Université de Paris VIII – Vincennes – Saint-Denis

REINVENTING LONDON
1855-2012

Rémy Bethmont

Supplément à la brochure

Département d'études des pays anglophones

Importance of the Outer Suburban Traffic.

You will see the reference in the report to the Bill we have deposited in Parliament. Our policy for some years past has been to encourage and develop our long-distance suburban traffic, and our efforts in that direction have resulted in a remarkable growth of that business. All along the route of our line from Wembley through Harrow to Eastcote, Ruislip and Uxbridge, and along the Aylesbury line through Pinner, Northwood, and Rickmansworth, building on a large scale has been carried on, and is still proceeding. It is, of course, our intention as and when circumstances permit to project our electrification further into the country districts served by the system, and there will at once follow on such electrification (as past experience has taught us) great activity in the development of those districts resulting in an ever increasing traffic to the line. We have recently opened the new branch line to Croxley Green and Watford, from which we expect a large traffic in the course of a short time. All these considerations point to the necessity for increasing our means of access into London. We have four lines of way—*i.e.*, two fast lines and two slow lines from Wembley to Finchley-road, but from the latter point to Baker-street, where the line is in tunnel, we have only two lines. On this latter section there are three important stations—*i.e.*, Swiss Cottage, Marlborough-road, and St. John's Wood—and we find it impossible to give those stations anything like an adequate service morning and evening, and at the same time provide a passage for the necessary fast trains from the outlying suburbs. The congestion on this section of line is acute, and not only shall we be unable to cope satisfactorily with our increasing country traffic, but we shall not be in a position to contemplate further extensions in the country north and west of Harrow, where lines are badly needed, unless and until we have provided some alternative entrance to Baker-street and the Circle lines, and got rid of the veritable bottle-neck that now exists this side of Finchley-road.

The problem of doing this has engaged our attention for some time past, and we have had various schemes under consideration. As the result, we have come to the conclusion that the scheme we are asking you to sanction to-day is the best from every point of view. Our proposal is not to widen the existing railway or to duplicate it by tube underneath, but to make a new railway leaving the present lines by a junction between Kilburn and Willesden Green, dipping under those lines and the line we lease to the London and North-Eastern Company, and continuing under the Edgware-road, which is a broad thoroughfare, and junctioning with the Circle line on the west side of our Edgware-road Station. By this means we provide a shorter and straighter route for our fast trains, and we break new ground, as we intend to have three stations at convenient points on the Edgware-road from which considerable traffic should be derived, as the line will afford passengers a direct service to the City. The effect of the new line will be to double our means of access to the heart of London and put the company in a position to extend its lines in the very popular residential country that we serve with our electric and steam services, and that has come to be known as "Metroland," and will at the same time enable us to give a much improved service of trains to and from the residential areas that we serve nearer to town.

The Times (London, England), Saturday, Apr 14, 1923

EXPERIMENT IN TOWN PLANNING.

THE BECONTREE HOUSING SCHEME.

Becontree, which is to be visited by the King and Queen, may become in future years a model town, with a population of over a hundred thousand people. It represents the largest and the most ambitious of the London County Council housing schemes.

The area of the estate is approximately three thousand acres. It lies between Ilford and Barking on the western side, and the old market town of Romford on the eastern side, and is intersected by two main railway lines running into London. It was originally proposed that about twenty thousand houses should be built, but developments have been restricted by the check on operations which the Ministry of Health in the last Government found it necessary to impose in the interests of economy. Until recently, building had to be confined to the Ilford section of 440 acres, where nearly three thousand houses are either completed or under construction. Work has now been started on a further thousand houses on the Dagenham section of fifty-five acres, near Dagenham Dock. At the end of 1920, when a beginning was made with the scheme, it was impossible to get sufficient bricklayers, and, after investigation, various systems of concrete construction, requiring the minimum number of operatives, were tried.

When the plans were prepared for the Becontree estate they represented the greatest attempt ever made by any housing authority to provide housing accommodation to meet the requirements of a particular area. It was suggested that there should be one civic centre, and for this a site was allocated at the junction of three central avenues. In this neighbourhood there was to be a shopping district, central markets, churches, and other public buildings. It was further intended that there should be a wide octagonal boulevard divided by the main avenues, and local centres were proposed at eight points of the boulevard. The suggested preliminary division was as follows:—Park, 150 acres; playing fields, 50 acres; open belt (including 60 acres for playing fields and 150 acres for allotments), 425 acres; further allotments, 100 acres; twenty-six school sites, 68 acres; arterial and ring roads, 165 acres; existing properties and adjoining land, 252 acres; land for commercial purposes, 125 acres; sites for working-class cottages, 1,215 acres; sites for cottages other than working-class, 450 acres. It was estimated that the total cost might approach £30,000,000, and of this sum in 1920 the Council had voted £5,000,000 on account. This original scheme has not been abandoned, but the attitude of the Government will be a factor in determining how far it is carried out. In any case, it is expected that further portions of the estate will gradually be developed. Work has so far been chiefly confined to the building of houses of three, four, five, or six rooms, with the addition in every case of scullery, bath-room, and the usual offices. Many blocks of flats or "maisonettes" have also been erected. The houses have been designed by Mr. G. Topham Forrest, architect to the London County Council.

The choice of the name Becontree for the estate is interesting. The estate is situated wholly within the Hundred of Becontree, a name which survives in Becontree Heath, immediately beyond the north-east boundary, and which comprised the nine parishes of Barking, Dagenham, East Ham, West Ham, Leyton, Ilford, Wanstead, Walthamstow, and Woodford. More than half the estate is in Dagenham parish, about one-fourth in Barking, and the remainder in Ilford. It was felt that on the estate there was no name for which precedence could be claimed in relation to the whole, and as the names Barking and Ilford related to local government units, which might eventually have no connexion with the estate, the choice seemed to lie between Dagenham and Becontree. The name Becontree occurs in Domesday, but Dagenham does not, though it may not be safe to assume that Becontree is therefore an older name than Dagenham. Morant, in his history, gives the names of many persons connected with the manors of the estate, and it was pointed out at the inception of the scheme that these lists would be drawn upon when the naming of streets had to be considered.

ILLEGAL DRINKING IN THE ROARING TWENTIES

CLUB STRUCK OFF THE REGISTER.

ILLEGAL SALE OF DRINK.

The RAYMOND CLUB, LIMITED, and WILLIAM ALEXANDER GALTON were summoned at Bow-street Police Court yesterday, before Mr. Graham Campbell, for selling intoxicating liquor without a licence on six different dates at the O.M.D. (Operatic, Musical, and Dramatic) Restaurant Club, St. Martin's-court, W.C. They pleaded "Guilty." Further summonses against them for supplying intoxicants after permitted hours were withdrawn.

Mr. Herbert Muskett, for the police, said that the club was registered on May 21 last. It was run by a limited company, which was a mere bogus concern, in the sense that the only directors were Galton and another man, whose name he need not mention, as no blame attached to him. Galton was the lessee of the premises, paying £275 a year rent, and the club was really run for his own profit. The club was raided at midnight on September 26 by Chief Inspector Morton and other officers, and the names were taken of nine persons who were consuming intoxicants.

Mr. Freke Palmer, for the defence, said that the club had been run at a loss and was now closed. It was run entirely for persons connected with the operatic and dramatic profession, and the members were all thoroughly respectable people. There was no dancing in the club.

The MAGISTRATE ordered the company and Galton each to pay a fine of £30 and £15 15s. costs. The club was struck off the register by consent.

Two women and seven men were each fined 40s. for consuming intoxicants at the club after hours.

The Times, 3rd November 1925

A PLAN FOR GREATER LONDON

NATIONAL POLICY AND REGIONAL ADMINISTRATION

REDISTRIBUTING PEOPLE AND WORKPLACES

The main aim of Professor Patrick Abercrombie's Greater London Plan, 1944 (H.M. Stationery Office), a preliminary edition of which is published to-day, is to discourage the further growth of industry and population within the London Region and to provide for their distribution and grouping. Some idea may be gained of the vastness of the task from the fact that 1,033,000 persons are involved in this transfer; 618,000 under the County of London Plan and 415,000 under the present proposals.

This decentralization of population and industry is only one part of the problem and the opportunity discussed in this survey. The future of transport—road, rail, river, and air—is reviewed. The conservation of good agricultural land, and the preservation, extension, and utilization for the public good of the green belt round London and the safeguarding of landscape features from the intrusion of industry or the speculative builder are examined.

"The area is so vast, the population so great, the aspects so complex, and the existing conditions so determining," says Professor Abercrombie in a personal foreword, "that no single technician could ever hope to presume in his person the necessary knowledge and detail. I wish to state quite definitely that all such attempts as foreseeing the trends of, and proposing some direction to, human environment in the planning of this vital region may at length take shape.

The area dealt with in the plan includes the whole of the counties of Middlesex, Hertfordshire and Surrey, and parts of Kent, Essex, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, and Berkshire. The total area of Greater London envisaged, including the County of London and the City, amounts to about 2,717 square miles, with a population of about 10¾ millions. Broadly the plan is based on a division of the area into four concentric rings, of which:—

(1) The Inner Urban Ring represents the fully urbanized built-up areas adjoining the L.C.C. area.

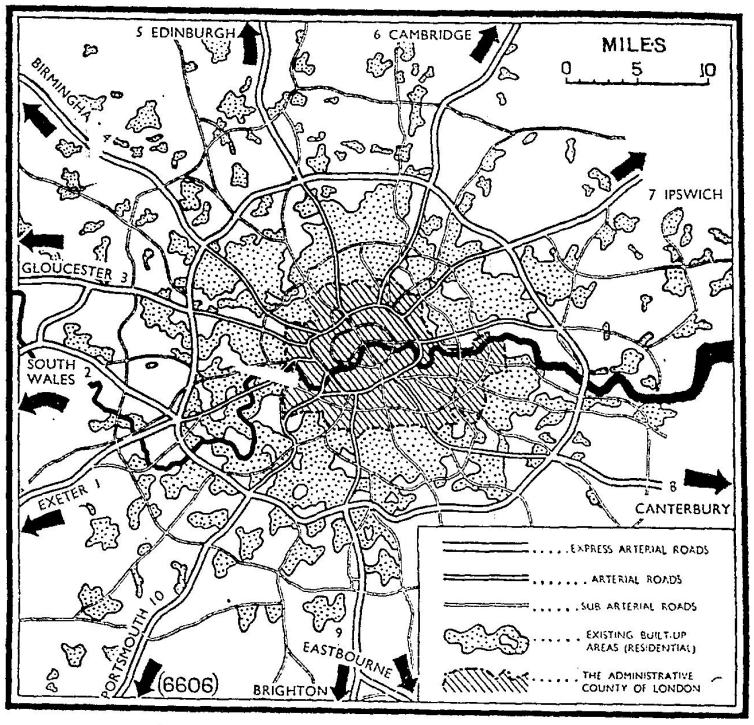
(2) The Suburban Ring is the area beyond the Inner Urban Ring and approximately within 12 miles of Charing Cross, in which the excessive densities of the Inner Urban Ring have not yet been reached but in which land has now been built up to the limit prescribed by tolerable conditions.

(3) The Green Belt comprises much open country and includes numerous established centres of population; it extends for about five miles beyond the Suburban Ring.

(4) The Outer Country Ring includes the remainder of the region and contains distinct urban communities situated in land otherwise open in character and mainly agricultural.

SATELLITE TOWNS

The Green Belt Ring is to provide primarily for the recreation of Londoners and to prevent further suburban growth; therefore only small increases to existing towns are to be allowed. The Outer Country Ring will be the principal reception area for the decentralized population. A number of entirely new satellite towns will be located in this ring, and it is hoped that industry, housing, shops, and those cultural facilities which go to make up a success-



ment must necessarily be a cooperative task. Many people have contributed to this work: at the same time those whose help is to be acknowledged must not consider themselves in any way pledged or compromised by the use that has been made of their contribution. Though the credit of the achievement is due to many, the ultimate responsibility or blame must be carried by one."

METROPOLITAN REGION

This report was prepared on behalf of the Standing Conference on London Regional Planning at the request of the Minister of Town and Country Planning. It represents the view of Professor Abercrombie as an independent consultant. Neither the Ministry of Town and Country Planning nor the other Government departments concerned have yet completed their review of his recommendations or the assumptions of policy on which they are based. Local authorities directly concerned have not yet had an opportunity of considering them.

Since the beginning of the present war three plans dealing with parts of the London region have been proposed, and each is complementary to the other two. The City of London has prepared proposals dealing with planning and reconstruction in the vital square mile at the hub of the Metropolis. The County of London Plan, 1943, deals with the area beyond this up to the confines of the administrative county boundary. From this line again, outwards to a distance of approximately 30 miles from the centre (though some attention has been given to several centres such as Aylesbury, Bletchley, and Braintree on about the 50-mile radius from Charing Cross, which does not come strictly within the plan), the present study is concerned. But these three complementary studies, says Professor Abercrombie, are each investigations into parts only of the one and indivisible Metropolis whose boundaries are invisible to the naked eye, unrealized by the normal citizen—save when indicated by rate demands—and unmeaning to the planner. These three different areas are all administratively of first-rate importance. The compact unity of the City and the more widely flung control of the L.C.C., superimposed except for certain lesser functions on the areas of the metropolitan boroughs, contrast sharply with the multiplicity of administrative units in Greater London, with its 2,599 square miles divided up into 143 local authorities. In the area there is also a vast number of statutory authorities whose function one way and another impinge upon planning, such as the Port of London Authority, the Thames Conservancy, drainage and hospital boards, gas and electric supply, railway and canal companies, &c. Of the 143 local authorities nearly every one has a planning scheme prepared, or in course of preparation, independently of its neighbour. Less joint preparation has been evinced here than in any other urban group in the country. Although a few advisory and executive committees have been at work, there has been a lamentable failure to realize a need for coordination all round London. With the plan submitted, says Professor Abercrombie, there may, be permitted the hope that a new and necessary unity ful community will be organized to go forward together in step. It is now an accepted fact that for the success of these towns they should contain all types of income and age groups. The redistribution proposed within the region entails three major movements. First, provision is made for the development of a few smaller sites which, though they are recognized as being unacceptable from a planning point of view by reason of their relative nearness to London, cannot be avoided if immediate accommodation is to be found for overspill in the interests of a short-term housing policy. The number for which provision is made on these nearer sites (described in the report as "quasi-satellites") is 125,000—120,000 from the County of London and 5,000 from Croydon. Secondly, additions are proposed to existing towns together with the establishment of eight new towns (or 10 if the density of 100 persons an acre were to be adopted for the County of London). Most of these satellite towns would have a maximum population of 60,000. These eight towns would accommodate the largest group of the decentralized population—namely, 383,250. Of the 10 possible sites for these towns suggested three are in Hertfordshire (Stevenage, Redbourn, and Stapleford), three in Essex (Harlow, Ongar, and Margaretting), one in Kent (Meopham), two in Surrey (Crowhurst and Holmwood), and one in Berkshire (White Waltham). A third aim is to decentralize other population to towns within a 50-mile radius of London, but outside the region. It is also suggested that 100,000 should be decentralized beyond the London influence.

THE INDUSTRIAL PATTERN

Discussing pre-war industrial trends in the London area, the report says that in the inner area (the County of London) industry falls broadly into three groups:—

(1) The heavy industries, mostly located in big units along the Thames water-front and adjoining the canals and railway junctions. These are concerned with food manufacture and processing, heavy chemicals, heavy engineering, and public utility plants.

(2) A wide variety of small-scale light industry and workshops intermixed with occasional large factories and with congested working-class housing, located in the East End boroughs. These are mainly concerned with clothing, light engineering, metal work, furniture manufacture, light chemicals, printing and stationery. This group of industries has spread westward into Islington and St. Pancras, and there has also been a spread of the clothing industry into Westminster and St. Marylebone.

(3) An area of more modern industry associated with the motor and electrical trades and the preparation of foodstuffs, and located in medium to large factories in the boroughs west of London. Approximately 30 per cent. of Greater London's factory growth between the wars is accounted for by the decentralization of industry from congested sites in inner London. The principal labour pool has remained on the east and south-east sides of London, giving rise to "an excessive daily journey to work."

Industrial damage has been fairly severe in some of the congested London boroughs, especially among factories in the 100-300 employee group. Every firm that refrains from returning

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A PLAN FOR GREATER LONDON
—Continued from page 5

to London, every occupier who moves out of London in preference to patching up old dilapidated premises, will ease the burden of London's reconstruction. Many firms have left London during the war and are undecided whether to return or not. Others have temporarily closed down owing to compulsory concentration or through the scarcity of raw materials. A break with the past has occurred which gives great scope for a policy of planned decentralization, provided that the Government will give industry and commerce a definite lead and an indication of its future policy, with an assurance that house and factory building will go hand-in-hand in the right places and that towns selected for industrial reception will be equipped as speedily as possible with all the services which industry and business need for their efficient operation. The decentralization of business firms also is very desirable, and so far as is practicable firms who have moved to the suburbs or to the provinces should be encouraged to stay there, at any rate for dealing with their routine work. On the whole the black-coat worker has been even harder hit than the industrial employee, as, unlike industry, his work is concentrated in a small area of Central London, involving him in long journeys in overcrowded trains from distant suburbs. Here a good example could be set by the permanent decentralization of much of the routine work of the Government Departments to provincial centres and to selected towns. The report says that it is essential that a detailed survey should be made of all the evacuated industries and of war-time concerns which have started up in the Greater London region with a view to determining their most suitable location. In a number of cases it is essential to remove war-time factory buildings.

HOUSING AND INDUSTRY

Except for Welwyn and Letchworth and the building of one or two small working-class areas near railway junctions, no conscious effort has yet been made to relate housing and industry in the Greater London area. Industry has mostly selected the nearest suitable flat land on the fringe of built-up London independently of housing movements. The industrial population in the main continues to be drawn from the older residential areas, since it is only here that accommodation to rent is normally available. As industry increases so does the population pressure in these built-up areas. London [illegible]

tion should be given to hauling goods by electric traction and the number of goods stations should be decreased. It is recommended that the regional railway proposals should be referred to an investigating body in the same way as proposed in the County of London Plan.

A ring of airports round London is suggested, with one large trans-ocean airport at Heathrow, twelve miles from Victoria. Communications to London should be provided by road and by electric railway to Waterloo and Victoria by means of a short branch to the existing Southern Railway's line east of Feltham. It is thought that navigable waterways may play an important part after the war in the transport of certain types of goods between the Midlands and the Thames, and suggestions are made for increasing the efficiency of the canals.

THE ROAD SYSTEM

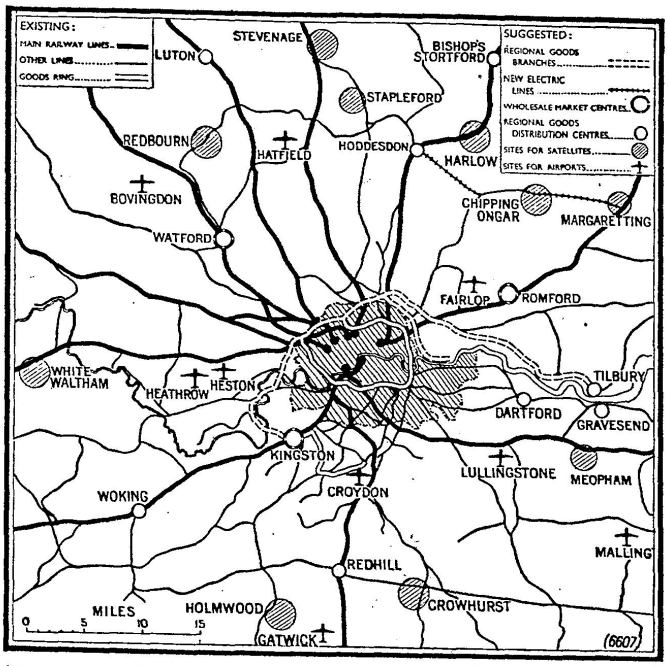
The inadequacy of the road system of this country generally, and of the London region in a more intensive degree, says the report, is a commonplace which required no restatement. Put in the simplest way, the vehicular means of locomotion has suddenly and completely outgrown the static surface upon which movement takes place. Cars have changed, roads have remained. The roads of Great Britain are reputed to carry the densest traffic in the world culminating in an appalling toll of deaths. No adequate steps have yet been taken to prevent this wastage of human life. It may be a comparatively easy task to enumerate defects in detail, but, says the report, it is by no means so easy to produce a workable scheme of improvement. The main features of the road system suggested in the report are:—

(1) Ten express arterial highways, linking up on the London side with the ten main radials of the County of London Plan and extending outside Greater London in a system of national routes.

(2) A sub-arterial road system to carry all the normal main traffic of the region and including many existing roads of great importance.

(3) Five ring roads, of which two are in the L.C.C. area, connecting the arterial roads and also serving as by-passes round congested areas.

The provision of an express arterial road, called the D Ring, at a radius of 12 miles from the centre, is deemed essential, so as to aid and regulate fast traffic distribution to and from the express radial routes on an orbit that would provide some definite relief to the traffic congestion within the Metropolitan area.



these built-up areas. London has expanded outwards by concentric rings of industry and mostly unrelated housing in an ever-widening sprawl. Given proper coordination between the provision of factories and houses, industrialists are known to be ready to move out. Employees also would not mind moving if houses were available to rent. Good cheap shopping and social entertainment facilities must also be provided in the reception towns from the start. It is only when detailed study is given to the harmonizing of human and industrial movement, says Professor Abercrombie, that the extreme complexities appear. It is no matter of a neat transference of a works and its workers, say from West Ham to a countryside in Essex. Many of the people in one borough work in the factories situated in another; the occupations of the members of one family are frequently totally different. Nevertheless, a broad policy of the movement of people and work can and must be pursued. But it must be recognized that it will take a considerable time for the final adjustments to be made.

DECENTRALIZATION

A scheme of decentralization of this magnitude is a policy which must be pursued with persistence and vigour, but also with discretion and sympathy for natural human feelings and weaknesses. As part of the regional administrative machinery, not only will it be necessary to have an officer administering whatever powers or persuasions there may be for the location of industry, but an equally important social or population director who can keep the human side uppermost and who can keep watch that the spirit of the scheme for regional grouping of the population is carried out. The proposals for decentralization contemplate the removal of industry to both new towns and existing towns. New towns are best built up in the first instance by firms who will take with them skilled male labour and their families. When large firms move out it is desirable that they should go to towns with a strong local life of their own into which the employees can be fully absorbed. The decentralization of 1,033,000 people would involve, the report estimates, the decentralization of sufficient factories to employ directly 258,000 people. The survey differentiates between areas where the entry of further industry should be prohibited, principally in the inner urban, the suburban, and green belt rings, and areas where it should be encouraged, mainly in selected towns outside the green belt ring and certain centres in the built-up metropolitan area and in the green belt ring. North of the Thames it proposes that within the inner urban and suburban rings no further industrialization should be permitted except in the Barking-Dagenham area on the east side of London, where more industry is needed to serve the big housing estates erected there within recent years. A detailed survey may reveal other areas in built-up London where the desirability of providing work for local labour would justify the admittance of further industry.

PLANNED TRANSPORT

Industrial areas, says the report, should be planned and developed in the closest collaboration with all transport authorities. An ultimate reduction in travel to and from work is an essential aim. It is considered that the solution of the railway problem is largely inherent in the proposals for the decentralization of population and industry which will materially reduce the amount of daily travel between London and the suburbs, and that no drastic alterations or additions to the railways are necessary. The suggestions put forward mainly concern general electrification in the Greater London area, the provision of certain additional short lengths of passenger track, and goods traffic. The main lines leading outwards from London should be electrified to certain points. These points, where change-over is made from electric to steam traction, are important, as there will be a tendency for traffic to be collected and distributed there. Points recommended are: Didcot, Princes Risborough, Aylesbury, Watford, Luton, Hitchin, Bishop's Stortford, Chelmsford, and Basingstoke. The plan will increase the importance of existing branch lines in the northern half of the region, which could easily be made to link up the Midlands and the north-west with some of the proposed satellites and also to link together various places in the region. To realize this, four new links would be required for a northern loop from Watford to Chelmsford. Another connexion required is a loop at West Thurrock enabling trains to run from London to Upminster *via* Purfleet to provide for the proposed development near Aveley. Considera-

A GREEN BELT

A wide green belt is proposed immediately round London, where buildings will be allowed in exceptional circumstances only, and which will be primarily for recreational use. This green belt will lead into an open countryside kept primarily for agricultural use. Lesser girdles are proposed for the separate communities, both old and new. It is important for recreational purposes that open spaces should be linked up and additions made to the green belt. The green wedges leading from the open country into the inner urban and suburban rings should be preserved. "We would like to see these wedges," says Professor Abercrombie, "carried right into the centre of London, and we believe it could be done in a long-term policy. There are also certain large geographic features which could be rescued from an unsatisfactory state and an uncertain fate. The most obvious is the Lee Valley, which for miles runs parallel to London's oldest ribbon of communities. It is true that it is partly industrialized and if no action were taken this would probably continue in a desultory, landscape-devastating way. But in the hands of a skilful landscapist this valley, with its streams, disused gravel pits, and water reservoirs, could in places be turned into a miniature Norfolk Broads; there is still time to rescue it and make it an open space of artificial beauty contrasted with primeval Epping Forest. The Cray Valley is almost gone, but there is still time to rescue the Upper Roding." The report gives a list of scenic areas, royal and private parks which should be preserved, and says that the Thames riverside should, so far as possible, be accessible. The standard adopted with regard to playing-fields is that three acres out of the 10 acres open space recommended per 1,000 population should be attached to schools: of the remaining seven acres, one acre should be in parks and four acres in public, and two acres in private playing-fields.

JOINT ADMINISTRATION

The provision of powers for planning, says the report, is a national concern: but the devising of the best authority to administer those powers is the unique problem of this Metropolitan region. The suggestion is made that the region be divided up into a series of joint planning committees, fully representative of the local authorities holding planning powers, and none of them too large to maintain local interest and contact. These committees would be responsible for preparing and administering schemes, in conformity with the master plan. There would be a right of appeal to the Minister of Town and Country Planning from the decisions of the joint planning committees. Presiding over the committee would be a regional planning board, its members nominated by the Minister. The board would not be advisory or merely coordinating, but would have overriding powers, dealing directly with planning matters and being responsible to the Minister. For certain purposes, also, the board could set up an executive arm, *e.g.*, for the purpose of the Green Belt, or for the creation of a regional housing corporation. Otherwise all the normal functions of the local authorities will be carried on by them as before.

THE COST

What will it cost? This, says Professor Abercrombie, is the first question many people, from the Treasury downwards, will ask of the plan, and he adds that though it would not be easy it would still be possible to compute in terms of 1939 prices and, with the addition of an ample margin for safety, to arrive at a grand total figure. But looked at in another light, it might be said that these things are to be provided anyhow; and it might be more instructive if it were possible to show whether they would cost more to provide them on the basis of a plan or haphazard and merely quantitatively. Who can assess in £ s. d. the precise value of a human being killed on an antiquated road? The financial aspect is not an easy one to present: to obtain an answer depends upon the breadth or narrowness of the conception of the word economics. The congenital opponents of planning can never grasp the theory of the realization, by stages, of a complete conception. They refuse to think of the future, using the familiar arguments and relying on some invisible hand to weld the separate parts together. An essential feature of the periodic realization method is that whereas each stage is complete and advantageous in itself, it leads towards a whole which is greater than the sum of its parts; and finally, the later stages must be capable of modification to meet changing conditions unforeseen at the outset.

may be coy about them. But if the coming election is to mean anything, the simplifying process of political battle must work to give the country sharp images of the parties between which it has to choose. This simplifying process is much maligned, sometimes rightly so. Specialists in subjects that become issues of contention raise their hands in expert horror, seek to shoo the simplifying politicians away, and demand that decisions that affect their speciality should be taken out of politics. If they had their way, political debate would concern only trivial things on the margin. This is to take altogether too low a view of the political process.

Party conviction is but one of the three ingredients that go to make up policy. The other two are the permanent role of government and the impact of external personalities, facts and events. It is right that independent commentators like *The Economist* should call attention to intractable facts that limit the choices of whoever attains power. But it is quite wrong that politicians should become so subdued that the voter is given the impression that no elements whatever in the amalgam of forces determining the actions taken on his behalf are at all amenable to the exercise of his choice. It is all-important to restore meaning to the word "election" itself.

Multi-racialism at Home

No single lobby or pressure group has arisen to organise coloured people in Britain for their defence. The most hopeful development lies in interracial co-operation against specific abuses

In half-conscious imitation of the spiders' webs of "progressive" and "betterment" associations which stretch exuberantly through American Negro communities, the West Indians in London have been indulging in almost an excess of organisation. Until the time of Kelso Cochrane's murder last May in London, such groupings, many of them closely related to local associations in the Caribbean islands, kept to themselves. During the race riots in the Notting Hill district there were attempts to float a wider National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People after the American prototype, but although the title was copied, the reality was never approached. Many West Indians, particularly in Notting Hill, feeling themselves let down by inflated aspirations, determined to act only with their immediate neighbours.

In the weeks just before the Cochrane murder the West Indies Migrant Service, smelling more trouble in the bad areas and worried at the complacent assumption that the racial problem had evaporated with Mr Justice Salmon's memorable charge to the jury in the Notting Gate riot cases last year, brought together the various immigrant clubs and societies into a Standing Conference of West Indian Leaders for Community Development. But this move revealed a divergence of viewpoints among West Indian leaders.

The divergence springs from the ambiguities in the West Indian's attitudes towards themselves, towards their white neighbours and towards politics. Should, for example, West Indians take pride in the Negro race? Or should they seek to be considered first and foremost as British citizens, among whom characteristics of race and colour should be immaterial? Should the word "coloured" as opposed to "West Indian" be used at all? As the West Indian Federation gets under way, a further question will doubtless arise as to whether the immigrants should think of themselves as visitors from an independent nation or as British residents in their own mother country.

Such questions are earnestly discussed by articulate West Indians. The answers which they give affect their political attitudes. If West Indians are primarily "coloured people", it follows that their natural allies are the Africans, who are obsessed with the worldwide struggle against "colonialism" and inclined to the conviction that nothing worthwhile is to be got without making a great deal of noise in the getting.

The Cochrane murder provided the occasion for Mr Bashorun, the president of the Association of African Organisations in Britain, to announce flamboyantly the formation of a coordinating committee which would organise Cochrane's funeral and demonstrate by banners and processions, vigils in Downing Street, boycotts of South African goods and so forth against unfair treatment of coloured people everywhere. This approach contrasts with the emphasis which is placed by the West Indian authorities and most of the social agencies concerned with the day-to-day problems of getting individual West Indians accepted in British communities on their merits, regardless of colour.

Cutting across this division is another: the division between those, on the one hand, who feel that West

Indians are more easily assimilated into respectable English society than other coloured people, or indeed than most foreigners, because of their essentially conservative, property-owning, cricket-playing traditions and a cultural background in islands where the colour bar is only occasionally and erratically present; and on the other hand, doctrinaires who see the immigrants as natural allies of the poor whites in the class struggle. Most of the poor whites do not see it that way. The Mosleyites and the White Defence Leaguers are having some local success in stirring them up to believe that their grievances against their environment, many of them legitimate, can be attributed to the West Indians. Nevertheless left-wing enthusiasts see a sharpening of class distinction as the ultimate solvent of race prejudice. But this is an outcome that does not appeal to West Indians with higher social ambitions than being assimilated with the lowest of London's low, white or coloured.

THESE ambiguities, which affect both the West Indians themselves and the large number of English organisations that have become involved in the racial question, should not be overdrawn. There are sensible and sophisticated people as well as hotheads among those who favour the more demonstrative methods. The West Indians leaders passed one critical test of maturity when, on the morrow of the Cochrane murder, the Trotskyites proposed the formation of a vigilante group armed with batons to patrol any area in which the Fascists were operating. Even Mr Ezzrecho, who leads the most militant West Indian group in Notting Hill, promptly wrote to Mr Fryer, the Trotskyite leader, telling him to keep out. The "Defence Committee" of Mr Bashorun's new organisation changed its name, so as to avoid any impression of taking the law into its own hands.

There are skilled politicians like the ubiquitous Dr David Pitt, the only West Indian to be a prospective parliamentary candidate (he has been adopted by the Hampstead Labour Party), who think that the weapons of conflict and conciliation, public protest and private assimilation have all to be used as tactics suggest. But friction between these lines of approach is inevitable. So deep is the prejudice against the public authorities among part of the immigrant community in Notting Hill that attempts to deal with rackrenting landlords by careful preparation of test cases brought by West Indian tenants have not received universal support. Tenants who stick out their necks expect a degree of immunity from retaliation which cannot by the nature of things be absolutely guaranteed; West Indians who work with the authorities run some risk of being dubbed informers by their compatriots.

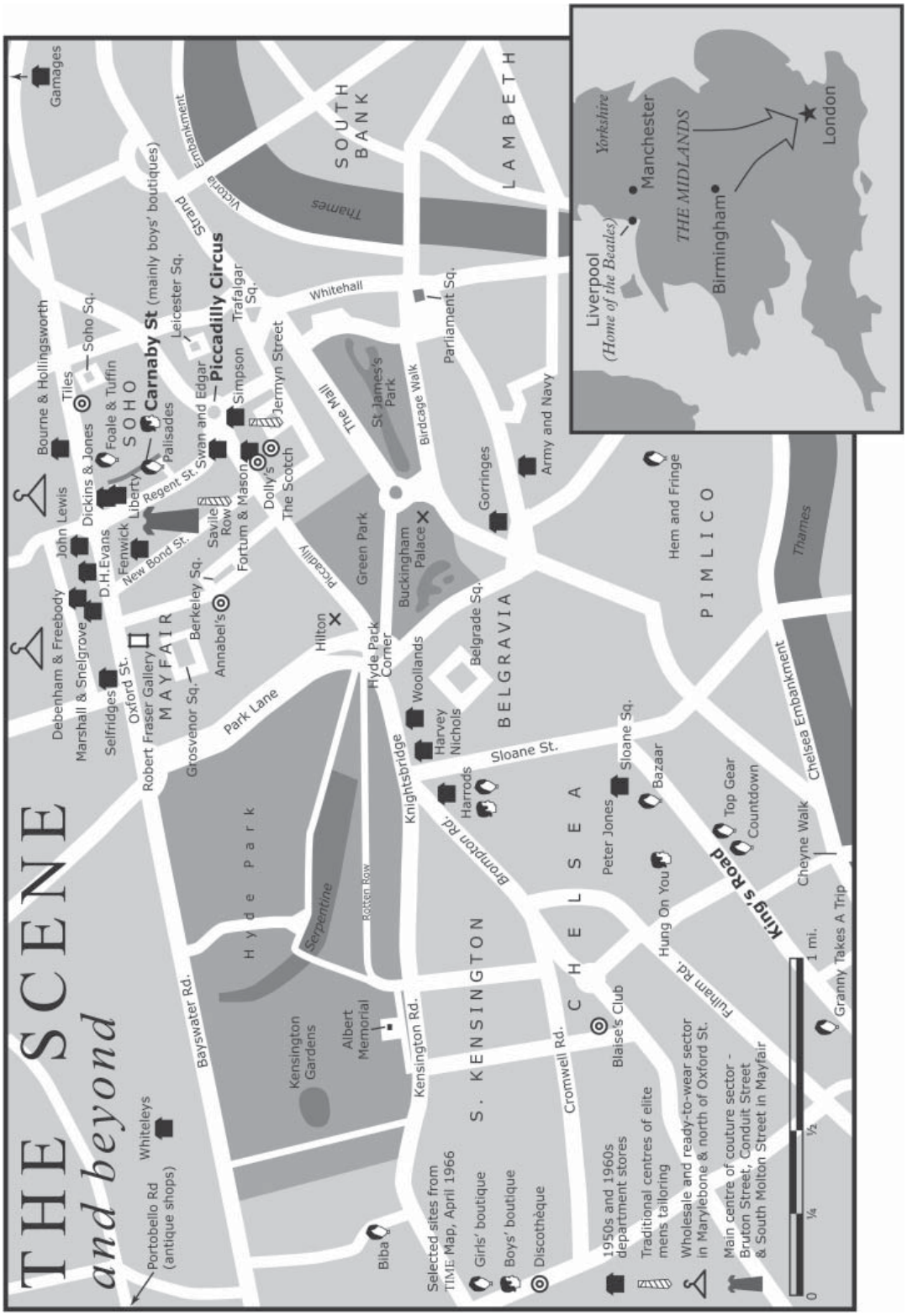
Nevertheless the diverse strands of West Indian activity are being brought together by the Standing Conference of West Indian Leaders for Community Development and by the British Caribbean Association. The eighteen organisations and clubs with such titles as the Coloured People's Cultural and Social Association, the Harmonist Movement, the Stoke Newington Caribbean Social Club and the Racial Brotherhood Association, which send representatives to the Standing Conference's monthly meetings cover every part of London in which West Indians are to be found.

The mood of these club leaders is healthily self-critical. They are especially worried by their failure to attract local white residents to their activities. Contact has hitherto been largely with outsiders with a conscience about race relations. Such club activities may even promote separateness rather than assimilation. There are a number of ways to avoid this. Clubs should find out what the individual interests of their members are, invite the secretaries of existing professional, social and hobby organisations to address them and offer membership. Local West Indian leaders should see that their compatriots register on the electoral roll as soon as they become qualified, since this is the only way to overcome the extraordinary lack of interest so far shown by local political organisations in the problems of potential coloured voters. Suitable West Indians should try to seek prominence in local affairs, because only then will many white people drop the habit of classifying all West Indians in their minds as unskilled labour. West Indians who find themselves exploited, as many tenants are in areas like Notting Hill, should seek common ground with white inhabitants who are in the same position. It is encouraging to learn that the small group of skilful social workers who were behind the recent successful test cases brought before rent tribunals are now promoting a multiracial tenants' association in North Kensington.

In certain respects West Indians in London's slummier areas have more political pull and more access to publicity than the previous white tenants, some of whom have traditionally put up with rackrenting, intimidation and other abuses because of a feeling that their own way of life was too vulnerable to permit of official scrutiny. Public anxiety about the race problem has called attention to situations which were in any case a scandal and West Indians have a chance of adding in the field of civic virtue to the services which the public is already accepting from them and beginning to accept and acknowledge in such fields as nursing and public transport.

SWINGING LONDON

FASHION IN SWINGING LONDON



The Geographies of Fashion in Central London in the 1950s and 1960s. Adapted from R.M. Chapin, Jr's map of 'The Scene' from *Time* magazine, April 15 1966, by Jenny Kynaston, Department of Geography, Royal Holloway. (Belgrave Square was marked as 'Belgrade Square' on the original.)

DOCKLANDS REGENERATION

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Docklands – A Private City?

Anne Kershen

■ On May 28th, 1992, the company of Olympia and York, developers of Canary Wharf in London's Docklands, went into administration owing the banks £550 million and in need of a further £600 million to complete the first phase of construction which included the Jubilee Line extension. The failure sent a frisson of fear through the financial world as a property Goliath was felled. Coverage of the 'disaster' appeared daily in the media as analysts conjectured as to the effect the company's collapse would have on the property world, stock market and international financial scene. Little was made of the socio-economic impact the failure would have on the local community, but then its plight was not the stuff of headlines. Docklanders were there, as they always had been, to be used and abused by the forces of trade and finance, by the needs and whims of the market and society.

The election of a Conservative government in 1979 brought a change in policy, away from emphasis on dockland regeneration in order to accommodate local needs and concerns towards a programme dominated by belief in market forces; an action replay of the previous century. In 1981 the London Dockland Development Corporation was established with sweeping powers which would enable it to override local restraint in favour of creating an environment attractive to the private sector. In

the next five years 85 per cent of houses built in Docklands were for owner-occupiers. The value of acreage rose from £35 to £450,000. Homes increased in value from between 195 per cent to 400 per cent at a time when the local community – experiencing increasing unemployment and poverty – were living in buildings, such as those on the Barley Mow Estate, close by Limehouse Link, described as recently as May 1992, as '... grey and ugly after years of neglect. Windows ... jammed shut and rarely cleaned, lifts seldom work ... rubbish-strewn car park ... used by those whose business is best conducted in the dark'. Docklands in the 1990s contains some of the worst and some of the most luxurious housing in the capital.

Transport has been a constant in the Docklands debate, a key issue over which the local community has little control but upon which it places great dependence. In 1976 the Docklands Joint Committee's 'Strategic Plan' stressed that 'improvements in all aspects of transport are the key to regenerating the economy of East London and to making Docklands an attractive place to live in'. Some might argue that the policy has been continued, but at what cost? The Docklands Light Railway has proved insufficient and inefficient, while the failure of Canary Wharf has meant that the future of the Jubilee Line continues to hang in the balance.

It is true that by 1990, in an attempt to improve the road network, the plans for the Docklands Highway were put into operation. But it has proved the 'most expensive stretch of road built in the country', costing £163,000 per yard but surrounded by a congested and inadequate local network. Construction necessitated the demolition of homes and the closing down of small-scale businesses which had provided facilities and employment for a local community which enjoyed few benefits from the development of Britain's 'second financial city'. For example, the *Daily Telegraph*'s removal to Docklands created 1,240 jobs but only forty of these went to locals and these in the areas of security, cleaning and catering, the lower end of the skill spectrum.

We end as we began, with the collapse of Olympia and York, a property development company with headquarters on the other side of the Atlantic, taking the helm in determining the welfare of those who live in the private city that is Docklands. Had Canary Wharf succeeded then the plight of the local residents may well have improved, as the company did have plans to ameliorate their condition. But the collapse of the property market and the recession have, for the time being at least, put paid to further private sector involvement, and 'Yuppie' properties remain empty instead of being used to rehouse those in need.

The story of Docklands during the past 200 years reflects the financial history of London and its demise as an industrial and colonial powerbase. It was the rise of industry and empire that stimulated dock development. Little concern was shown for those who stood in the way. In the late twentieth century optimism was fired again when talk of Docklands regeneration began. But that failed the local community on almost every level. As in the early nineteenth century the beneficiaries were, until the bubble burst, 'those who promoted and constructed the works'. Docklands was structured to accommodate the economic needs of the city and the nation. Boom or bust, local residents seem destined to suffer.

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Margaret Thatcher
Speech at the Inauguration of the Canary Wharf Project
11th May 1988

First, Mr. Reichmann may I for all your guests thank you and your colleagues for inviting us here today to mark the formal beginning of the Canary Wharf project. Secondly, I would like to tell everyone here how impressed I have been during my visit to Canary Wharf itself by Olympia and York's commitment to London and to Docklands. I share the sense of excitement that your managers, designers, contractors and prospective tenants clearly do have in being part of such an ambitious well-prepared development.

I cannot emphasise too much that it is really time to shout the praises of what is happening in Docklands. Do go out and look for yourselves what is happening in London's Docklands. Canary Wharf is remarkable in itself. It is as you know the largest single commercial development in the world. But it is only one of the many exciting things you can see happening. In a few years we have begun to transform Docklands from a wasteland of industrial dereliction into a lively varied new centre of employment, housing and leisure for London.

Of course initially development had to be the priority for the London Docklands Development Corporation. We owe a lot to the leadership of Sir Nigel Broackes and Sir Christopher Benson as successive LDDC Chairmen. Now, as private sector investment continues to flow into Docklands, we will need to work hard to establish a balanced community with a range of services, including improved low-cost housing for the growing number of people attracted to visit, work and live in the area. Particularly I welcome the Docklands Compact and hope employers working with local schools and the training agencies will find more opportunities for Eastenders.

I recognise that the scale of private investment would never have been attracted without the Government putting in a single planning authority to speed decisions and to press ahead with the necessary new infrastructure. I recognise that better access to Docklands will be a cornerstone of the success of Canary Wharf and other projects. I am determined, as are Nicholas Ridley and Paul Channon, to press ahead as quickly as possible with the new road and rail schemes to serve Docklands.

I am delighted to declare the Canary Wharf development well launched. It will make a great contribution to our capital city. And I return to No. 10 full of enthusiasm for what the Canary Wharf team are trying to achieve.

London's Docklands

It is worse to travel hopefully

In the wasteland that was once London's docks, private developers were set free from most planning constraints in 1980. Since then they have been trying to realise the dream of a new centre for London, to rival the City and the West End. To succeed, they will need not just a free market, but better means of getting people to and from it

Which way to success?

"IN THE long run, people are quite confident about this area. In the short run, we've got big problems," says Mr Cass Whittaker at the Docklands office of Jones Lang Wootton, a large firm of surveyors. In the long run, said Maynard Keynes, we are all dead. That prospect now troubles many developers who bought Docklands sites at the peak of the property market in 1987—financing their projects, all too often, with short-term bank loans.

Residential property has been hit hardest. According to Mr Stephan Miles-Brown at the estate agents, Knight Frank and Rutley, prices are now about the same as they were in 1987 but "sales velocity must have dropped 30% since a year ago. People whose cash flow was based on selling 70 units a year, and who are selling 40 units instead, have got real problems." Building programmes have slowed; some developers who bought land two years ago have left their sites empty.

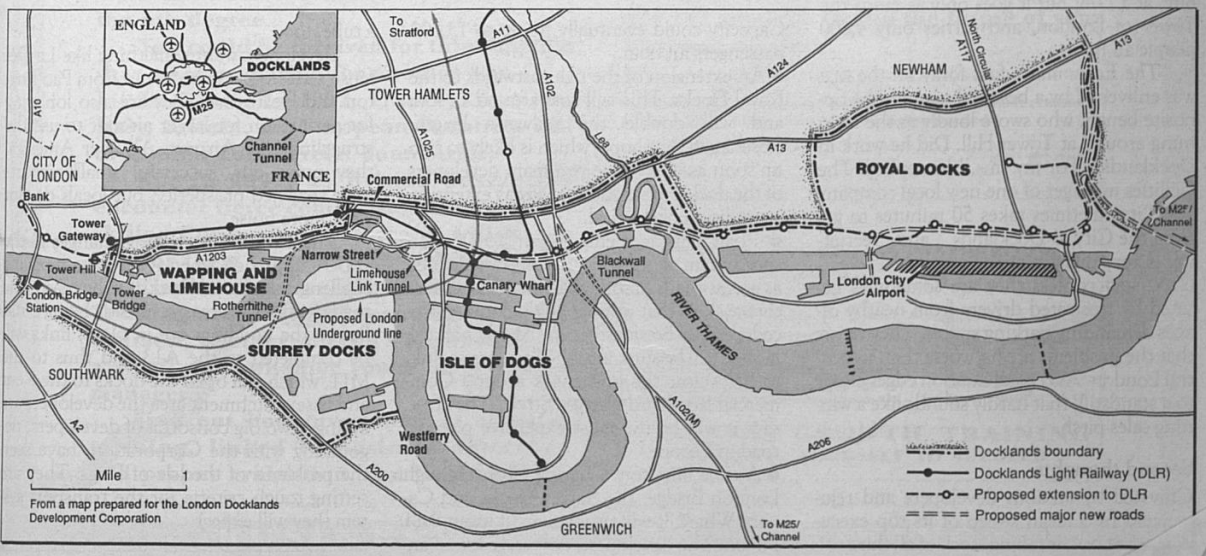
Commercial-property rents for top-quality space have been stuck at £20 a square foot since late last year. Developers have to find tenants: without them, the investors who buy their finished buildings cannot claim tax allowances. So clever deals are proliferating: six-month rent-free periods, free fittings. Lower-quality space goes for as little as £15.

The property blues in Docklands are more than just a reflection of high interest rates. They have their roots in the government's approach to reviving the area. As a planning phenomenon, Docklands stands in stark contrast to Paris's new commercial centre at La Défense. The French government first built roads and the fast new RER railway to connect the development to the rest of Paris and to Charles de Gaulle airport; then it fed the land slowly onto the market.

Docklands was wrenched from the anti-capitalist grip of three left-wing local authorities. The government quickly handed over planning powers to the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC), which let the market in to slice up the land. It has not been cheap: until April 1992 the Isle of Dogs enterprise zone gives tax holidays (which, on the basis of development committed, will amount to around £1.5 billion) and rates holidays (now running at around £24m a year). But direct state investment has been small.

The hands-off approach has generated astonishing activity. Nearly £7 billion-worth of private-sector investment has been committed—a remarkable feat, given the apparent futility of every improvement scheme considered by the local authorities in the 1970s. Some 15,000 houses have been built; 20m square feet of office and industrial space are completed or under construction, with another 15m committed. La Défense took 30 years from conception to completion. Docklands has done it in nine.

But such helter-skelter progress has brought its own problems, which are now showing up. The subsidies that heightened developers' enthusiasm for the place have glutted the market with property, at a time when there are starting to be some empty offices in central London. Next year another 13m square feet are due to be completed, 5m of them in Docklands. The area is being affected partly because the approach of the cut-off date for special rate relief and capital allowances—April 1992—is naturally reducing its attractions. But there is also much nervousness about whether Docklands can really compete, as it aspires to, for City finance houses, the West End's shoppers and eaters-out, and the residents of posh Fulham and Hampstead. That depends partly on as-



pects of development which the LDDC has until recently ignored. Above all, it depends on transport.

Caught in a jam

La Défense, through the infrastructure built for it, has improved Paris's whole transport system. When Mrs Thatcher visited Docklands on June 19th she went by river because, as one LDDC official ruefully admitted,"it's the only way you can guarantee getting here on time". Mr Michael Dennis of Olympia & York—the developer behind Canary Wharf, Docklands' single biggest project—sees the failure of the LDDC to provide transport as characteristic not so much of any political ideology as of an inherently British lack of Napoleonic vision, and the state of the economy in the early 1980s. "If the LDDC had put in a proposal for infrastructure along the lines of La Defense," he says, "no British government would have given it to them at that time."

The docks' transport system was geared to carrying goods, not people. There were just about enough roads for the lorries, but no public transport. The Isle of Dogs (see map on previous page), sticking out into the river like a thumb, has one road across its north: Commercial Road, which turns into the East India Dock Road. It has Westferry Road around its edge, and some narrow tracks running to the wharves.

The LDDC has contributed only one road through the Isle of Dogs and one new transit system: the Docklands Light Railway (DLR). The road, as might befit an industrial estate, is a two-lane private affair, with private-sector traffic wardens in white caps hired by the LDDC from a firm called Securiguard to keep motorists in order and show lost visitors the way. The DLR, known affectionately or abusively as the Toytown Railway, might initially have seemed a good buy, at £77m; but it goes only as far as the Tower of London, and carries only 4,000 people an hour.

The Economist's first foray on the DLR was enlivened by a besuited man on the opposite bench, who swore loudly as the train hung around at Tower Hill. Did he work in Docklands? "For my sins," he replied. The facilities manager of one new local company says "it sometimes takes 50 minutes to get from the City to Docklands", and "recruiting is very difficult at the secretarial level". LDDC staff confess they are sometimes berated by frustrated drivers from nearby offices demanding parking spaces. They retort that the problems are no worse than in central London. As central London edges closer to a standstill, that hardly sounds like a winning sales pitch.

Second thoughts

Chivvied by anxious developers and rejuvenated by a clean sweep of its top executives, the LDDC is taking stock of all this criticism. Central government is relaxing its stand against a closer involvement. So after eight years of directing growth from the sidelines, the LDDC now finds itself increasingly in the business of channelling heavy public investment.

The LDDC got £25m from the government in 1982. This year it is getting £177m; with its income from land sales, it will have a budget of £350m—of which 74% is to be spent on new infrastructure. It is planning to provide the area with roads, trains, schools, doctors, housing for the poor and training. Some of the schemes under study or construction include:

- An extension of the DLR to Bank station. Paid for jointly by the Department of Transport and Olympia & York, it will cost £156m and is scheduled to open by the end of next year.
- Extended DLR platforms for longer trains. Capacity could eventually be up to 13,600 passengers an hour.
- An extension of the DLR eastwards to the Royal Docks. This will cost around £140m and will double the railway's length. Rosehaugh Stanhope, which is likely to sign up soon as one of the two main developers of the docks, has made the railway extension a condition of the deal.
- Road improvements worth £550m. To speed them along, the additions are defined as access roads (although some are near-motorways), so that normal public-inquiry procedures can be sidestepped. Nearly half the money will be sunk into the Limehouse link, to help clear the bottleneck around Commercial Road and Narrow Street. The LDDC says it will be the most expensive piece of road in Europe.
- A tube line from Charing Cross through London Bridge, the Surrey Docks and Canary Wharf. It will probably cost around £1 billion. The developers, desperate for an announcement, say the place needs one; the government will not commit itself until it has squeezed as large a contribution as possible out of the private sector. A decision to go ahead seems likely within weeks.

But decisions do not shift earth. Too often, they are a prelude to more delays. Seven months ago the LDDC said that the building of the Limehouse link would start in early 1989. The contract has not yet been awarded, and building is now expected to start in September. Tunnelling for the DLR's extension to Bank has posed a threat to water and gas mains; *Construction News* reports that work could be delayed by ten months. Anyway, the DLR will not do much to carry the 100,000-odd workers who are likely to occupy the office space in the Isle of Dogs. In the long run the tube will help; a tube, though necessary to the area's success is not sufficient to guarantee it. Brixton has a tube, too.

The Docklands Light Railway casts its shadow on the waters

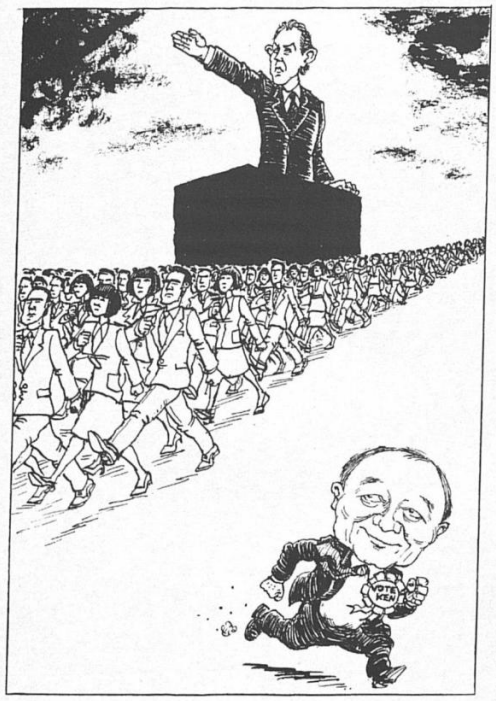
Developers want something like La Défense's RER to bring people in from Paddington and Heathrow. They are also lobbying for permission for larger aircraft to use the struggling City Airport. All over America, they point out, successful small airports have spawned prosperity; but locals do not want more noise.

There will be interesting changes in the LDDC's approach when it faces its next big challenge, the Royal Docks further east. The roads within the area are already being built. Before the buildings are in place, links will be completed to the A13 and thus to the M11, which will open the docks to the Kent and Essex catchment area the developers are eyeing. Two big consortia of developers, negotiating with the Corporation, have seen the problems of the Isle of Dogs. They are setting tough criteria for the transport system they will expect.

BAGEHOT

An independence beyond their ken

HE'S a son-of-a-bitch; and he's not even our son-of-a-bitch. That, in a nutshell, is how the people at the top of New Labour feel about Ken Livingstone, the man who would be London's mayor and who seems now to be presenting Tony Blair with his most awkward political challenge since the party swept all before it in the general election of 1997. In a week that should have been dominated by good news from the government—a chance of peace (again) in Northern Ireland, a Queen's Speech groaning with yet more plans to modernise Britain—much of Britain and all of London were hypnotised by the prime minister's increasingly desperate attempts to prevent one particular Labour MP from becoming the city's first-ever elected mayor. The most fascinating thing of all is that a governing party known for ruthless political control has in this battle shot itself not only in the foot but also in the knee, groin, head and—many are beginning to say—heart as well.



What a waste. For the Labour Party, giving London its own mayor and government was never intended as just another bit of devolution to fit into the constitutional puzzle along with the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament. London devolution was part of Labour's final revenge against Lady Thatcher, the famous control freak who abolished the Greater London Council when its troublemaking Labour leader had the temerity to oppose her efforts to modernise Britain in the 1980s. London's experiment with an elected mayor was supposed to be a model that other cities might follow, a way to energise the country's moribund local authorities and revive a taste for local democracy.

It was a fine idea, except for one detail. The troublemaker whose job Lady Thatcher abolished did not just disappear. Mr Livingstone remained in politics, became a celebrity, was never given a job in Blairdom, is bored as a backbencher, and would now like the nearest thing to his old job back again. Through carelessness or incompetence, Mr Blair let it be known that he intended by hook or by crook to stop Mr Livingstone becoming mayor. But the prime minister does not seem to have worked out early enough how he was going to do this.

In recent weeks, voters have watched with mounting incredulity a sequence of ever more brazen, ever more desperate and ever more counter-productive attempts to do so. First came a frantic search for a more popular candidate. Frank Dobson, who had spent months telling anyone who would listen how happy he was being health secretary, "chose" abruptly a few weeks ago to resign from the cabinet and run against Mr Livingstone instead. Just in case Mr Dobson's own charms failed to overwhelm enough members of London's Labour Party, party managers then announced that the choice of their candidate would not be left to London members but would be put instead in the hands of an electoral college including trade unions and MPs as well. When it looked as if a ballot rigged this way might still deliver the nomination to Mr Livingstone, they produced another idea: before making it on to the party short-list, every candidate would have to prove his loyalty in front of a committee of party grandees.

Until this week, Mr Livingstone had brushed aside all these manoeuvres with an infuriating insouciance. He is the Cheshire cat whose grin never fades, a brilliant televisual politician whose ready wit unerringly turns his opponents' strength against them. When reporters asked him whether he could demonstrate his loyalty to party inquisitors, he offered to swear on the bones of a saint, pull a sword out of a stone—whatever was demanded of him. This made it all the more preposterous when Clive Soley, MP, the chief inquisitor and a former probation officer, emerged after the loyalty interview to announce grimly that Mr Livingstone had failed to provide satisfaction on some points and would therefore be summoned for a second interview. In particular, Mr Livingstone opposes the party's official policy of pulling investment into London's underground system by means of a public-private partnership—"partial privatisation", as Mr Livingstone insists on calling it. He wants to raise the needed money by issuing bonds instead.

This is not a bad idea. But it betrays an independence of mind that has scandalised the party's hierarchy. Is Mr Livingstone willing to abide by party policy or not, its staff officers demand? To which the would-be candidate meekly replies that the man seeking election as the capital's mayor might expect some say over the manifesto on which he will fight. After his second (four-hour) inquisition of the week, he seemed to have won his case.

Whatever happens next, Mr Blair's management of the mayor's election has already become an otherwise sure-footed prime minister's biggest mistake to date. Labour's desperate gerrymandering makes the Conservatives' simple decision to let their own London members decide whether they wanted the roguish Lord Archer as their candidate look admirable by comparison. Worse still, Mr Blair has made this sort of mistake twice. The prime minister's mysterious aversion to Rhodri Morgan, the most popular candidate to lead the party in Wales's new Assembly, persuaded many Labour supporters last May to abstain or vote for the nationalist Plaid Cymru opposition instead.

Mr Blair's aversion to Mr Livingstone is less mysterious. The former GLC leader is an unpredictable loner and a self-appointed spokesman for the Old Labour values that many party members accuse New Labour of abandoning. As the capital's elected mayor, he would probably become a thorn in Mr Blair's side—arguably even the most influential Labour politician apart from Mr Blair himself. It would seem inconceivable to any prime minister that such a man should be given such a job just because he was a Labour MP and London's voters wanted him to do it. Inconceivable, that is, except to a prime minister who really believed in the devolution of power, the revival of local democracy and all the rest.