All "Kens" to all men. Ken the chameleon : reinvention and representation. From the GLC to the GLA

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Ken Livingstone's last two official biographies speak volumes about the sort of politician he comes across as being. John Carvel's title[1] is slightly ambiguous and can be interpreted in a variety of ways: *Turn Again Livingstone* suggests that the one time leader of the Greater London Council (GLC) and twice elected mayor of London shows great skill in steering himself out of any tight corners he gets trapped in. Or, that he is the epitome of the cunning opportunist, constantly lying in wait to seize power. Or even that he has been able to adapt his personal style of politics and municipal socialism to fit the mood of the times. The title of Andrew Hosken's more recent biography[2] strikes a slightly different note: by insisting on the *Ups and Downs* of Ken Livingstone's career, the author stresses his ability to constantly bounce back often when the odds against him have been stacked up high. Whatever, there is no denying that despite the flak, Livingstone has always seemed to be able to reinvent himself and his defeat in the third mayoral election of 2008 has by no means sounded his political death knell. There is indeed a chance that Livingstone might take part in the 2012 Olympic Games opening ceremony as mayor elect rather than just another VIP.[3]

There is no denying that Livingstone has always had a special relationship with the media and his antics and taste for provocation have constantly enabled him to be make the headlines throughout the world. Livingstone is neither rich nor famous and it seems as if he has come to expect therefore, that his reputation, image and career should largely depend on the way he plays to the gallery. To this end, it is how he has been represented that has enabled Livingstone to reinvent himself on countless occasions. He would possibly like the image of "Red" Ken to be the one that sticks, "red" as in revolutionary, always the one to be up in arms about some noble cause. Yet, as it turns out, over time Livingstone's colours have perhaps faded and the mast on which they were initially nailed is less high. Playing too many fields at the same time meant that Livingstone somehow lost his cuddly image of being "our Ken" for Londoners. It was replaced by the vote losing title of "Blair's mayor", associating Livingstone with the overall disappointment surrounding New Labour's political project.

This article will look at the different ways in which Livingstone has been represented in and by the media. It will emphasise his uncanny ability to fall from a

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[1] John CARVEL, *Turn Again Livingstone*. London: Profile Books, 1999.
[2] Andrew HOSKEN, *Ken : the Ups and Downs of Ken Livingstone*. London: Arcadia Books, 2008.
[3] Timothy WHITTON, *Ken « le rouge » et la Mairie de Londres. Du Greater London Council à la Greater London Authority*, Paris: l'Harmattan, 2010.

peak of popularity into a trough of opprobrium only to spring back equally as quickly. His popularity has always stemmed from his determination to speak his mind. In so doing, there is no doubt that he contributed to giving the GLC and then the GLA a sense of identity. In the first case, it just happened that Livingstone was not on the same wavelength as the government or Fleet Street and to a certain extent this animosity was maintained during his time as first mayor of London.

Early days

Livingstone's first real brush with the press came on May 8th, 1981 when after a caucus vote he was chosen to lead the new Labour dominated Greater London Council. On hearing the news that the labour councillors had campaigned behind the more rightwing Andrew McIntosh but had then let the extreme left-winger Livingstone become leader, the Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher, immediately expressed her scorn for this strategy by declaring that the GLC was about to *impose upon this nation a tyranny which the peoples of Eastern Europe yearn to cast aside*.[4] The press went to town over this statement and immediately Livingstone was branded "Red Ken" a sobriquet that was to become as permanent as the Iron Lady's loathing of him.[5] At first it represented Livingstone as the revolutionary who had taken over the GLC by force but little did the press know that it was also to symbolise a declaration of war between the conservative governments and the government of London. The leader of the GLC understood immediately that the image of "Red Ken" would enable him and his friends at the GLC to be constantly in the limelight, thereby giving them and their cause immense publicity and what is more, absolutely free of charge.

After the conservative win in 1979, the Labour Party was in such disarray that Her Majesty's Opposition was too feeble to stop the Thatcher juggernaut. County Hall, on the other hand, stood just a few hundred yards away across the Thames and the thirty-six year old Livingstone, who had given up on most of the perks afforded to administrators of his status, boldly claimed that the GLC would oppose the Thatcher "regime".[6] In almost the same breath, Livingstone stated that the police were racist, the army dangerous and that the IRA could be considered as freedom fighters. For the time being these declarations were looked on with a form of bemused amusement by public opinion and even when he declined an invitation to go to Charles and Diana's wedding declaring that he hadn't been elected to go to Royal Weddings, people didn't know whether to laugh or cry.[7]

What the press had quite unwittingly done by promoting the idea that the new GLC leader was a revolutionary, was to compound his meteoric climb to fame. Before May 1981, Livingstone, the son of a window cleaner, had been a hospital laboratory technician until devoting himself full-time to his job of local labour councillor. From this political oblivion, he now found himself in charge of the multi million pound

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[4] Discours de Mme Thatcher prononcé lors de la *Scottish Conservative Conference*, le 8 mai 1981 à Perth City Hall.

[5] *London's new chief cuts fares, boosts IRA and Outrages Establishment*, The Associated Press, September 13, 1981.

[6] Including a chauffeur driven limousine. This step was to cast Livingstone as a defender of public transport.

[7] The "wedding of the century" took place on July 29th 1981. Livingstone released black balloons over London on the same day.

budget of a capital city and in order to promote his new working class style of politics was prepared to attract and harness the full attention of the media. Red Ken's honeymoon with public opinion was nonetheless to be short lived and by the end of August 1981, his constant refusals to condemn the terrorist acts in Northern Ireland meant that Fleet Street unleashed its full power on him. Gone were affable references to the almost glamorous revolutionary leader of the GLC, the "cheeky chappy" who was going to defend the "people" of London from Thatcher's neo-liberalism. Livingstone was portrayed as being a clown, irresponsible and a "damn fool" for not condemning the IRA bombers, especially in the wake of the horrific Chelsea barracks' attack on 10 October.[8] Red Ken had suddenly become "the most odious man in Britain".[9] What is more, his antics were supposedly bringing the whole Labour Party into disrepute which of course was music to the ears of the fast rising SDP.[10] Basically, Livingstone had quickly come to represent the unacceptable face of socialism and his media friendly "rent-a-quote" style was causing substantial damage to an already strife stricken Labour Party. Livingstone was beginning to epitomise the "loony left" that in the long term would scupper the Labour party's ability to win any of the next four General Elections until the scourge organised by the modernisers and pursued relentlessly by Tony Blair.

Yet Livingstone's relationship with the media was to prove paramount in increasing his political strength and subsequent popularity. The truth of the matter was that he was quite simply the most colourful politician around and could alone substantially boost a programme's ratings. Invitations to chat shows also meant that he was constantly given a forum to articulately explain his points of view and justify his standpoints and decisions. Even if people didn't support his policies, they liked his style, colourful language, his outspokenness and ability to be self deprecating: they made such a change from the run of the mill politicians and their legendary sense of being careful about everything they said. Livingstone on the other hand, was fast becoming a media star, projecting a popular image of himself and the Labour party at the GLC. At the same time, he was defending policies that were popular too. "Ken" was quite simply the best show in town.

From anti-establishment to anti Thatcher

Livingstone's first major foray onto the stage of national politics had firmly established his "red" Ken reputation to the extent that some newspapers employed journalists to follow him around on a permanent basis. Later on, Livingstone was to fully acknowledge the fact that although many people put this down to his lack of experience, his main aim was to get as much publicity for the GLC's socialist policies as possible.[11] The problem was that the intense media coverage of his antics had begun to undermine the GLC leader's popular appeal and portray him as being a

[8] Front page of *The Sun*, 13 October 1981.
[9] *Ibid*. Livingstone was subsequently attacked in the street on his way to work and sprayed with red paint.
[10] Livingstone was possibly the target for flak initially aimed at Tony Benn and his claim to become the deputy leader of the Labour Party. Benn had fallen ill and attention was perhaps turned to the GLC leader.
[11] John CARVEL., *op. cit.*, p. 103.

"menace to stability in public life".[12] The Labour Party was feeling the side effects of this and the GLC was being accused of dealing with matters that had very little to do with their electoral mandate. In this respect, the first major financial clash between the GLC and the government was to shift the focus of public opinion's vision of Livingstone and enable him to firmly establish his image of being an anti Thatcher force.

Initial confrontation basically came from the fact that Michael Heseltine, secretary of State for the environment and one of the rising stars of the "dry" conservatives, had a major role to play in the reduction of public spending, a key component of the government's monetarist agenda. One of the GLC Labour party's election promises had been to cut transport fares by 25%, which they did on October 1st. This was to be funded by a small rise in local tax but little did the Labour faction of the GLC know initially that this decision did not fit in with Heseltine's bid to cap local government spending in his overall desire to meet the governments public spending cuts. But even if both parties were capable of envisaging confrontation, neither of them had actually thought that the GLC's rate cutting might be quite simply illegal. As it happened, members of Bromley council decided to challenge the GLC's decision to cut fares suggesting that their rate payers would have to accept a rise that given their geographic position in London, would be of little interest to them. Their legal quibble was that councils had to act "reasonably" and they could not see why their ratepayers should fund a system designed to reduce fares in central London where cheap travelling would benefit above all richer Londoners from the stockbroker belt and tourists from abroad. What must be underlined here is that Livingstone's reputation was largely responsible for the Bromley councillors' belligerency because they believed that it would influence the courts in coming down on their side by declaring the rate rise "unreasonable". In other words, it was thought that Livingstone's leadership of the GLC was being publicised in such a way as to influence even the supposedly impartial courts of law.

"Fares Fair" was duly condemned on November 10th by the Law Lords who stated that the GLC had no right to create such a deficit in public transport in London albeit in the interests of Londoners. After the decision had been handed down, one of the Law Lords, Lord Watkins, very aptly emphasised the role that Livingstone had played in the decision to declare the GLC's action unlawful:

> *Those who come newly to govern people and who act in haste in wielding power to which they are unaccustomed would do well to heed the words of Gladstone. He knew a great deal about power, and in 1890 he said of it: 'The true test of a man, the test of a class, the true test of a people is power. It is when power is given into their hands that the trial comes'.*[13]

To add insult to injury, Livingstone's offer to attend court hearings and explain the GLC's case, was turned down by even his own barristers. In his own words, "*but as in the previous hearings my offer was politely declined on the grounds that my presence*

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[12] *The Sun*, 23 July 1981.
[13] Quoted from Ken LIVINGSTONE, *If Voting Changed Anything They'd Abolish It*, London: Collins, 1987, pp. 194-5.

might be offensive and inflammatory to the judges, thus prejudicing them against our case".[14] Livingstone was indeed managing to attract a great deal of publicity to the GLC's actions but his incessant provocation was not only undermining its credibility but also turning the pillars of the establishment against it.

The decision taken by Lords Denning, Oliver and Watkins was confirmed on appeal on December 17th and the Conservatives immediately seized the opportunity to declare that the GLC was being run by an incompetent bunch of left-wing radicals bent on undermining Mrs Thatcher's governments rather than defending the interests of Londoners. In a relatively short lapse of time, the GLC was aptly portrayed – even abroad[15] - as being in the hands of the "loony left". To a certain extent they were successful because despite Livingstone's desperate attempts to explain just how central government was thwarting local government's financial leeway, it was the Trotskyist inspired brand of municipal socialism that was coming to characterise the GLC – and ultimately lead to its downfall. Perhaps the greatest symbol of the GLC's outright provocation was the erection, in February 1982, of huge signs on the roof of County Hall showing the latest unemployment figures.[16]

It was of course in the Conservatives' interest to see to it that in Londoners' minds, the GLC should be represented as being a hot spot of profligacy where anyone or anything remotely marginal was welcomed with open arms. GLC grants to the most obscure groups were fully documented in the press, with "Babes against the Bomb" being undoubtedly the most exotic and thus the most famous.[17] The idea was to convince the public that London deserved a well oiled team of accountants to balance the books rather than Livingstone and his cronies bent on promoting the interests of women's groups, ethnic minorities, gays and other campaigners against the white male heterosexual order in society. As it happened, tactics were to rapidly change as abolition of the metropolitan councils became a possible solution. To prevent the bird from singing, the answer was to cut down the tree rather than the branch where he was perched.

Abolition

Livingstone had lost his legal battle to reduce travel fares in London but had emerged as the champion of yet another popular cause. "Red" Ken was rapidly becoming "our" Ken as Londoners would often fondly refer to him. Too often for central government who felt that public opinion was beginning to represent "Ken" as being the natural leader of London. Despite their attempts to represent him as *persona non grata* within the capital, Livingstone seemed to be weathering the storm and in many ways was stronger after the Fares Fair episode than ever before. But the government's campaign to end the GLC's life was to enable him to reinvent himself again, not only as the champion of London, but of democracy itself. This time round

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[14] *Ibid.*, p. 196.
[15] "Red Ken's Moves Stir London Storm", *The Gobe and Mail* (Canada), 3 December 1981.
[16] These signs were clearly visible from the balcony of Mrs Thatcher's office and apparently many a foreign leader looked inquisitively at them. Legend has it that François Mitterrand was the only dignitary to have asked explicitly what the figures meant.
[17] A group of mothers who protested against the government's nuclear weapons' policy and who came to rallies with their children received a £800 grant from the GLC in February 1983.

though, Livingstone was fighting for survival which was to require a completely different brand of showmanship.

The Conservative Party's 1979 manifesto contained nothing about the Metropolitan Councils but in 1983, they were part of the list of the "enemy from within". The manifesto claimed quite clearly that it was time to get rid of them:

> [t]*he Metropolitan Councils and the Greater London Council have been shown to be a wasteful and unnecessary tier of government. We shall abolish them and return most of their functions to the boroughs and districts. Services which need to be administered over a wider area - such as police and fire, and education in inner London - will be run by joint boards of borough or district representatives.*[18]

This pledge was repeated in October in a White Paper entitled *Streamlining the Cities*.[19]

But it was at this point that the Conservatives made a fatal mistake. Elections to renew the Councils were due in April 1985 and this date would have provided the ideal opportunity to get rid of the Metropolitan Councils. Yet despite its hostility towards the councils, the government felt that abolition at such an early date would have meant leaving too many ongoing projects in the lurch and so decided to maintain the initial plan to get rid of them on April 1st 1986. To achieve abolition by this date, another scheme was hatched and entailed using legislation to do away with the April 1985 elections. In theory, this would mean appointing officials – borough councillors in the case of the GLC - to run the Metropolitan Councils for the remaining year.[20] These people would be hand picked and would make sure that abolition took place as smoothly as possible and above all without dilapidating public money. As far as the GLC was concerned this strategy was designed to prevent Livingstone and his friends from using the local elections as a referendum against abolition while handing the running of the capital over to officials from the mostly conservative led boroughs for the last remaining year. Then, by generously funding the London boroughs after abolition, the Conservative government thought it could easily convince Londoners that abolition had been a wise decision. It must be said that at this point in time, the Conservatives were formidable politically speaking and their main adversaries had been all but crushed. They possibly felt too secure in the belief that the abolition of the Councils was a foregone conclusion but they had vastly underestimated the fact that their solution for this "gap" year was going to really set the cat amongst the pigeons.

Mrs Thatcher's government was finding it relatively easy to peddle the image of the GLC as a layer of government next to useless and what is more, staffed by "loonies" who spent most of their time dealing with business that did not concern them in the slightest. Livingstone's meddling in the Northern Ireland question was a case in point, especially when he invited Sinn Féin members to County Hall and

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[18] http://www.conservative-party.net/manifestos/1983/1983-conservative-manifesto.shtml

[19] Command Paper 9063, HMSO, 1983.

[20] This choice was severely criticised by Edward Heath who despite supporting abolition for the GLC, found it outrageous that his party should try to replace a democratically elected body by an indirectly appointed one. See *Hansard*, 11 April 1984, cols. 402-484.

supported the "Troops Out" movement. The message to public opinion was that the everyday preoccupations of Londoners such as housing, policing, social services and refuse collection were already being dealt with by other authorities so that getting rid of the GLC would have very little impact on them. But the truth of the matter is that whether the government's condemnation of the GLC was legitimate or not, under Livingstone's command it had gradually become an efficient fighting machine in its attempts to oppose Thatcherism. Livingstone was constantly available for the press and GLC officials had become dab hands in developing propaganda that was friendly to their cause. This time round, however, it was democracy itself that the GLC would be defending in its last ditch battle for survival in which Livingstone was to excel. In the words of Andrew Hosken:

> [b]*ut Livingstone has been always at his best fighting against the odds and he managed to outmanoeuvre the government through one of the most brilliant political campaigns seen in post-war Britain. It did not come cheap but he succeeded in humiliating a powerful government machine and a seemingly omnipotent prime minister – not for the last time.*[21]

Basically it did not matter that much what the GLC said and did during the campaign against abolition given the conservative majority in Parliament. Legislation was going to go through by hook or by crook: what really mattered was the impact this campaign was going to have on people's careers, especially Livingstone's. In order to establish his future as a key player within the Labour Party, Livingstone had to represent himself as being prepared to fight a battle as if he could win the war even though he knew full well that chances of success were very slim. He had to for his own sake as much as for the GLC's.

The fight to defend the GLC in the name of democracy soon found an ideal representation with the slogan: *Say No to No Say*. The façade of County Hall was the ideal place to placard this message and Livingstone's team set about explaining to public opinion that London would soon be the only European capital without a central authority. To achieve this, the GLC was everywhere, stickers on dustbins, traffic lights, fire stations and engines, rubbish dumps and even behind the goalposts during an away football match between Rumania and England. Gradually the GLC was opening Londoners' eyes to the fact that after abolition, London wide affairs would be run by faceless bureaucrats: "[b]*y awakening public antipathy towards the Whitehall bureaucracy, the campaign contrived to make people believe that the GLC was local, accessible, friendly and democratic*".[22] Livingstone too was particularly keen to be represented in exactly the same way because the end of the GLC meant a return for him into political oblivion.

The GLC's campaign worked quite well and gradually the tide was turning in its favour: polls were beginning to show that a majority of Londoners did not think abolition was a good idea.[23] Also, in a relatively short time Livingstone had managed

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[21] Andrew HOSKEN, *op. cit.*, pp. 193-194.
[22] John Carvel, *op. cit.*, p. 173.
[23] See Andrew FORRESTER *et al.*, *Beyond our Ken, a Guide to the Battle for London*, London, Fourth Estate Ltd., 1985, p. 80.

to reinvent himself and from "the most odious man in Britain", was being referred to as "our Ken" by Londoners and "cuddly Ken" by the media. "Our" because for once, even people who had good reason to dislike Livingstone were coming round to the idea that this time round he was actually defending something important for London, a far cry from his "lesbian/IRA" approach to most causes. The GLC had managed to convince Londoners that this whole issue was about democracy, not about Livingstone. And "cuddly" because he was every chat show and television presenter's dream; with Livingstone on the agenda, ratings went through the ceiling and attendances at public meetings had never been better. Livingstone was the crowd puller of the times and stopped at nothing to attract the public's attention to the GLC's achievements[24].

And this is precisely what he managed to do when after a rough ride in the Commons[25], the government's legislation to replace the council's elected members by appointed borough councillors was defeated in the Lords: the GLC pulled out all the stops to make sure that enough peers were available in order to vote against the Paving Bill[26] on 28 June 1984 and force the government to backtrack. What had particularly got the Lords' goat was the fact that the government considered the abolition of the Metropolitan Councils as a *fait accompli*: it rather naively believed that legislation to appoint officials to run the councils for the last year could be voted before the final legislation concerning abolition. Egged on by Livingstone and his well briefed team at the GLC, the Lords were astounded at such arrogance and were quick to question what would happen should abolition be refused and the GLC left in the hands of officials appointed by Parliament. Given the parliamentary agenda, Patrick Jenkin, Secretary of State for the Environment who was responsible for the legislation had no other choice but to recommend that the current GLC councillors' mandate be prolonged by one year taking them up to the planned date of abolition on April 1st 1986. Time was indeed running short and despite her loathing of Livingstone, the prime minister could but agree. The Local Government Bill was duly amended and approved by Parliament.

Following their refusal to adopt the Bill, a new banner floated from the top of County Hall expressing the GLC's thanks to the Lords for saving democracy.[27]Livingstone instantly became a real folk hero: the "people's Ken" had successfully led the modest GLC to a form of victory over the Thatcher juggernaut. Little did anybody know that fifteen years later his struggle to defend democracy would be repeated, but this time round, he was to take on his own party.

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[24] Even so, some of Livingstone's political acquaintances were aghast that he should bow so low to the Queen when she opened the Thames Barrier. "The GLC; Ken and Queen turn the tide", *The Economist*, 12 May 1984.

[25] Despite opposition even within the ranks of the Conservatives (see note 21), the government majority and the efficiency of the Whips were such that there was little stopping the Commons' approving the legislation.

[26] Called so because it was supposed to "pave the way" to abolition of the Metropolitan Councils. The real name was "Local Government Bill".

[27] This message was hammered home even further on 6 March 1985 when the GLC celebrated « Democracy Day » in support of the miners' strike and to denounce the government's rate capping campaign.

From cuddly Ken to citizen Ken

The GLC was duly abolished as planned but not before it had used its final year to empty its coffers giving preferential treatment, as was to be expected, to a multitude of colourful associations and Labour controlled boroughs. Subsequently, the government of London was gradually bequeathed to a myriad of committees and organisations, not to mention the boroughs themselves of course.[28] Yet it soon became apparent that even though London had a lot of government, it lacked a central body capable of providing trans borough coordination. Despite this, having spent so much energy on getting rid of the GLC, the Conservatives showed no interest whatsoever in reinstating any sort of central authority. On the contrary, after their fourth election defeat in 1992, the Labour Party began to publicly promote the idea of creating a new form of central government in London. At first, the subject was broached with great precaution given that any mention of a central authority would inevitably remind people of the militant GLC and the darkest hours of the Labour Party. Yet as Labour firmly established itself as a party of government, the commitment became clearer.[29]

Meanwhile, Ken Livingstone was elected MP for Brent East on 11 June 1987 and in September became a member of the NEC, a seat he retained for two years. It was only when he lost it and returned to relative political oblivion that he once again became attractive for advertisers and the media, selling 'Red' Leicester cheese, while appearing regularly on the popular television quiz *Have I Got News for You*.[30] He also appeared twice on stage with the pop group Blur to sing Ernold Same whilst becoming friendly with gossip columnists and glossy magazine editors.[31] This meant Livingstone's return to his former persona of "cuddly Ken". But, what must not be forgotten is that keeping a high profile was the only way for him to remain firmly in the public eye, while at the same time enabling him to supplement his income.[32] Both were to prove vital when the crunch decision came to run as an independent in the first mayoral elections in 2000. "Crunch" because while everything was done in order to block Livingstone, he would by far have preferred to be the Labour Party's candidate. But the Millbank Tendency had deemed otherwise.

The idea to create the new Greater London Authority (GLA) was approved by referendum on 7 May 1998[33] and already speculation about the future candidates was

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[28] For a full diagram see Edward WOOD, *The Greater London Authority Bill : a Mayor and Assembly for London*, House of Commons, Research Paper 98/115, December 1998, p. 14, http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp98/rp98-115.pdf . Andrew HASKEN, *op cit.*, p. 288, talks about "272 appointed bodies".

[29] Voir Timothy WHITTON « La Mairie de Londres : l'exception qui confirme la règle », *in*, Gilles LEYDIER (dir. de publication), *Les Services publics britanniques*, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2004, pp. 266-267.

[30] Later on, Boris Johnson would also become a celebrity on this particular show.

[31] For Livingstone's stage appearances with Blur see http//www.youtube.com/watch?v=IpOEE_bMDS4&feature=related

[32] "There's no business like show business – except politics. Tony will do his best to look surprised as he throws his arms round a bearded Yorkshireman", *The Independent*, 11 November 1999.

[33] Timothy WHITTON, « La Pratique référendaire et la Mairie de Londres », Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique, Hors série n°2, 2009, pp. 67-85.

rife. The name Ken Livingstone was on everyone's lips but initially the man himself did not seem that enthusiastic about it.[34] It was when he realised that Blair was not going to give him a government position and that come what may, New Labour would never endorse his candidacy to run for mayor, that Livingstone took the plunge.[35] And once again, it was in the name of democracy. Livingstone used all the contacts he had made by being "cuddly" Ken to show public opinion that he had been forced to act alone. On 6 March 2000, he made his case quite clear in the Evening Standard:

> *I have been forced to choose between the party I love and upholding the democratic rights of Londoners. I have therefore concluded that defence of the principle of London's rights to govern itself requires that I stand as an independent candidate for London mayor on May 4th*.

This was followed up by a very clear manifesto commitment (p.1) to protect the democratic rights of Londoners: "*I am standing as an independent candidate because I believe the job of the Mayor will be to stand up for London. If candidates and policies can be imposed centrally then devolution will mean nothing*".

Livingstone was duly excluded from the Labour Party for a period of five years and immediately launched his "purple bus" campaign. The idea was to represent Livingstone as being the ideal choice to teach the Millbank spin doctors a good lesson. Thus, the purple "Hoot for Ken" bus with "Ken4London" and "Vote4Ken" emblazoned on the side along with its sophisticated sound system and dancers drove around London and soon became a familiar sight for Londoners. Citizen Ken spoke to them through a loudspeaker about saving the underground from privatisation and resisting the Millbank tendency. He also made ridiculous election promises emphasising the extent to which he was at odds with New Labour's party machine:

> *This is Ken Livingstone, your Labour candidate* [ironic pause]. *..sorry, 30 years of habit.*
>
> *This is Ken Livingstone, your regular cheeky chappy. If you vote for me the weather will improve dramatically.*[36]

It was a way of connecting with Londoners, a far cry from the traditional methods used by the party machines. This strategy worked like a dream and on 4 May 2000, citizen Ken, the David who had taken on the New Labour Goliath was elected mayor of London. His first words as the third man of England will go down in history: "*As I was saying before I was rudely interrupted 14 years ago*…".

Cockney Ken

Livingstone's pledge to stand up for the rights of Londoners was to occupy the best part of his first mandate. His efforts were nonetheless slightly marred by the decision to stop people feeding pigeons on Trafalgar Square because they had become a health

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[34] *Hansard*, 6 juin 1997, col. 717.

[35] Timothy WHITTON, "'Nightmayor at City Hall' : les coulisses d'une investiture, d'une élection et d'une réélection à Londres", *in*, Susan TROUVE-FINDING, *Les Coulisses du pouvoir*, Observatoire de la Société Britannique, n°6, juin 2008, pp. 197-225.

[36] Mark d'ARCY & Rory MACLEAN, *Nightmare, the Race to Become London's Mayor*, London: Politicos, 2000, p. 217.

hazard.[37] The press went to town over this issue and published pictures of starving pigeons staggering around Trafalgar Square, a far cry from the stereotype picture postcard of children running amidst a flurry of healthy birds. For a time, "red" Ken had to bear the brunt of a formidable media assault and his colour had more to do with the pigeon blood on his hands than on his revolutionary past.

Initially, Livingstone's defiance of New Labour took the form of a refusal to accept the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) that Gordon Brown was so keen on introducing to renovate the London underground.[38] The GLA hounded the government every inch of the way, running up a considerable legal bill in doing so and only to see its case thrown out of court. But Livingstone constantly emphasised the fact that his fight was one of principle to ensure that security in the underground would not be compromised by the "partial privatisation plan" as the PPP had been quickly dubbed.[39] He was cheered in and out of court on several occasions and came across as being the Londoner among Londoners, the mayor whose heart was in the right place because his priority was London. With Livingstone in command, the GLA was not going to be a simple lever for the transfer of national policies to the capital city. Opposition to the PPP also encouraged Livingstone to bring in one of his flagship policies, namely the congestion charge. As his plan to levy a tax on vehicles entering the centre of London advanced, with the setting up of the appropriate infrastructure, the mayor became more and more isolated. To the extent that the congestion charge began to represent for him success or failure not only as mayor of London but also as a politician. It goes without saying that New Labour was all too eager to point out that this idea was entirely the GLA's and more specifically the mayor's. Responsibility for the project lay entirely in his hands which meant that if London became suddenly gridlocked on 17 February 2003, so would Livingstone's political career. The black sheep of the Labour family would return to the political wilderness while New Labour quietly cleared up the mess, making sure that the GLA came back under the control of Millbank.

As it happened, the congestion charge was as successful as any such measures can be. Very few of the black spots underlined by opponents actually materialised and financially speaking, the whole project seemed viable. Livingstone was of course on the right track for a second victory in 2004 but he had also given himself the image of being a sound manager of London's affairs: for once a public institution had organised an economically sound venture along the lines of a private company. No message could be sweeter to the ears of New Labour except that now they had to find a way of bringing Livingstone back into the fold before the end of his five year exclusion from the Labour Party.

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[37] "Come and have a go if you think you're hard enough; the pigeons of London send a message to Ken Livingstone", *The Independent*, 14 October 2000.

[38] Timothy WHITTON, « La mairie de Londres et la décentralisation du pouvoir : enjeux initiaux et premiers bilans », *in*, Gilles LEYDIER (dir. de publication), *La dynamique de la dévolution au Royaume-Uni*, Université du Sud Toulon-Var, Babel, n°17, 2ème semestre 2008, pp. 122-123.

[39] Livingstone was helped in this task by the American born transport specialist Robert Kiley. See Timothy WHITTON, *Ken « le rouge » et la Mairie de Londres. Du Greater London Council à la Greater London Authority*, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-104.

Old Ken and new Ken: Blair's Olympic mayor

Thanks to the success of the congestion charge, Livingstone reigned almighty over London and polls showed that under whatever banner he chose to fight the next election, he would win. On 10 September 2003 the Guardian revealed that according to their research, "*he was the most influential man in public services in Great Britain today*" and campaigned for the Labour Party to let him rejoin.[40] The truth of the matter was that no other candidate had the slightest chance of beating Livingstone and he held all the cards concerning the various options that the next mayoral election would offer. At first, Livingstone's reintegration into the Labour Party seemed slightly bizarre given his popularity. What did he stand to gain for renewed collaboration with New Labour? With hindsight, the gamble paid off at least at the beginning because the incumbent mayor becoming the Labour Party's official candidate for the 2004 election[41] meant that antagonism between the GLA and central government abated somewhat. In this new climate, Livingstone was able to promote several of his pet projects, namely CrossRail[42] and the building of a new toll-bridge across the Thames, from Beckton to Thamesmead. But most of all, London could now think seriously about its Olympic bid because no committee would give the Games to a city where the mayor is at loggerheads with central government.

On the other hand, the risk was that by becoming Blair's mayor, Livingstone's image of being "our" Ken for Londoners might become slightly tarnished. Old Ken was somehow being replaced by New Ken and to a certain extent, the disappointment the electorate felt about New Labour's overall political project was affecting their approach to the 2004 mayoral election. On realising this, and nearer election day, it seemed almost on purpose that Livingstone launched into a flurry of declarations that could only remind people of the days when he got involved with subjects having very little to do with his electoral mandate.[43] It was as if Livingstone deliberately wanted to reassure his electorate by distinguishing his own brand of politics and image from those of the Labour Party. The strategy paid off because he won but by a far smaller margin than in 2000. The gamble had worked but had shown that Livingstone was cutting it extremely fine.

This second mandate was to witness Livingstone gradually becoming bogged down both in his relationship with the Labour Party, his own personal brand of cronyism and allegations of anti-Semitism and corruption that were ultimately to lead to his downfall. July 2005 saw him reach a summit of popularity when London was given the Olympic Games even though the joy was bitterly dashed within twenty-four hours when terrorists struck London. Speaking from Singapour, Livingstone tore up his official speech and told the world in Churchillian tones that never would "his" city

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[40] "Let Ken back on the bus, with Livingstone likely to be elected London mayor again, it would be absurd for Labour not to let him rejoin*"*, *The Guardian*, 24 October 2003.

[41] Livingstone was readmitted on 7 January 2004 after the most extraordinary sequence of events. For a detailed account see Timothy WHITTON, "'Nightmayor at City Hall' : les coulisses d'une investiture, d'une élection et d'une réélection à Londres", *op. cit.*, pp.215-219.

[42] This is a colossal project meant to create a high speed rail link between the North-East and the West of the capital.

[43] "Jail Sharon and create 50% top tax rate, says Livingstone", *The Guardian*, (final edition), 8 avril 2004.

give in to such barbaric acts. A week later, in a meeting in Trafalgar Square, the mayor, obviously distraught, gave a speech which provided London with the sort of leadership that it so needed after the atrocities.[44] But within a few days, Livingstone the statesman had once again fallen from his pedestal by brashly claiming that Great Britain should take a good look at her foreign policies in order to eradicate terrorism. This was followed by endless and extremely costly court cases concerning several of Livingstone's allegedly anti-Semite remarks. If Livingstone was cleared each time, the damage had been done and the mayor of one of the most multicultural cities in the world was coming across as having lost his grip on what Londoners had come to expect him to stand for.

Ken versus Boris

In spite of his waning popularity no run-of-the-mill candidate stood the slightest chance of beating the incumbent mayor in 2008. "Ken" had somewhat reverted to the more straightforward "Livingstone", but for the purposes of the election this was soon to change but not in the way that the mayor would have wanted. The Conservatives had toyed with several names but knew deep down from the start that this election would be all about how candidates were represented rather than political programmes. At first, however ludicrous the candidacy of Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson seemed, it soon became apparent that he was exactly the sort of candidate they needed, someone who could personalise his campaign and beat Livingstone on his own territory where he excelled, that of representing London itself. Over time, Livingstone had come to be the voice of London and no ordinary campaign about public transport, housing and the Olympic Games would be sufficient to topple him.

And this is exactly what the Conservatives did: while promoting "Boris" rather than Alexander Johnson, they systematically underlined the weaknesses of the incumbent mayor's record and repeatedly pointed out his relationship with New Labour, the unpopular political party that the electorate dreamed of punishing.[45] Thus while Livingstone spent his campaign time explaining why Britain was involved in an illegal war with Iraq and why petty criminality was such a problem in London, "Boris" signed autographs and became a family name thanks to his regular appearances on *Have I Got News For You*. Whilst Livingstone found himself caught up in his good friend Lee Jasper's resignation from the GLA, Boris candidly asked why the budget for the Olympic Games was spiralling out of control. In the same breath he also promised to bring back the much loved Routemasters while promising to do away with the much hated bendy buses. This was a particularly efficient tactic because for many Londoners who had a sense of belonging to the majority, the bendy buses symbolised Livingstone's irritating - and costly - devotion to minorities.[46] Even

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[44] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6BSIBPsbL9c

[45] To the extent that all references to New Labour vanished from Livingstone's campaign and were only barely visible on his posters. For further details see T. WHITTON, *Ken « le rouge » et la Mairie de Londres. Du Greater London Council à la Greater London Authority*, *op. cit.*, pp.161-178.

[46] Introducing the bendy buses was hugely expensive but they were equipped to give access to wheelchair users. The general feeling of Londoners, which the anti-Livingstone press was quick to pounce on, was that the ramps were used very seldom. "What the (new non-clowning, short-haired) Boris should learn from my bus driver wife", *The Daily Mail*, 18 April, 2008.

though both men scrupulously avoided attacking the other's personal life, Boris' team was nonetheless quick to pick up on sleaze and cronyism. Apart from the Jasper affair, several of the mayor's close friends at the GLA had been caught out supposedly taking advantage of public money and at this stage in the campaign, they were often on the back foot when it came to proving the contrary.[47] The upshot of this was that Livingstone's main weakness was emphasised, namely that of coming across as being an amateur manager of London's financial affairs. Johnson was managing to destroy the credibility of "Ken" but the bottom line probably was that he represented a change, a change from the "Kenocracy" that City Hall had come to represent in the eyes of Londoners. If Boris were to be elected, he would be the voice of London and leave financial matters to professionals.

Conclusion

One persona that Livingstone will never shed is that of being "red" Ken. Come what may, he will go down in British political history as being the epitome of the anti-establishment, folk hero always ready to defend a cause, the more obscure, the better. Yet this proved to be insufficient in 2008 when the job of mayor was given to Boris Johnson, who has become the third man in British politics and who, should David Cameron become the next prime Minister, will most certainly represent in London the ideal intermediary for conservative politics. Livingstone on the other hand has joined the after dinner speakers' circuit and is busy writing his memoirs. Both, he hopes, will enable him to remain in the limelight because as the saying goes, he who lives by the press usually dies by it.

But Livingstone is hoping to be resurrected for the umpteenth time in 2012 so as to open the Olympic Games as the mayor of London. This is how he represents his own personal future yet it will surely depend far more on national politics and Johnson's record than Livingstone's image. This is because he has worn out the ability to appeal to all men by representing the rainbow mayor of London and any future mandate will entail "Red Ken" being a more traditional local politician. In many respects this is a shame because whether one likes Livingstone or not, his populist appeal is extremely rare and has always enabled him to come across as being a genuine politician, at his very best in the face of adversity.

At times Livingstone has been his own worst enemy and this perhaps explains why in 2008, Boris Johnson's slogan "Time for a Change" rang truer than "Vote for

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Despite Livingstone's efforts to convince them, little did Londoners know that the GLA was merely bowing to a European directive that states that by 2017, all public transport should be accessible to wheelchair users. Transforming the old Routemasters would have been far too expensive and in a television interview, Johnson was very hard put to actually state how much this operation would cost:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=spknUcSHYK4

[47] A GLA employee had had to resign after accepting a trip abroad in a luxury hotel, the GLA had also lent a room for the CND to host a meeting and various community groups had received generous grants. It was also alleged that some GLA employees had worked full time on Livingstone's 2004 campaign. All of these were highlighted in the press. Taken separately these events were meaningless but so soon before the election, they were crucial in undermining "our" Ken's credibility. For details of the sleaze see Giles EDWARDS & Jonathan ISABY, *Boris v. Ken*, London: Politicos, 2008, pp. 79-115.

London – Ken". Livingstone no longer represented London as Londoners thought he should and therefore he was not able to drum up the support he needed especially in view of his connivance with New Labour. Even though Johnson was not the ideal candidate, far from it given his track record, the main advantage he had was of representing an alternative and this was probably the most attractive policy he had to offer.

Timothy WHITTON

ALL "KENS" TO ALL MEN. KEN THE CHAMELEON: REINVENTION AND REPRESENTATION. FROM THE GLC TO THE GLA

Ken Livingstone's relationship with the media has always been conflictual but he undeniably owes them a large part of his celebrity as a non-conformist politician poised to defend all causes even the most obscure. Year in, year out, his reputation as "Red Ken" has enabled him to make the headlines with the press representing him in a variety of ways and giving him in the process the opportunity to reinvent himself according to prevailing circumstances. He is also one of those people who in the twinkling of an eye can reach a peak of popularity before falling into a trough of opprobrium. He took full advantage of this to give the Greater London Council and then the Greater London Authority a colourful leadership but Londoners finished by growing weary of his incessant shock tactics. When they were no longer able to clearly distinguish between his politics and his antics, it was time for a change. In this way the first "third man of the country" had to give way to someone whose greatest credit was to represent this change.

A CHACUN SON "KEN". KEN LE CAMELEON : REINVENTION ET REPRESENTATION. DU GLC A LA GLA

Ken Livingstone a toujours entretenu des rapports conflictuels avec les médias mais leur doit indéniablement une grande partie de sa célébrité d'homme politique non-conformiste prêt à défendre toutes les causes, même les plus obscures. Sa réputation de « Ken le Rouge » lui a permis, bon an mal an, de faire les manchettes de la presse. Celle-ci l'a représenté de multiples façons lui permettant, parfois malgré lui, de se réinventer en fonction des circonstances. Il fait ainsi partie de ceux qui en un laps de temps réduit peuvent atteindre des sommets de popularité avant de tomber dans les profondeurs de l'opprobre. S'il en a pleinement profité pour donner un leadership très bigarré au Greater London Council *et puis à la* Greater London Authority, *les Londoniens se sont lassés de ses éternelles provocations. Lorsqu'il était difficile de faire clairement la distinction entre son action politique et ses simagrées, l'heure du changement avait sonné. Ainsi le premier « troisième homme du pays » a dû céder sa place à celui dont le principal mérite était de représenter ce changement.*