91.3

Source: 1971-1981 from Annual Census of Employment
1980-1990 from Warwick University

FIGURE 2

CHANGES IN EMPLOYEES IN EMPLOYMENT BY SECTOR (THOUSANDS), 1981-84 ROSE:

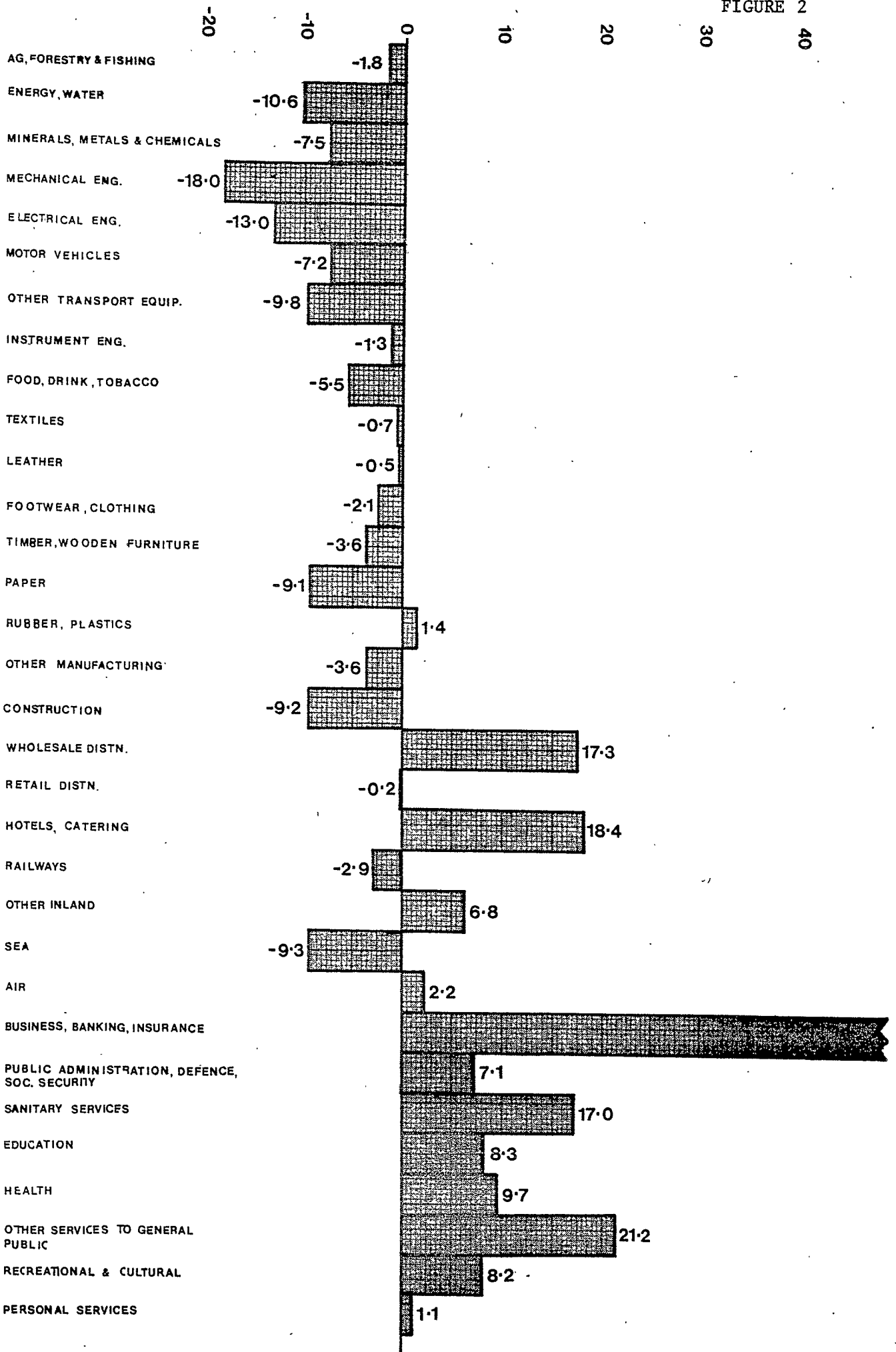


Figure 3

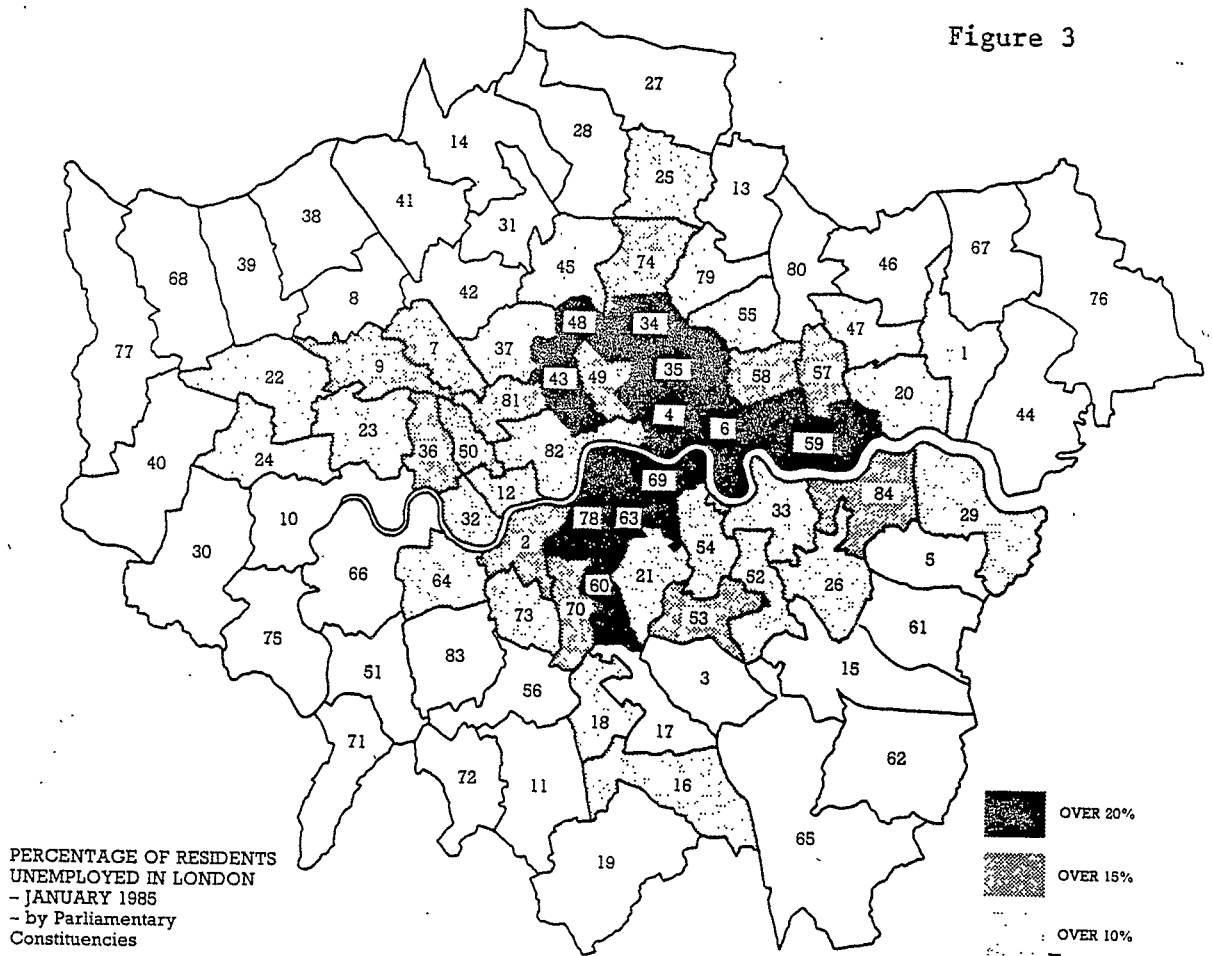
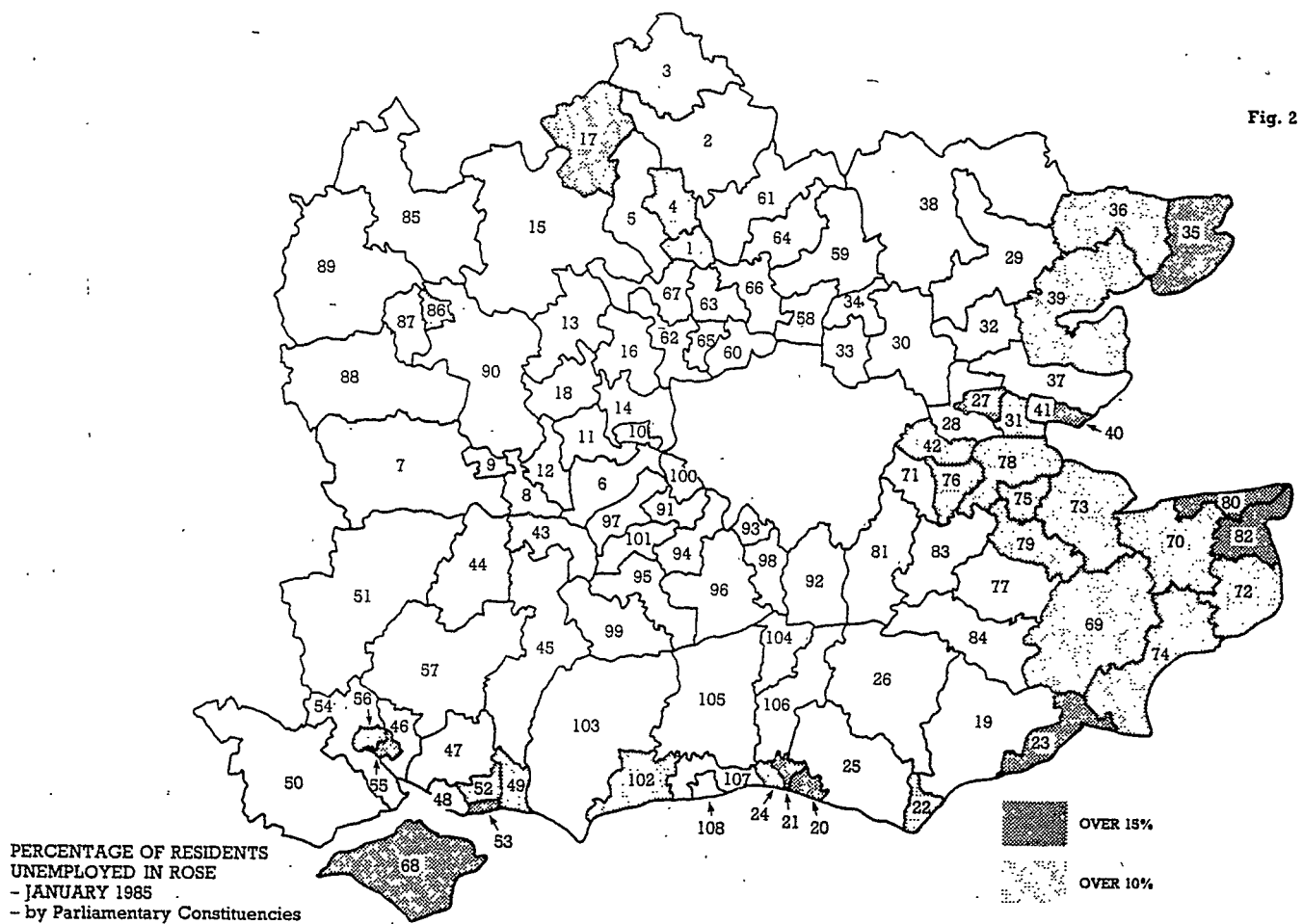


Fig. 2



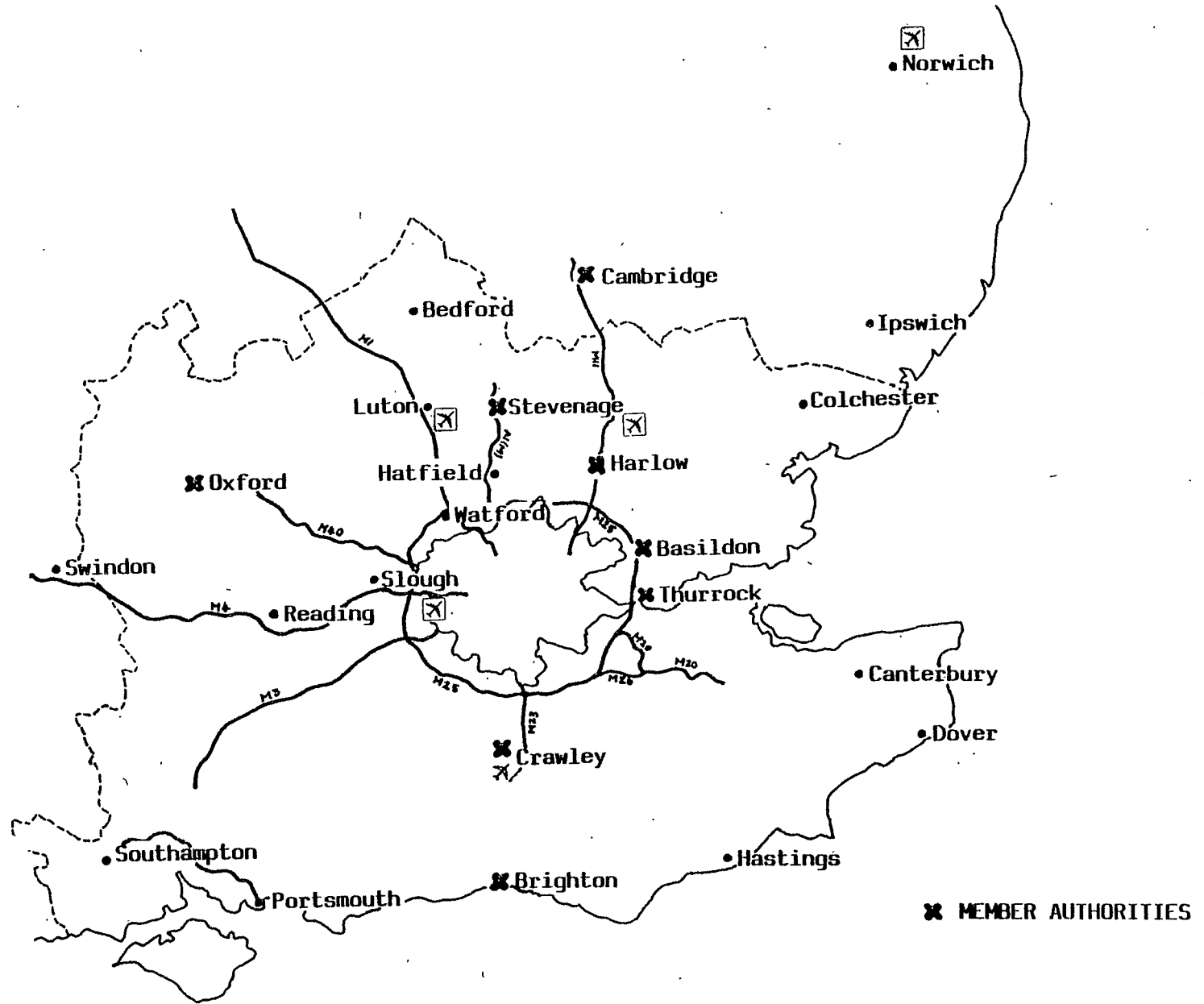


Figure 4

THE PRESENT SOUTH EAST REGION - SHOWING SEEDS MEMBER AUTHORITIES

THE SEEDS SECTOR PLAN

INDUSTRIAL
SECTORS

Motor vehicles
Food Processing
Financial Services
Printing & Publishing
Scientific Instruments
Telecom
Electronics
Tourism
Hotels and Catering
Agriculture
Leisure and
Cultural Inds.
Retailing
Software
Airlines
Cleaning
Pharmaceuticals
Furniture
Defence Electronics
Clothing
Plastics
Wholesaling
Fast Food

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC
INFRASTRUCTURE

British Rail
Health Service
Water & Sewers
Bus transport
Education
Seaports
Airports
Energy
Heat Planning
Road Haulage

Construction
Nuclear Indtry
Govt. Research
Estabs.

Refuse Disposal
Gas Supply

LABOUR
MARKET

Women
16-25 year olds
Office work
Black People
Disability
Unemployment
Social Security
Low pay
Child care
Domestic work
Industrial
Democracy
Council employment
Health & Safety

Local Labour Mkts

PROPERTY & THE
ENVIRONMENT

Land privatisation
M25
Channel Tunnel
The Green Belt
Enterprize zones
House prices
Public Action Zones
Stansted Airport
Agricultural Land