

# London's Alternative

*Michael Ward*

*In 1985, the Greater London Council published The London Industrial Strategy. It ran to more than 600 pages, and 'Printing' was one of 23 industrial sectors addressed by the Strategy. Michael Ward, GLC Deputy Leader and Chair of the Industry and Employment Committee, contributed this Foreword, which remains a succinct statement of the case for popular planning and socially useful production to meet human needs, albeit in the circumstances of Mrs Thatcher's 'de-industrialisation' of Britain.*

*Writing in 1985, Michael Ward said:*

When the history of Britain's experiment with monetarism comes to be written, the contrast between unmet needs and vast human and financial waste will be the theme. The financial waste of London's unemployment is now two-and-a-half billion pounds a year in benefits and lost taxation alone. To include the value of lost output, this figure could be more than doubled. The human waste is the loss of precious skills of our unemployed engineers, builders, carers and curers. It is also the waste of those who have never worked and may never do so.

The needs confront us every day: housing and hospital waiting lists increasing; roads, bridges and sewers crumbling; poverty and decay.

Our strategy is to use wasted resources to meet needs. Elected, publicly accountable authorities must intervene to replace the anarchy of the market economy with justice and fairness. London now has the worst concentration of unemployment in the developed world: we need planning to bring jobs and prosperity.

*The London Industrial Strategy* is more than this. It is about restructuring and modernising London's industrial core. The health of our economy depends above all on rebuilding a viable economic base. The uniqueness of *The London Industrial Strategy* is that we show how this can be done in the interests of the people who live and work in London, and in ways which involve working people in the process of planning and restructuring.

The strategies for each sector have been developed in conjunction with employers,

trade unions and consumer groups. They highlight ways in which public investment, legislation, and other forms of intervention and assistance can create jobs and improve working conditions. Refined by the hard practical experience of investing in the economy through the Greater London Enterprise Board (GLEB), the strategies set out here represent an initial, if extremely modest, programme to secure 48,000 jobs through continuing GLEB's work over four years, 37,000 through other private sector interventions, and 153,000 through the public sector. More is both possible and desirable. The strength of *The London Industrial Strategy* is that it shows clearly, we believe for the first time, how detailed sectoral planning can generate feasible, cost-effective and socially beneficial strategies for employment growth.

Even though the limitations of monetarist ideas are now clear, those ideas remain those of our national government. The harsh realities of restructuring through unemployment are now reflected in a broad consensus around the need for reflation – for public spending to replenish demand and begin the reconstruction of Britain. Reflation is necessary: it would make conditions better. But it would not, of itself, begin the task of industrial transformation. If lasting change rather than immediate amelioration is to be achieved, a thorough programme of intervention and restructuring is required. Our strategy is addressed to the longer term, and to the problem of industrial decline.

The manufacturing and service strategies draw on experience from successful firms and industries elsewhere. Changes in production methods and work organisation, in planning and workplace democracy, in application of technology, training and quality control, have been studied. They have then been assimilated to our principal goal of planning viable employment growth in the context of the skill-base, and needs, of Londoners.

The May 1981 GLC Labour Party manifesto implied that interventions in the arena of industry and employment would all be guided by *The London Industrial Strategy*. Now, as the *Strategy* goes into publication, the GLC, the Enterprise Board and the Training Board are already backing about 600 employment, investment and training projects.

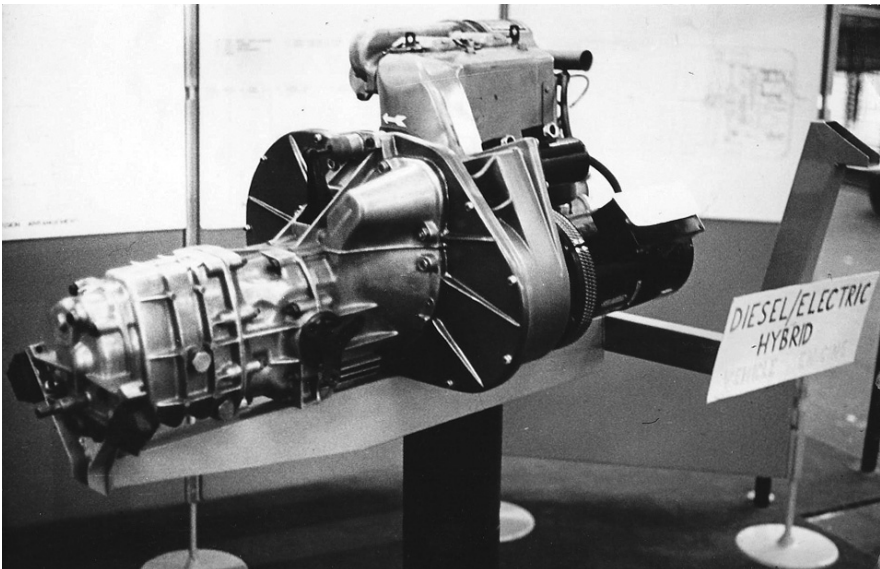
Our experience of implementation has been the single most important contribution to this strategy. The success of GLEB's investment programme commands enormous interest around the world. We now have groups of people who know what our objective of 'restructuring industry in the interests of labour' means in practice, because they have done it. Our staff know how we can begin to tackle discrimination in employment

opportunities against women and black people. We are running dozens of projects, exemplifying what can be done.

The government's plans to abolish the GLC make no provision whatsoever for continuing this task nor preserving the unique skills that have been developed.

The strength of the sector strategies is that they have been subject to consultation and refinement in the light of experience. Publishing *The London Industrial Strategy* is another stage in that process. Now we need reactions to the ideas advanced.

Britain is being driven into becoming an impoverished low-tech, or no-tech, economy, sharply divided into two nations, north and south, rich and poor, in work and out, black and white. The GLC has already shown that there is a real working alternative. *The London Industrial Strategy* shows the potential that exists for that alternative if it is nurtured and developed.



*Hybrid engine a generation ahead of its time*