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London Government 50 Years of Debate

The Contribution of LSE's Greater London Group

Edited by Ben Kochan

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Preface

The papers, which form the basis of this booklet, were prepared for a seminar which took place in summer 2008 to mark the 50 years since the formation of the Greater London Group. These have been edited and in some cases extended by their authors. We would like to thank all those who participated in that event and particularly those who wrote and presented the papers. In addition, we would like to thank Christine Whitehead, Ian Gordon, Gill Wedlake and Marialanna Lee who contributed to its organisation. Finally, we are grateful to the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) which helped to fund this publication and the seminar through the LSE London Research Centre.

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1. Introduction
London Government - 50 years of debate

The founding of the Greater London Group is inextricably linked with the debates about London's government. This publication marks 50 years of its contribution to the ongoing debate which shows no signs of abating. In 1957, Harold Macmillan's government set up the Royal Commission on Local Government in Greater London, better known as the Herbert Commission. A year later, a group of academics at the London School of Economics, chaired by Professor William Robson, set about preparing evidence for the Royal Commission. Robson's work, developed by the 'Greater London Group', became the basis for the Royal Commission's eventual proposal that a new 'Greater London' council should be created.

Greater London approximated to the built-up sprawl that had grown around the historic core of the London County Council (LCC). A small amount of countryside fell within Greater London, while some urbanised areas of Surrey, Berkshire and the then county of Middlesex were left outside. 'London' is today described as a region of England, but it is more accurately a metropolis at the centre of the Greater South East super-region.

Robson's body of work was immensely important in influencing the Herbert Commission. George Jones and Michael Hebbert describe how Robson had researched the issue of London government for many years and how he had become convinced that a single local authority for the metropolis was essential. George Jones suggests that Robson can be credited to a great extent with the developing the notion of a greater London which has endured to this day. Herbert, in accepting this idea, created the version of 'Greater London' that was used not only for the Greater London Council (GLC) but which is today also the area covered by the Greater London Authority.

Robson was hugely influential in propagating the intellectual case for an authority for the whole of the capital. His writings regularly display impatience with the fragmented and often chaotic governance arrangements for, in particular, planning and transport. The group of colleagues he brought together at LSE undertook detailed research and gave both written and oral evidence to Herbert.

John Davis outlines the complex and parochial set of institutions that had evolved in London as the city had grown from its medieval core. There had been earlier 'metropolitan' institutions, notably the Metropolitan Board of Works and the London County Council which covered the built-up area that existed in the mid-19th century. If fragmentation and complexity were often the norm within the LCC's boundaries, government became even more tangled within the rest of the capital's apparently endless built-up area. As London's economy has developed, particularly since the 2nd World War, its reach has become ever more extended, raising issues about the relationship between 'London' and its metropolitan hinterland. There are questions about how commuters should pay for services they use and how London and its surrounding regions can work effectively together.

Parliament and the Government amended Herbert's detailed proposals for a Greater London Council with a second tier of 51 boroughs and the City of London, but the overall concept of a metropolitan authority for about 700 square miles around Charing Cross was delivered. From 1965 till 1986, the GLC took responsibility for a number of city-wide services. Jerry White's paper outlines the extraordinary, if short life of the council, which was abolished amid acrimony in 1986. He suggests that the GLC's failure was due to structural problems with the GLC sitting uncomfortably between the London boroughs and central government with overlapping responsibilities. It was also born into a period when London politics were peculiarly frantic and where the political reference-points that had held good were dissolving. Jerry White suggests that the GLC is remembered more for its failures, than its achievements.

There was then an 'interregnum' when central government departments and joint committees of boroughs took responsibility for ex-GLC functions. During this period, the capital's economy and population began to grow, following many years of decline. Nirmala Rao describes in her paper the reversion to fragmentation and Whitehall intervention. After the GLC's demise, there was a general assumption that a new London-wide authority would emerge, but few wanted another GLC. The, most recent stage of the 'Greater London' story is described by Tony Travers. In 2000, the Greater London Authority was set up after a referendum. The GLA was based on an American city government model. The mayoral elections ironically brought Livingstone, back to centre stage in London-wide government but it was a new 'Ken' which was more business-friendly. The 2008 election of Boris Johnson is a reminder that London's politics are plural. Johnson has signalled a shift in power back to the boroughs.

London has regained its self-government and, to a significant extent, civic self-esteem. There is more accountability for transport, the police and planning than when such services were embedded within Whitehall.

Few major cities have simple systems of government, but London's has been reformed with regularity and zeal. This suggests a restlessness that, in turn, implies the post-2000 arrangements are unlikely to be the last word on the subject. However, the last 50 years has seen the establishment and development of Greater London, with a population of almost eight million people. Despite all the churn and reform, Robson's hope for an authority for virtually the whole of the urban area around central London has proved surprisingly durable.

2. London's evolution - from parochialism to global metropolis

John Davis

London, like most major British cities, experienced rapid population growth in the second quarter of the nineteenth century – as the country was modernising its constitution. Those problems associated with urban growth were being addressed at the same time as the relationship between government, parliament, the localities and the citizen was being reassessed. In London the 'urban problem' was as severe as anywhere, while the administrative problems associated with the government of the modern world's first metropolis were arguably more intractable than elsewhere. In other British towns and cities the template provided by the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act proved generally adaptable, but London's particular problems – the autonomy of the City Corporation and the difficulty of accommodating local variation within any single municipal model – required constitutional innovation. This was pursued in traumatic circumstances in the 1840s. The concern about public health regulation in the wake of the 1832 cholera epidemic was so intense as to dissuade policy makers from entrusting health functions to a fragmented network of local bodies. There were said to have been eighty-four separate paving boards in London in the 1850s.[1] The result was that an ad hoc government agency was appointed to overhaul London's sanitation. At the same time, suspicion of the kind of centralising model introduced for the 1834 Poor Law reform bred a similar determination to protect localism against central intrusion.



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In the view of the most articulate localist, the radical Joshua Toulmin Smith, the 'enemies of human freedom' invariably resorted to central poor law boards, boards of health and the like, but "no central bureaucracy can ever, by any possible human machinery, know, as the inhabitants must always do, the circumstances and conditions of a district, and so how its affairs may be best managed."[2] He also believed, as did many early Victorian theorists on local government, that public involvement in local administration was a good in itself. He wrote in 1853 "not allowed to learn self-government, men naturally take to beating their

wives."[3] In these years the phrase 'local self-government' was used more often than 'local government'. John Stuart Mill's journey away from strict utilitarianism would lead him to conclude that the best system of local administration was one in which, while expertise should be centralised, administration should be decentralised as far as was feasible.

The 1855 Metropolis Local Management Act - a compromise

These tensions made the issue of London's administration something of a 'West Lothian question' – a conundrum to which any likely solution would be sub-optimal. The solution eventually chosen was Sir Benjamin Hall's 1855 Metropolis Local Management Act which sought to reconcile the demands of metropolitan administration with a respect for localism by means of a two-tier government system. What was sub-optimal about it would become clear over the years of its operation.

The Metropolitan Board of Works

Firstly, a pronounced localist bias within the legislation[4] ensured that the London-wide body, the Metropolitan Board of Works (MBW), was indirectly elected from the second tier, which impaired its accountability and thereby increased resistance to the substantial taxing powers that the Board possessed. The Corporation's in-house polemicist, the City Chamberlain Benjamin Scott, saw the board as "a compromise between a desire to appear to favour Representative Government, and a determination to deny its practical operation."[5] The parochialist Toulmin Smith had predicted that any metropolitan body would be nothing more than "oligarchism…a mere clique – father of costly jobbery and functionalism."[6] The board was a soft target. In attempting to avoid creating a body too distant from parish concerns, Hall had created a structure, which diminished accountability, as the scandals, which overtook the board in the 1880s, would show.[7] Secondly, and perhaps as a reflection of the offhand treatment of the metropolitan layer of government, little thought was given to the identity of administrative London. The Registrar General's definition of the Metropolis was adopted, based originally on the definition of London first used for the 1592 Bills of Mortality. This obviously bore no direct relationship to the actual built-up area in the mid-nineteenth century, with the result that municipal London included much wilderness in the south and south-east, but excluded many areas in the north that were already built up in 1855. Thirdly, and again out of deference to localism, the second tier preserved every existing local body. The most obvious result was the survival, almost unscathed, of the City Corporation, though the reverence of the localists towards the Corporation meant that this had never really been in doubt. More important to Hall, Toulmin Smith and all

those involved in the arguments over local autonomy in the 1830s and 1840s was the survival of every individual parochial body, regardless of administrative fitness. The smaller parishes were simply grouped into 'District Boards' for administrative purposes, after the manner of the 1834 Poor Law Unions, retaining the direct election of each parish vestry, however tiny.

The difficulties produced became evident a generation later, if not sooner. For most of the 19th century the London debate centred upon the position of the City Corporation. Its exemption from the national municipal reform of 1835 and its retention of a large measure of autonomy in 1855 were inevitably provocative. London reformers saw reform of the Corporation as a precondition for reform of the metropolitan system as a whole. They argued that the City had avoided a presumptive duty to assume the municipal leadership of London and to apply the massive wealth of the Corporation and of the Livery Companies to the purposes of London government as a whole, and Liberal reform proposals, down to the failed legislation of the second Gladstone government in 1884, aimed at expanding the Corporation to cover the whole metropolitan area. The attack on the Corporation was primarily a political one, though. A central authority based upon an expanded Corporation would obviously have been lavishly resourced by comparison with other municipalities, but even without mulcting the City, London was clearly governable.

The flaws in the 1855 Act

The significant flaws in the 1855 Act were less political than structural. In the first place, the metropolitan board lived most of its short life under a cloud. It had been created, mainly to produce a main drainage system for London, rather as the GLC later would be created above all else to produce an urban motorway network. The drainage system, the associated Thames Embankment and the other infrastructure works were intrinsically expensive, but they were the MBW's raison d'être. Challenges to the board's legitimacy provoked by its heavy expenditure were challenges to the system as a whole. Secondly, although the failure of its writ to run beyond the Registrar General's London was probably the least of its worries, the fact that the Board had no authority in Hornsey or Wimbledon was a failing that became increasingly evident as the London fringe expanded in the 1870s and 1880s. Finally, the fragmented nature of the second tier, exacerbated by the associated inequality of wealth between authorities, meant that London's local bodies varied greatly in strength and prestige. Larger, populous parishes like Islington and St Pancras were well resourced urban authorities. They lacked first-tier powers, of course, but they were otherwise comparable to many of the stronger municipalities given county borough status in 1888. Overall,

however, the second tier was only as strong as its weakest members. As so often in Victorian local government, the take-up of permissive legislation provided the most telling evidence. Twenty years after Hall's Act, only eight of 39 second-tier authorities had adopted the Baths and Washhouses Act,[8] and even by 1890 Sidney Webb could argue that the duties neglected by the vestries were more significant than those they actually performed.[9] One result of this uneven performance was to make credible the polemical charge that the vestries were unconcerned with London's municipal improvement and by extension, that they were negligent because they were corrupt. The claim that the Clerkenwell Vestry was in the pockets of slum landlords, and thus avoided its public health obligations, exercised the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes in 1884-5. The claim was overdrawn, and the suggestion that second-tier authorities could have solved an entrenched housing problem, had they wished to, distracted attention from the real issue of those authorities' structural weakness, but the propaganda impact of such charges added to the problems of London's local bodies.

Demands for a more energetic and democratic administration

These systemic problems provide one substantial explanation for London missing out on the 'municipal revolution' of the later nineteenth century, when most major UK cities became providers of the principal public utilities and other services. As a result, in the 1880s, ratepayer discontent with the cost of the system was augmented by ratepayer unrest at the cost of public services still in private hands and by municipal reformers' demands for a more energetic and more democratic municipal administration. In the 1880s London came closer, arguably, to a consensus on the municipal agenda than at any time before or since. The goodwill vested in the early London County Council from 1889 was evidence of this. More strikingly, concern about London's social problems following the publication of the first edition of Charles Booth's poverty investigation in 1889 pervaded the first LCC election campaign in 1889. It made it possible for the council to be run for its first 18 years by the Liberal-Radical Progressive Party, advocating a combination of social radicalism and municipal provision of public services, in defiance of the capital's Conservative leaning in parliamentary elections.[10] The Progressive LCC is still regarded as ground-breaking in its development of social politics, particularly the spectacular early housing schemes, but success in public service provision was essentially confined to the acquisition of the tramways. Gas and water remained beyond its reach, in part because the county area formed only a relatively small proportion of the service area. Given the intensity of public hostility to the water companies in the late 1890s, the 'quango' solution adopted with the creation of the Metropolitan Water Board in 1904 has to be seen as a significant setback to the council, as does the similar expedient – the Port of London Authority – adopted to take the docks into public control in 1908.

Conservatives thwart bid for expansion

A year earlier the Progressives had been ousted from power in a rancorous election, which demonstrated that the municipal consensus of the late 1880s was dead. A quarter of a century of Tory control followed, putting an end to the more ambitious aspirations of Progressive municipalism. In the Progressives' last few years these had included what were by now overdue proposals for the expansion of the administrative county.[11] These were a direct reflection of the communitarian ideals of the local 'New Liberalism' that the Progressives embodied, seeing the LCC not only as a service provider but also as a mouthpiece for a metropolitan community capable of speaking with one voice. For Sidney Webb, effectively the author of the Minority Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, the pressing problem of poor relief in London required the absorption of the outer areas into an enlarged county.[12] Fitzroy Hemphill, author of a scheme for enlargement published in 1906, believed that only a realistic county area would dispel the obvious danger that further municipal services would be entrusted to quangos.[13] They had been promoted, somewhat quixotically, despite the likely hostility of the outer suburbs to high-spending Progressive radicalism. In narrow political terms, the (Conservative) Municipal Reformers who took control of the Council in 1907 stood to benefit from any expansion of the county boundary to embrace the suburbs, but they were also politically sympathetic to those outer London areas most resistant to LCC expansion. Only once during the quarter-century of Tory control at County Hall did the council leadership make any concerted effort to advocate expansion, which was in 1920 when the Council lobbied the Lloyd George Coalition government for revision of the county boundary. This initiative by the LCC Tories was opposed by the metropolitan Tory umbrella group, the London Municipal Society, the extra-metropolitan local authorities and the contiguous county councils.[14] The establishment of the Royal Commission on London Government (the Ullswater Commission) in 1923 may well have been intended to bury the enlargement issue. According to the minutes of its proceedings:

> "The Chairman [the Conservative Viscount Ullswater] indicated that in his personal opinion the extension of the area of the administrative county, even if desirable, was not practicable in view of the opposition to any such proposal which had been manifested by local authorities in their evidence."[15]

It certainly came as no surprise when the commission scotched the enlargement proposals.[16] If there ever had been any realistic prospect of expanding the county boundary in the first half of the century, it was before 1914, the period when Liverpool absorbed Bootle and Greater Birmingham was created. The harsher economic climate of the post-war years stiffened the resistance of the suburbs to what they saw as central city designs on their growing rateable value. After a flurry of expansion proposals had been blocked up and down the country, Whitehall imposed a moratorium in 1925.

The 'County of London' becomes distinct

As inter-war suburban growth proceeded apace, the 'County of London' became more markedly distinct from built-up London. Another quango, the London Passenger Transport Board, created in 1933, relieved the LCC of its trams and underlined its inadequacy as a metropolitan body. Among the principal objects of London's variegated transport providers was to carry commuters to suburban homes beyond the county boundary. The pre-war LCC had probably been most visible to Londoners as a tramways authority but now it lost that role and had to renounce any other transport ambitions. The inevitable political consequence of suburbanisation followed in 1934, when the victory of Herbert Morrison's London Labour Party demonstrated that the LCC was now effectively an inner-city authority. For the 30 or so years until its abolition, the Council became as much of a one-party state as any east end borough, being privately described by Clement Attlee as "the nearest approach to a totalitarian state in Western Europe."[17] Its policy agenda shifted steadily to emphasise Labour concerns, principally housing and healthcare. In the 1920s, as the third party in the London municipal system, and heir to a progressive tradition jeopardised by the decline of the Liberals, the London Labour Party had advocated a fully representative metropolitan authority. By the 1940s and 1950s, ensconced apparently permanently in control of the inner city, Labour sought to defend its working-class laager.

Robson calls for an energetic pan-London authority

This is where the Greater London Group's founder, W A Robson, comes in. There is presumably no reason to doubt that this Fabian protégé of the Webbs was happier to see the LCC in Labour than in Tory hands, but his 1939 polemic on London municipal history, *The Government and Misgovernment of London*, is better read as a Webbian – in some ways a Progressive – call for an energetic pan-London authority, combining efficiency with accountability, than as a piece of Morrisonian triumphalism. At a time when democratic institutions were threatened across the world, Robson called

for recognition of the democratic qualities of municipal government and for a "strong [and] effective regional patriotism" instead of the detachment bred by the existing system.[18] Specifically, Robson surfed the wave of 1930s regionalism, asserting "as an indisputable proposition that if we desire to cultivate and encourage a sense of community among the citizens of the London region, it is necessary for the area to acquire a regional form of government."[19] Tellingly, the book received only tepid recognition in the Labour press,[20] and Robson took the opportunity provided by a post-war reissue in 1948 to pour contempt on Labour's limited and pragmatic proposals for London reform in the party's 1943 pamphlet *The Future of Local Government*.[21] By then, of course, what had previously been something of a specialist interest in regionalism had been transformed into the post-war vogue for planning associated with the work of Patrick Abercrombie, whose Greater London Plan of 1944 demanded a holistic approach to the management of the entire metropolitan area and its associated green belt. This approach had appealed to Morrison's successor Charles Latham during the War, but which had been put firmly back into its box by the LCC leadership after 1945.

By the time of Robson's second edition, his conviction remains clear that the fusion of administrative efficiency and democratic accountability, that the Victorians had pursued by such elaborate means could only be achieved through expansion of the administrative county and the creation of a strategic metropolitan authority, mandated to 'think big' for London. In its evidence to the Herbert Commission of 1957-60, Robson's Greater London Group would provide the strongest non-Tory case for dispensing with the LCC and enlarging the administrative county – even at the risk of destroying Labour's inner-city stronghold,[22] and the Greater London Group's arguments did more than anything else to make the enlargement of London by Tory legislation in 1963 appear more than a simple party-political calculation. In 1939 Robson had argued that "only through a Greater London Council can a Greater London spirit arise which will attempt to envisage the problems and the welfare of the metropolis as a whole rather than the problems and the welfare of its particular parts."[23] A quarter of a century later, following the Herbert Commission's deliberations, a Greater London Council is what Londoners got.

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[23] W.A.Robson op cit, 324-5.

2. The Greater London Group after 50 years

George Jones

My first contact with the Greater London Group was in autumn 1960 as I was making preliminary inquiries for my doctoral thesis at Nuffield College, Oxford. The Group had earned a reputation as the leading centre for the study of London government, and I wanted to tap into the advice of its research officer, Jim Sharpe, and his colleagues. Meetings with them took place in the rooms it occupied on two sites. The more imposing was at Clements Inn in a tall red-brick Victorian block, gloomy with dark wood-panelled walls, a steep staircase and an archaic and leaky water lift operated by pulling on a steel hauser. The other room was in a dingy clapped-out noisy building fronting the Strand, which must have been part of King's College.

The next contact came six years later when, as a new lecturer in LSE's Department of Government, I joined the Group as a member. For many years my timetable was dominated by the Group's regular weekly Monday meetings from 3 pm to 5 pm, held first in the former boardroom of the Nat West Bank at the top of LSE's Connaught House and later in LSE's Old Building, the more austere Room A582, next to the Senior Dining Room's bar. Under the imperious chairmanship of emeritus Professor W A Robson, we argued over draft reports and chapters. As Robson turned each page, one had to be quick to interject comments both on issues of substance and on grammar and style. These meetings set strategy, decided the Group's line, and, if no papers were before us, heard visiting speakers, either academics or practitioners.



George Jones is emeritus Professor of Government at LSE

My first meeting with Robson had been in about 1965 at a conference in Jesus College, Oxford, when he asked me to help him use the phone. Squashed with him in a booth I put coins in the slot for him and dialled. He gave me his helpless-old-man act. At Group meetings he was alert as he turned the pages, but when visitors spoke he seemed to fall asleep, yet could always at the end of the speech ask the first question right on target.

Robson was an early champion of the concept of greater London. From the 1930s to the 1960s he had argued the need for a regional or met-



Robson: an early champion of the greater London concept

ropolitan government covering a wider area than that covered by the London County Council, the existing top-tier of London government. Beneath this strategic planning coordinating body which carried out administrative functions serving a large population and area, would be a series of boroughs for more local and personal services.[1]

The Group was also Robson's creation, and he remained its driving force until his death in 1980.[2] He set it up in 1958 to give evidence to the Royal Commission on Local Government in Greater London. Its chairman Sir Edwin Herbert had asked the University of London's Vice Chancellor for a group of scholars to do research and give evidence to his commission. Robson gathered an interdisciplinary team from LSE's teaching staff. Eminent professors and later professors participated from many disciplines. They included Alan Day working on economics, David Donnison on social administration, Michael Wise on geography, John Griffith on law, Donald Macrae on sociology, Richard Pear on political science and Peter Self on public administration.

They could of course not agree. Professor Griffith felt no major reorganisation of local government was required and that local democracy should not be considered a factor. He wanted administrative efficiency to be the criterion, urging that land-use planning and highways should be the responsibility of central government. The other members of the Group put in two schemes, A and B. Both agreed on the need for an

overall metropolitan authority for greater London, but they differed over what size of lower-level local authority was necessary to provide an adequate standard of service while remaining an acceptable unit of representative local democracy. Scheme A, championed by William Robson, sought authorities with populations of between 250,000 and 500,000, in effect a municipal borough solution. Scheme B, championed by Peter Self, wanted authorities of populations of about 1.5 million, radiating outwards from the centre with each containing inner and outer London areas, in effect a county solution. Despite this division, the Group's evidence, 120 pages out of a total of 200 pages submitted to the commission, helped shape its report. The commission grilled the Group for two whole days.

After the Royal Commission

Robson kept the Group going to study what happened to the Commission's recommendations, the reasons why the eventual Act diverged from these recommendations, and then later how the new system of London government operated following the 1963 London Government Act which set up the Greater London Council and 32 London Boroughs. The new system began in 1965, and I joined the Group in the middle of its assessment of the results of the 1963 Act. The outcome was a book by the Group's Senior Research Officer, Gerald Rhodes, *The Government of London: the struggle for reform* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), whose chapters were pored over by the Group.

Next Rhodes edited a volume examining the first five years of the new system.[3] It contained chapters by members of the Group, again scrutinised in detail at the Monday meetings. The topics covered demonstrate the Group's wide range of concerns: - party politics, elections, personal health and welfare services, children's services, education, housing, highways, traffic and transport, planning, finance, the Greater London Council, the London Boroughs and an appraisal of the new system as a whole.

Robson ran a model research centre, with academics taking the lead in their specialised fields of study. Research officers, many of whom went on to later academic fame, like Ken Young, carried out the detailed research. Jeffrey Jowell found a welcoming home at the Group after leaving South Africa. Some of the research officers were LSE doctoral research students. Seminars brought in outside experts.

The output was not only in major volumes. There were more focused monographs like the two from the research officer S.K. Ruck, *London Government and the Welfare Services* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), and *Municipal Entertainment*

and the Arts (London: Allen and Unwin, 1965). Another research officer, Enid Wistrich, produced *Local Government Reorganisation: The first years of Camden* (London: London Borough of Camden, 1972). The Group produced a series of Greater London Papers, the second was the authoritative *Theories of Local Government*, by W.J. Mackenzie who was a member of the Herbert Royal Commission.

Transport in London was a topic often considered by the Group, with major contributions from Ernest Davies, Gil Ponsonby, and Michael Thomson who had an antipathy to cars and was an early champion of road charging. A massive contribution to transport was the 660 page volume by Michael F. Collins and Timothy M. Pharoah, called *Transport Organisation in a Great City* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1974). Land-use planning was another frequent concern of the Group, with Peter Self, Peter Hall and Derek Diamond urging rational methods to order London's chaotic development, at first urging the decanting of economic activities, factories and offices to beyond London's boundaries, and later urging them to be brought back.

Wider Concerns

The Group was not blinkered by its focus on London. It considered London in the wider setting of the South East, especially in its studies of land-use planning and transport. Greater London Paper number 12 was Gerald Rhodes' *Town Government in South East England* (London: LSE, 1967). The Group watched what happened in other UK cities, and monitored the attitude of central government towards local government. Robson continued to criticise centralisation and the erosion of local government. This message ran through the three editions of his book, *The Development of Local Government* (London Allen and Unwin, 1931, 1934 and 1948), up to *Local Government in Crisis* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1966). The Group's seminars heard speakers, both politicians and officials, about aspects of London's governance, and about other cities, like the ever-boyish Alan-Bennett-like Manchester City Treasurer Noel Hepworth.

Robson was keen for the Group to see London in its international context. He edited the magnificent two-volume *Great Cities of the World: their government, politics and planning,* which had three editions, 1954, 1957 and 1972, (W.A. Robson and D.E. Regan (eds.), London: Allen and Unwin, 3rd ed. 1972). He involved overseas visitors in the work of the Group, like Wallace Sayre who was insightful on New York (Wallace Sayre and Herbert Kaufman, *Governing New York City* New York: Russell Sage, 1960). Frank Smallwood from Dartmouth College, USA, became an active member as he wrote his account of how the Greater London Council was established, emphasising political aspects against Robson's focus on administrative factors. (Frank Smallwood, *Greater London: The Politics of Metropolitan Reform* New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965). A stream of Japanese visitors kept the Group in touch with Tokyo, including the Governor of Tokyo who came in a state of some alarm worried that the abolition of the Greater London Council in 1985 might lead to abolition of Tokyo's metropolitan government.

Later developments – the Travers regime

The Group's office moved around the LSE's buildings, with Robson fighting hard to escape exile to distant corners near Euston station and delighted to fetch up on the top fifth floor of the Library. The Group's papers followed the chairmen who succeeded Robson after his death in 1980, first Peter Self and then Derek Diamond. Tony Travers emerged as Research Director and then Director, and his office was the Group's hub. Indeed from the 1980s Tony Travers had become the dynamic centre of the Group, carrying on and extending Robson's work.

In 1992 he orchestrated a series of Greater London Papers, numbers 19 to 23, about five specific policy areas and their problems: - planning, transport, police, housing, education, and government generally. He and I, with June Burnham, undertook studies of local authorities outside and within London looking at whether the success or failure of local authorities correlated with their size, - the answer was in the negative. The quality of political leadership proved the key to success. Good leadership attracted good officers. We looked at the changing roles of chief executives, and the attitudes of central government ministers and civil servants towards local government – they were full of disdain for what they regarded as second-raters. We were unable to raise funding for a survey of what local government councillors and officers thought about central government.

By the 2000s the Group was under the umbrella of LSE London. Together they carried on the tradition of Robson's GLG. Within LSE London are representatives of many disciplines at LSE. Under its auspices, many reports and papers have been produced about London's economy, its population, immigration, land use, housing, and transport, the latter often in collaboration with Stephen Glaister. The involvement of Ricky Burdett from the 1990s provided a new focus on design and architecture. The Group's concerns at its outset had persisted.

Its activities became more entwined with teaching at LSE. The occasional seminars evolved into regular seminars attached to courses, like the London seminar series on

Mondays from 4.30 pm to 7 pm, attracting masters and research students from many departments. And the Group's involvement with the practitioners of London government evolved into frequent workshops and conferences on topics about the history of London government and current problems, that have drawn wider constituencies into the orbit of the Group.

The structure of London government

A core interest of the GLG has remained the organisation of London's government. Robson's last significant contribution to official inquiries into London's governance was as an adviser to the 1978 Marshall inquiry into the strategic role of the Greater London Council. The Group produced a guide to the pattern of government in London in the 1980s including *The London Government Handbook* edited by Michael Hebbert and Tony Travers (London: Cassell, 1988) which noted how there were over 60 separate bodies which divided London for administrative purposes in nearly 30 different ways. Tony Travers and I produced two books in the 1990s about the structure of London government and eight ways in which it might be reformed: - *The Government of London* (Tony Travers, George Jones, Michael Hebbert and June Burnham, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1991) and *The New Government of London* (Tony Travers and George Jones York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1997). The story of the dismantling of the structure created in the 1963 Act was told by Michael Hebbert and Anne Edge in *Dismantlers: The London Residuary Body* (London: STICERD/LSE. 1994). Tony Travers wrote a masterly, comprehensive account of the saga of London's government, including an assessment of the Greater London Council, the period without a London authority, and the start of the new directly-elected mayoral system in *The Politics of London: Governing an Ungovernable City* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

Robson's long-held vision was that London needed both an overall strategic authority and a layer of boroughs beneath for more personal and local services, but he was also concerned that there should be a government body responsible for the centre of London, its heart or core, that people from all over the world recognised as London. He wrote GLG paper, number 9, *The Heart of Greater London: Proposals for a Policy* (London: LSE, 1965). Derek Diamond addressed this issue too in his chapter *The City, the 'Big Bang' and Office Development* in Keith Hoggart and David R. Green, *London: A New Metropolitan Geography* (London: Edward Arnold, 1991, pp. 91-94). In 2008 Tony Travers and I produced a report on the same topic for the London Development Agency, although this time the "heart" was called the Central Activities Zone, an area fragmented between a number of boroughs with concerns wider than

the central area, and rarely considered as a whole by the Greater London Authority whose remit ran far beyond the central area.

Robson believed that academic study should inform the public and help improve public policy. Tony Travers has carried on that tradition. He has been a member of various Government and Parliamentary bodies, submitted evidence and assessed the evidence of others, acted as a consultant to local authorities and numerous groups and agencies concerned with London issues, the Corporation of the City of London, and the West End Theatres. He has become the reliable voice for objective analysis of London with the media, called in first by TV, radio and the press for his observations. In all this activity he promotes the name of the Greater London Group and the LSE. Indeed media watchers say he obtains more mentions in the media than the Director of LSE.

The continuing relevance of the Group

A survey of the fifty years of the GLG reveals that Robson's vision and his choice of topics are still relevant. Throughout its fifty years the Group has continued to explore similar questions, and they are salient today.

How should London be governed, and what are the dilemmas posed by different solutions?

What should be the relationship between the government of London and central government?

What should be the relationship between the various parts of the governance of London, between the tiers, and between elected bodies and appointed bodies?

How should the government of London adapt to changes in London - economic, social, physical and cultural, both domestic and global?

What assessments can be made about how particular policy areas have been dealt with in London, and what factors make for success or failure?

How should London government be financed?

What lessons can London's experiences teach other urban areas in the UK?

What can London learn from the experiences of other world cities?

Additional questions

I have some additional questions which need to be answered.

> How are popular perceptions of London shaped, and how can false impressions be corrected?
>
> How can one overcome the jealousy and dislike of London that persist outside London?
>
> How can the dynamism and vitality of London be encouraged, and not stifled?
>
> How best can the pockets of poverty and exclusion in London, worse than anywhere else in the UK, best be tackled?

The Group's work is of crucial importance today, with a new Mayor of London and pressure from central government on local authorities to apply the directly-elected mayor model more widely and devolve power to entities below local government. There are also new issues on the policy agenda, like responding to climate change, sustainability, drug use and worries over terrorist attacks. Some old issues that have not gone away include crime, policing, transport, education, pollution and litter. This is all in the context of tighter limits on resources, public resistance to higher taxation, sensationalising media and growing contempt for political parties and elected representatives. As Jerry White has recently written, "At the end, it was to government and leadership that Londoners would need to look, if progress were to be made with London's enduring challenges.[4] The work of the Greater London Group is certainly needed.

Robson's approach was first to find the facts, then make judgments and finally disseminate the findings. That is still the Greater London Group's approach. Long may it thrive.

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4. William Robson, the Herbert Commission and 'Greater London'

Michael Hebbert

Bernard Crick tells the story of George Bernard Shaw's first trip in an aeroplane.[1] Always concerned to keep his modernist credentials up-to-date, Shaw asked to be taken up by the author of *Aircraft in War and Peace* (1916), a rather good wartime book about aircraft manufacture, maintenance and training, bombing, aerial combat and the military significance of stunt flying. It also covered the wider strategic and political significances of flight, and the sensory exhilarations of the rush of air in the face and panoramas below, the aeronaut's extraordinary sensations of buoyancy and of uplift in mind and body.[2] The twenty-one year old author-aviator had left school at fifteen and soon become assistant manager of Hendon Aerodrome. He was then a lieutenant in the Royal Flying Corps flying the night skies over London on Zepellin patrol. His name was William Alexander Robson.

> "On landing safely, Shaw asked what Robson intended to do when demobbed. On learning he had no settled plan, Shaw said 'LSE is the place, took out his famous reporter's notebook from his cavernous pockets and, resting it on the fuselage, wrote a note of introduction to 'my friend Webb'. Robson would recall this to say, 'however well we plan, there is a lot of accident in career and history".



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Robson lacked entry qualifications but at the Webbs' request the School waived its normal matriculation requirements. He graduated with a first in the BSc Econ in 1922, turned to law and was called to the Bar. Sir William Beveridge invited him to become an LSE lecturer in 1926, and he published his academic magnum opus *Justice and Administrative Law, a Study of the British Constitution* (1928) just two years later. He taught and researched at the LSE until his death in 1980, writing widely on politics, administration and public enterprise, and editing for more than four decades the *Political Quarterly*, which he had founded in 1931 with £2,000 financial support from G.B.S. It acted as "a bridge between the world of thought and action, between the writer, the thinker and the teacher on the one hand, and the statesman,

the politician and the official on the other".[3] The Greater London Group is another of his legacies and, if you like, another such bridge.

Early in his career, the Webbs encouraged their protegé to explore municipalism, an unfashionable and academically neglected topic that was close to their hearts. The first fruit was an excellent handbook, *The Town Councillor*, co-authored with Clement Attlee and published by the Labour Publishing Company in 1925. Robson soon became a leading authority on the technicalities of rates, structures, functions, audit, ultra vires, and the facts and tendencies of local government. His expertise was not, as he put it, 'colourless' as he was ardent for modernisation. He laid out a comprehensive critique and reform agenda in *The Development of Local Government* (1931), a book which would run through several editions and reprints over the next quarter of a century. With many a vigorous sideways swipe at the fetters of nostalgic localism and dead-handed centralism, and the national predilection for muddling through, he argued for local government to be modernised in structure and function and not merely preserved and strengthened but expanded in a progressive direction and brought into harmony with the developing economic, social, political and scientific tendencies of the day.[4]

First contribution 'the chaos of London'

Robson would soon apply that argument to London. His first contribution was a Political Quarterly commentary *Thoughts on the LCC Election* written after the Labour Party's momentous victory in March 1934. Subtitled *the Chaos of London*, the piece had less to say about the shift of party-political control in County Hall than the geographical and functional limitations on the administrative county and the negative influence of the City Corporation.

> "This, then, is the spectacle which confronts us in the London scene. There is London County Council, which is supposed to be the principal governing body of the capital city. Its area was designed more than three-quarters of a century ago, and is about fifty years out of date. It is able to claim jurisdiction over less than half of the inhabitants of the metropolis, and its area extends over a fifteenth or twentieth part of the effective territory of the region. The Square Mile of the City, the heart of the empire, with its vast wealth and long traditions, its Lord Mayor, its ancient privileges, its magnificent Guildhall, its jealously guarded right to an independent police force, and its own peculiar 'Mayor's and City of London Court' - all this is entirely divorced from the county of London, a heart cut off from the functional needs of the living body of the metropolis, like the heart cut off from a dissected animal beating in a scientist's laboratory"[5]

The Chaos of London ends with a call for a Greater London council with regional scope and functions, and a suggestion that if such a government existed it might embue Londoners - even Londoners - with shared civic consciousness.

Robson: a tenacious advocate for metropolitan government

Five years later these arguments emerge fully-fledged in *The Government and Misgovernment of London* (1939). Robson timed the publication of the 484-page book to coincide with the LCC's 50th Jubilee celebrations - and to deter celebrants "from indulging in any excessive satisfaction at the present state of affairs".[6] The book begins with a history of previous missed opportunities for reform and the second part describes present institutional confusions, especially in London's vast tracts of new suburban expansion. Part Three - The Future - elaborates the blueprint for a directly elected Greater London Council covering the new continuously built-up metropolis of eight millions. In 1936 Robson had made a study visit to Moscow with Sir Ernest Simon of Manchester, dedicatee of *Government and Misgovernment*. He had noted the relevance to London of Mossoviet's double-decker structure of city and district governments.[7] He had also closely followed the 1938 reorganisation of New York City and Boroughs, a concrete demonstration of the potential for reform "in the only other metropolis which can be compared in size, wealth and importance to London".[8] The concept of a modernised two tier metropolitan solution was already fully formed in his mind.

Throughout the 1940s Robson kept up a tenacious advocacy for metropolitan government, often writing under the pseudonym 'Regionaliter'. He became a leading figure within the town planning movement and its most articulate exponent of the benefits that war offered for 'the planning outlook'.[9] A framework for comprehensive control of land use and industrial location had been put in place even before the Attlee government nationalised development rights and launched the new towns programme. London acquired visionary advisory plans, which were to lay the basis for its post-war development. But what did not change, in any way, was the structure of local government.

Government and Misgovernment went into a second edition not long after the publication of Sir Patrick Abercrombie's *Greater London Plan 1944*, a state paper of a radically new kind that offered an integrated spatial vision of the future development of the metropolis, but without any proposal for delivery, other than a perfunctory one and

a half pages on the need for an appointed planning board. With the establishment of the Welfare State in full swing, planners were instinctively looking to central government as universal provider of implementation mechanisms - new town development commissions, ad hoc boards, ministerially convened regional advisory committees. Robson saw all this with cold clarity as nothing more than a proliferation of misgovernment. The 1948 edition of his London book took strength from reconstruction planning to restate with powerful simplicity the need for a directly elected, democratically rooted council for Greater London. He wrote a new peroration: with the Imperial Parliament giving so much thought to the issues of new constitutional machinery for representative democracy in the colonies and Dominion Territories, it was time for London to get the same consideration as Timbuctoo.[10]

His next line of attack was in another major research work, *Great Cities of the World* in 1954. This book was the first comprehensive attempt at a comparative account of the government, politics and planning of nineteen metropolitan areas around the world. Robson built an international team of authors, set them a template, and wrote a long introductory essay which ends with a vision of the constitutional framework for great cities which was not direct rule by the central state, nor ad hoc single-function bodies, or joint arrangements, but a modernised municipalism:

> "It involves the administrative integration of the whole metropolitan area for the large-scale services which require unified planning, co-ordination or administration. It also involves smaller, more compact units of local government to perform the functions which can best be administered by smaller municipal organs. The reform of metropolitan government thus demands both more centralization and more decentralization; in other words, both larger and smaller areas and authorities".[11]

The editor's own chapter on London repeats a now-familiar critique. The City Corporation appears as "an obstinate relic of mediaeval structure sticking out like a rock in the sea".[12] The rock is still there but everything around was about to change.

In 1957 the Macmillan government announced its intention to review the structure of London government and appointed a Royal Commission under the chairmanship of the solicitor Sir Edwin Herbert. Unlike previous commissions, none of its members could be said to represent existing interests in the capital: they included the Birmingham industralist Paul Cadbury, Sir Charles Morris, Vice-Chancellor of Leeds University and Professor W J M Mackenzie from Manchester University. The geographical coverage was quite precisely defined to coincide with the continuous built-

up area inside the newly-designated Metropolitan Green Belt. The commissioners' task was to rearrange the existing map and functions, they were not asked to consider whether other competences such as police and water should be brought under local government control. As Royal Commissions go, Herbert and his team were exemplary. Their remit was well focussed, they were conscientious in visiting every corner of their vast enquiry area, thorough in investigation, and careful in sifting their recommendations, and unlike many local government enquiries before or since were unanimous in their conclusions.[13]

Royal Commission prompts formation of the Greater London Group

As part of the commission's preparatory stages, Sir Edwin Herbert wrote personally in March 1958 to the chief administrator of every university in the UK inviting evidence from academics, and particularly evidence from research groups rather than individual scholars. The University of London's invitation was soon in William Robson's hands, backed by personal words of encouragement from Bill Mackenzie. It prompted the formation of an interdisciplinary research group at the London School of Economics, chaired by Robson, to do research and submit evidence on matters within the Herbert Commission's field of enquiry. The work had been invited rather than commissioned, that would come later in the Royal Commission on the Structure of Local Government in England of 1966. William Robson secured Nuffield Foundation money to hire the young Jim Sharpe as research assistant. Among the Group's fourteen members were the lawyers Olive Stone and John Griffith, the economist Alan Day, the geographers Michael Wise, Robert Estall and John Martin, social policy and administration specialists David Donnison and Jane Henderson as well as colleagues from public administration and political science, Peter Self, Richard Pear and Keith Panter-Brick. After twelve intensive months of research and drafting, the Greater London Group made a 200 page submission in July 1959.[14]

It was the weightiest and most comprehensive evidence received by the Herbert Commission, with substantial analysis of the London economy, demography, land use and transport as well detailed thematic papers on each of the main local government functions, which were all familiar territory for Robson. However, he was no longer offering a personal diagnosis of government and misgovernment but chairing a Group of equally strong-minded colleagues. As Ken Young has observed, persuasion was not his forte [15]. The Group splintered. John Griffith saw no call for structural upheaval and could not share Robson's passionate conviction that the functions of a great city needed to be provided by a general-purpose directly-elected municipality. He submitted individual evidence to that effect. The Group's other members could not reach

agreement on the local arrangements but they did accept, with some reservations, the case for a single upper-tier authority for the continuously built-up area, with its eight million population, and were willing to sign up to Robson's own long-held though controversial conjecture that the absorption of metropolitan Kent, Surrey, Middlesex, Hertforshire, Essex and the county boroughs into a Greater London Council would "both express and develop the latent consciousness among Londoners, which lies beneath the surface, of belonging to great metropolitan community".[16]

Divided views on governance model

As to boroughs, Robson's views were clear. Since *Government and Misgovernment*, he had envisaged the reformed system as a scaled-up version of the relationship between the LCC and the Metropolitan Boroughs. The new boroughs should be small enough to correspond in some degree to the structure of urban sub-centres and their communal loyalties and memories, and large enough for all but the minimum amount of London-wide responsibility to pass upward to the GLC. Half the Group went with him, settling on a recommendation of twenty units with a size range of 250,000 to 500,000, comparable to county boroughs elsewhere in England. This was Scheme A. Peter Self, David Donnison and four other colleagues preferred an alternative approach, scheme B, which took county councils as the template, dividing London into seven sectors that radiated from the centre, each with its share of inner city and outer suburbs, and populations in the range of 1 to 1.5 million. There was also a second variant of Scheme B, which left the greater part of the LCC intact.

The Herbert Commission spent two full days taking oral evidence from the Greater London Group. The members did not disguise their differences. Robson said of Scheme B that to obliterate 100 local authorities and replace them with 7 counties "does not look right and I think that not only does it not look right but I personally would say that I do not think it is right". Peter Self spoke of Scheme A as "anomalous and retrograde - perhaps even a little absurd". When the chairman thanked them all at the end of Day 63, Robson stole the last word, returning thanks to the Royal Commission "for the very patient hearing that you have given to us and the great courtesy you have shown to our eccentricities and peculiar ideas".[17] At this point we have to imagine, with the help of George Jones's evocative pen portrait, a certain puckering of William Robson's austere countenance, "as if he were drawing jocular sustenance from the air with his mouth and nostrils".[18]

The commissioners really did seem to appreciate the Greater London Group's openness. The lively intellectual wranglings over the model for change made a contrast

with the generally descriptive or defensive tone of most other evidence received by the Commission. The Group's lower-tier disagreements also put into relief their comprehensive and unanimous advocacy of a single Greater London Council - with all that implied in terms of LCC abolition. The strength of LSE endorsement brought a late counter-submission from UCL's Centre for Urban Studies.[19] This group had an even wider disciplinary range, being chaired by the public health specialist Professor J M Mackintosh, and including the statisticians Roy Allen and Claus Moser, the planner Sir William Holford, the anthropologist C. Daryll Forde, geographer Dudley Stamp, historians S. T. Bindoff and Asa Briggs, and the sociologists David and Ruth Glass - the latter three did most of the drafting. Their evidence set out to correct the misconception that existing arrangements were somehow flawed and that London was lacking in democratic vitality. They attacked advocates of administrative solutions, with their question-begging faith in the magic word 'coordination'. They pointed out that the LCC had a socio-economic basis and corresponded to an area of 'distinct social identity'. They saw no need for a metropolitan authority, arguing that the outer boundaries of London were indeterminate and that physical built-upness was an inappropriate basis for metropolitan definition. They suggested that the management of this wider metropolitan region could best be provided through a special agency of central government. Their oral evidence was somewhat confused, apart from an emphatic rejection of the Greater London Group's recommendation. As Sir William Holford put it, "I think we all feel such a regional elected authority would be a monstrosity".[20]

Commissioners back Group's core argument

The commissioners felt otherwise. Their report, submitted in October 1960, was unanimous and it closely followed the core argument of the Greater London Group. They discussed London-wide government by Whitehall ministries, ad hoc bodies, appointed agencies, and joint committees of local authorities, rejecting them all in favour of a comprehensive reorganization into two tiers, with 52 London Boroughs and a Greater London Council for "those functions which can only be or can better be performed over a wider area".[21] In 1961 the Government's White Paper signalled its acceptance of the Herbert Commission's recommendations, including the key premise that Greater London within its green belt had become a recognisable civic entity, the home of modern 'Londoners'.[22] The pattern in the 1963 London Government Act of 32 London Boroughs was closer to the LSE Scheme A, than the 52 recommended by Herbert, though to William Robson's dismay the Corporation of the City of London escaped unscathed - yet again.

I will end with two last thoughts about William Robson, the Herbert Commission and 'Greater London'. The creation of the GLC in 1963 set the pattern for the wave of structural reforms undertaken by the Wilson and Heath governments. It was a triumph of public administration over politics, which failed the test of time. Contemporary American observers Frank Smallwood (1965) and Stephen Elkin (1974) were struck by the lack of interest in political dynamics and the degree of respect accorded to technical elites in London's management.[23] Ken Young contrasts the British public administration tradition's advocacy of large-scale integrated metro-bureaucracy with American political scientists' awareness of territorial diversity and conflict - and their interest in competitive, neo-liberal approaches to big-city governance. This line of argument gathered strength from abolition of the GLC in 1986, though from the longer perspective of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 we may conclude that Robson and Herbert got the essentials right after all.

The most impressive aspect of what has rather scornfully been called Robson's 'metropology' was his early and tenacious advocacy of a local government model of democratically elected, locally accountable, general-purpose government on the metropolitan scale. He understood clearly that a modernising and effective big-city leadership needed both wide powers and democratic roots. Paradoxically, the planning and transport modernization that Robson, Herbert, the Macmillan and Wilson governments and the incoming Greater London Council all envisaged was a comprehensive US style urban highways programme. That was abandoned in favour of public transport as a direct consequence of the hard-fought 1973 GLC elections. Londoners have never had cause to regret this historic choice, which they would have been unable to make under any constitutional model but the one which Robson put so cogently to the Herbert Commission.

A final word on the Greater London Group. The studies undertaken for Herbert were amplified and published as Greater London Papers. Robson kept the team together, adding new members from many disciplines within the LSE and the Group became the springboard for many academic careers. London's reorganisation was chronicled in Gerald Rhodes's *The Government of London: the struggle for reform* (1970) and *The New Government of London; the first five years* (1972). Other studies followed in the 1970s and Robson continued to preside over the Monday afternoon meetings of the Group until his death in 1980.

At this point the Group might also have faded were it not for the stimulus of the Conservative Government's proposals in *Streamlining the Cities* in 1983. Robson's successors Derek Diamond and then George Jones rebuilt a fresh interdisciplinary

team of young academics who submitted evidence on GLC abolition and were joined by Tony Travers to chronicle the dismantling of County Hall's empire and illuminate the complexities of government and misgovernment during the years of interregnum. Through formal and informal channels the Group had a significant influence on the 1999 outcome. The dialogue between thought and action, research and policy continues here and now - as the playwright said to the aviator, 'LSE is the place'.

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5. The Greater London Council 1965 to 1986

Jerry White

It's easy to look back on the 21-year history of the Greater London Council as an institution whose early promise was snuffed out by a tragic combination of malevolent external enemies and fatal flaws from within. There was tragedy here, because overall the GLC was a failure. Indeed, it seemed that certain design flaws had set it on the wrong path from the very beginning. Yet throughout those 21 years almost anything seemed possible at the time. The outcome of certain disputes and conjunctures appeared sometimes to hang by a thread - as fine and uncertain as a judge's deliberations. Or it depended solely on personal relationships and fickle human frailty. This was a story that could have had a happy ending, but it would have been against the odds.

The odds were stacked against success mainly at two levels. At a structural level, it was caught up in the relationships between powerful institutions. The GLC sat uncomfortably in the middle between the London Boroughs in the localities and Whitehall at the centre. The other, even more important, was political. The GLC was unfortunate to exist at a time when London politics were peculiarly frantic and where the political reference-points that had held good in the capital - and to a certain extent the nation - were dissolving. Politics were not made easier with an economic downturn in London's fortunes, of unparalleled severity in recent times.

The Beginnings: the 1963 London Government Act



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The structural problems had been foreseen from the beginning. The Herbert Commission had striven to avoid overlapping and duplication between the boroughs and the GLC, with the boroughs discharging all functions best delivered locally.Some of the commission's proposals met this injunction better than others. The new arrangements in the London Government Act 1963 muddied the waters further by disregarding some of Herbert's proposals for functional discrimination. For example, planning functions were reasonably clearly delineated between the boroughs and GLC but education was a muddle. The

solution for the inner boroughs was based on the continuation of the London County Council Education Authority under another name. Traffic and roads were distributed uneasily between the GLC, the Minister of Transport who was responsible for trunk roads and the boroughs which had general road maintenance. The boroughs and the GLC shared parking responsibilities. Public transport had been specifically excluded from Herbert's consideration but that was rectified from 1970 when the GLC became Transport Planning Authority for London with the task of integrating and improving public transport in the capital.

The most difficult issue was housing. The London housing problem was of huge dimensions, and it was inconceivable that the GLC should have no part to play in addressing it. The London Government Act's arrangements however were a recipe for conflict. The GLC could buy land and build wherever it wanted. The enormous housing stock it inherited from the LCC, about 230,000 dwellings, including the suburban estates, would eventually be transferred to the boroughs but on a timetable that took years to negotiate. Local authorities were given power to encourage the improvement of areas of old housing rather than demolition, in 1969 and 1974, so the GLC was given them, too. The Act in effect created two housing authorities in every London borough - the borough councils and the GLC.

The London Government Act made one other change of lasting significance to the recommendations of the Herbert Commission. This was to draw in the boundaries of Greater London, taking out some well-off suburban areas, which had vociferously lobbied the government against inclusion. These changes, made at the request of Conservative authorities, in fact did not help Tory prospects in Greater London. In fact they helped put the GLC on a political knife-edge by balancing out party political support in suburban and inner city boroughs in what was virtually a microcosm of England. The new council would be much more susceptible to swings in the national political mood than the peculiar micro-climate of the old LCC.

This effect was obvious from the beginning. Elections took place for shadow authorities in April 1964, to take over the new councils from 1 April 1965. To general surprise, Labour won overwhelming control of the GLC, 64 councillors to 36 and 19 of the 32 boroughs, including unlikely targets like Bexley and Hillingdon. The reason was clear enough. The elections had come at the fag end of an unpopular and scandal-plagued government. The Greater London elections were the first opportunity for a nation keen for change to make its opinion felt.

The challenge of power sharing

An even more dramatic fluctuation the other way took place three and four years later. The deep unpopularity of the second Wilson government (1966-1970) in mid-term caused by an incompetently-handled devaluation, combined with race relations, a new element in London politics:. The result was a Conservative landslide in April 1967. They took control of the GLC with 82 seats out of 100. A year later, 28 of the 32 London Borough Councils went Conservative too. With Londoners voting in local elections largely in accordance with national preference, the GLC fluctuated in a gloomy double fugue, with political rule at County Hall for 11 out of 21 years out of kilter with the party in charge across the river at Westminster; and generally in conflict with half the London Borough Councils.

This might have not have mattered so much if the London Government Act had not shared so much power at local level between the boroughs and the GLC. Most of all, it might have mattered less had the times been more propitious, but the late-1960s and 1970s were years when there was fundamental disagreement over every element of change in London. There was no common ground - indeed there were furious disputes - over roads versus communities, redevelopment versus conservation, and the future of redundant industrial land. Getting things done in such a tempestuous climate proved noisy, bloody and endlessly protracted. The Greater London Development Plan took seven years to gain approval from the Secretary of State after Sir Frank Layfield's revisions. There were bitter and exhausting debacles over London's ring ways and the future of Covent Garden. There was failure to negotiate and agree a scheme capable of practical realisation in Docklands. And there was mordant trench warfare over housing in London, the biggest metropolitan political question.

Housing - one of the flashpoints

From the beginning, the GLC sought hegemony over London's housing. The government allowed the GLC to delay handover of former LCC stock as a bargaining tool to get borough councils to do what it wanted, and to meet its own aspirations as a housing developer. The first Labour GLC's big idea that "London was one city" was received badly in a capital where local interests and popular loyalties were always stronger than any metropolitan world view. Just as the old Metropolitan Borough Councils had successfully staked their claim against an overweening LCC, the London borough councils fiercely resented interference by the GLC as central authority in local affairs.

It was not just parochial pride, though, that made boroughs bridle at the GLC trespassing on their interests. It was political. The Conservative outer London boroughs suspected the GLC of reducing inner London's problems by exporting Labour-voting council tenants to the suburbs. Bromley and Redbridge were not alone in virtually refusing to cooperate with the GLC's efforts to rehouse Londoners in their areas, others were niggardly in their offers of help. When the Conservatives captured the GLC and almost all the boroughs, its housing policy switched drastically to council house sales and stock transfer to the boroughs. Both were at first curtailed by a Labour government until 1970 and reversed with Labour back at County Hall from 1973. In 1974 the GLC attempted to put together a housing strategy for London, which tried hard not to alienate the outer boroughs, but their cautious agreement to negotiate came to nothing because of severe government cutbacks on housing capital from 1975.

Abolitionists become vocal

The failure to construct a London-wide strategy for housing, coming on top of 10 years of housing strife and planning defeats, provoked *The Observer* newspaper to comment in May 1975 that "regional housing strategy is the [GLC's] one claim to salvation. If it fails in that, what is it there for?" That was a question many others were asking from the mid-1970s on. The boroughs had bedded down reasonably well - their travails were yet to come, but the GLC had not staked a satisfactory claim in London governance. There had been such wild swings in political control and policy direction. Policy had been blocked from above by government and below by the boroughs. The GLC had lost functions like vehicle licensing to the Department of Transport in 1969, sewerage responsibilities to the water authorities in 1973 and the London Ambulance Service to the NHS in 1974. It had gained the coordination of public transport in 1970, but here it was thwarted by chronic under-investment and poor management within London Transport. So was the GLC necessary at all?

Some thought not. In 1974, Geoffrey Finsberg, a former Hampstead Borough Councillor, Conservative leader of Camden Borough Council from 1968-70, and then MP for Hampstead, produced *A Policy for London* which advocated stripping out the GLC's role and reviewing its purpose. This sparked off an even more radical movement for abolition within a section of the Conservative Party in London. In the new abolitionists' scheme, a Minister for London would become the metropolitan authority, and self-government would be confined to the parts of London acting alone. At the 1977 GLC elections 'The Abolish the GLC Campaign' fought 31 out of 92 seats. They had little success, but London Conservatives, who won their third term at these elections, could hardly fail to take note.

In his 1977 GLC manifesto, Horace Cutler, the Conservative leader, had undertaken to commission an independent inquiry into London government. Cutler was an anti-abolitionist but also believed the GLC had taken on too much, especially with housing. He arranged for a fresh look at the Council by commissioning Sir Frank Marshall, formerly the Conservative leader of Leeds Corporation, to review the GLC's role in London government.

The July 1978 Marshall Report concluded that a metropolitan authority continued to be necessary because "The total interest of London as a whole transcends that of its constituent parts, their local needs and individual aspirations." Marshall called for devolution from Whitehall to give the GLC a clearer and bigger strategic role. He proposed that Government should pass to the GLC responsibility for trunk roads and for "the complete public transport network in London, setting fares policies, approving investment plans and co-ordinating services", including contracting with British Rail. He suggested that in 'the long run', the health service in London and the Metropolitan Police should also go to the GLC. Marshall recommended that the GLC should let some services go to the boroughs, especially housing management and development. He was notably less keen on devolution from County Hall to town hall than from Whitehall to the GLC. Marshall suppressed for a few years the abolitionist war cry by reaffirming the need for metropolitan government but his recommendations for more power to be given to the GLC fell on stony ground. In May 1979 a Conservative government was elected that proved more hostile to local government than any since the Attlee government 30 years earlier.

Labour becomes subject to gentrification

One reason for its hostility was the increasing identification of local government with an adventurous and costly left-wing socialism. This was especially so in London.

It is possible to debate for a long time the forces that scrambled Labour politics in London from the 1960s on beyond recognition. It seems to me race and the consequences of gentrification were the key elements but there were no doubt others. The 1968 Conservative landslide unquestionably had a pernicious racial component. The effect on Labour of electoral defeat was to dislodge many of the older party activists from their powerbase in the town halls. With the party flung into opposition, it became easier for middle-class newcomers to make their mark. Well-educated, articulate, trained to argue, their self-confidence often honed by working in the media or in professions like law or architecture brought special and useful knowledge to party discussions, The gentrifiers formed alliances dedicated to moving the party in new direc-

tions. Questions began to be asked. If the 'old guard' had been so good, why had they lost power in 1967-68? When they had held power, why had they done so little, most of all to improve housing conditions? And how could 'socialist' councils tolerate black people living in worse conditions than whites? These were the years when politics began wrestling with new ideas and the new challenges emerging from a multi-cultural society.

The old guard didn't give up easily. The 1970s were characterised in Labour parties throughout London by factionalism, shifting alliances and internecine strife. There was a bitterness that had not been seen since the anti-communist struggles of the 1920s. Any number of elements were cast into this burning fiery furnace. Race grew in importance as minority groups gained in confidence, discovered the need for self-defence, and found their way to a stake in civil society through party politics. It was less a question of choosing a party, because that usually was Labour, than of choosing elements or groups to ally with inside it. It was often, though, the manual trade unions who held the key to advancement within the local and London parties. Hardly a Labour council in London felt able to confront and resist its blue-collar workforce in the dreadful strikes in the 'Winter of Discontent' of 1978-79 because it would have meant losing power to the faction which would back the union.

Then gender and the politics of sexuality found a louder voice from the mid-1970s and after. Countless single-issue pressure groups attached themselves to a party or faction in a kaleidoscope of fragile and promiscuous unions: conservationists, environmentalists, squatters, anti-nuclear campaigners, roads protestors, lobbyists for single mothers or playgroups, protestors against abortion or kerb-crawling. All actively engaged within local Labour parties or knocked importunately without, at some time or another. It all had little to do with the real lives of most Londoners, and, in the case of public sector strikes, was directed against their interests. The traditional Labour voter, the skilled worker in regular employment, who had originally been the party's backbone gave up trying to make sense of it and was now leaving inner London in droves for the suburbs and the New Towns.

The rise of Livingstone

Out of this feverish milieu Ken Livingstone emerged to seize the London limelight on 7 May 1981. That night Labour won control of the GLC after four years' rule under Cutler. The question then was, which Labour? Going into the elections, the GLC opposition was led by Andrew McIntosh, a moderate who had relied on right-wing support to take the leadership just a year before. He had beaten Livingstone by one vote with

two abstentions. Yet it was Livingstone on whom Cutler concentrated his fire during the campaign and the television cameras also turned on him on election night. Livingstone proved the most significant Labour Party figure of the post-Morrison years in London.

It was Ken Livingstone who became the voice of the Labour left in London. Within 24 hours of the GLC victory he had engineered a party coup to oust McIntosh and to install himself as leader and his close allies as committee chairs. The left's victory at the heart of London government led to a redoubling of conflict, dissension and schism across the Labour parties of the capital. Things were hardly helped by Livingstone's London Labour Briefing, where personal attacks, laced with vitriol, alienated Labour politicians of the right and centre. For the rest of the GLC's short life, there would be splits everywhere, and unprecedented electoral defeats in London's Labour heartlands.

Livingstone's battle with the 'dragon' across the Thames

At County Hall, the GLC under Livingstone seemed fatally caught up in the quagmire of political rhetoric that had clogged Labour's arteries since at least the mid-1970s in most of inner London. The euphoria of the 1981 GLC election victory when, in a high turnout, voters came out in droves against a temporarily unpopular Conservative government, seemed to endow Livingstone with a crusader's cloak equipping him to do battle with the dragon across the Thames. The whole agenda of the Livingstone GLC, in close alliance with so-called 'Loony Left' boroughs like Lambeth and Hackney, seemed set to provoke, challenge, and defeat the Thatcher government. Any means would justify that end. It ignored the majority of Londoners in spending endless time and bottomless resources in pursuit of ideological purity on gender, sexuality and race. It spent Londoners' taxes on recruiting comrades to an ever-enlarging payroll. It gave grants to some 'community organisations' dedicated to little more than their own survival and the government's downfall. It waged a publicity war against government on policies, like 'troops out of Ireland'. It confused the boundary between GLC and the Labour Party when agitating at huge expense against rate-capping and other government initiatives. It snubbed the Royal Family, always a mistake with cockney London. In all this, Livingstone demonised those colleagues who departed from him along the way. It was all pretty dreadful stuff, even if it had considerable allure for many at the time.

There were some achievements. The Council's anti-racism agitation, which ILEA carried into every classroom in inner London, forced Londoners to think seriously about

the implications of living in a multi-cultural society. It probably changed behaviour for the better. The GLC's much-lambasted arts policy redirected subsidy for 'culture' away from the opera house and art gallery into more demotic and inclusive spheres. After pursuing the decentralisation of jobs from inner London until as late as 1976, the GLC belatedly tried to stem the flood of jobs with its Greater London Enterprise Board exploiting GLC land and capital to some positive ends. The GLC tried valiantly to do something about London's transport and traffic problems.

Fares Fair gains support

The Labour Party manifesto for the 1981 GLC election, constructed under McIntosh's leadership, proposed a 25% cut in London Transport fares followed by a freeze. The cost of the 'Fares Fair' policy would be borne by ratepayers, estimated in the manifesto at a supplementary rate of 5p in the pound. But by the time Labour came to implement this pledge the government's punitive grant regime clawed back one pound subsidy for every pound a council spent beyond the government target. The actual cuts in fares made by the GLC averaged 32%, but the cost to ratepayers was nearly 12p in the pound. This is claimed to have more than doubled Londoners' weekly outgoings to the GLC.

The cost and even more so the popularity of the fares cuts enraged London Conservatives, especially in the run-up to the Borough Council elections of May 1982. The enterprising Tory Bromley leadership - old opponents of the Labour GLC in its early days of housing imperialism - then dreamt up the wheeze of challenging in the courts the GLC's decision to subsidise bus and tube fares from the rates at such a high level. Bromley rationalised its challenge by arguing that the borough would not benefit, because it was not served by the tube, but the residents would pay steeply through the GLC precept. The High Court initially rejected Bromley's claim. It concluded that the GLC could subsidise London Transport and it was a matter of discretion how much that subsidy should cost. Bromley then appealed and the Appeal Court unanimously decided against the GLC on the basis that London Transport had a statutory duty to balance its books with fares covering costs, without the benefit of GLC subsidy. That decision was upheld in the House of Lords. The government was hardly likely to alter London Transport's obligations, so Fares Fair was at an end.

Livingstone's GLC, with the support of most Londoners, had fought to establish a sensible funding regime for public transport in London and so ameliorate one of London's enduring disabilities. Its potential success is demonstrated by an estimated 10% increase in public transport use during the three months' operation of Fares Fair, and

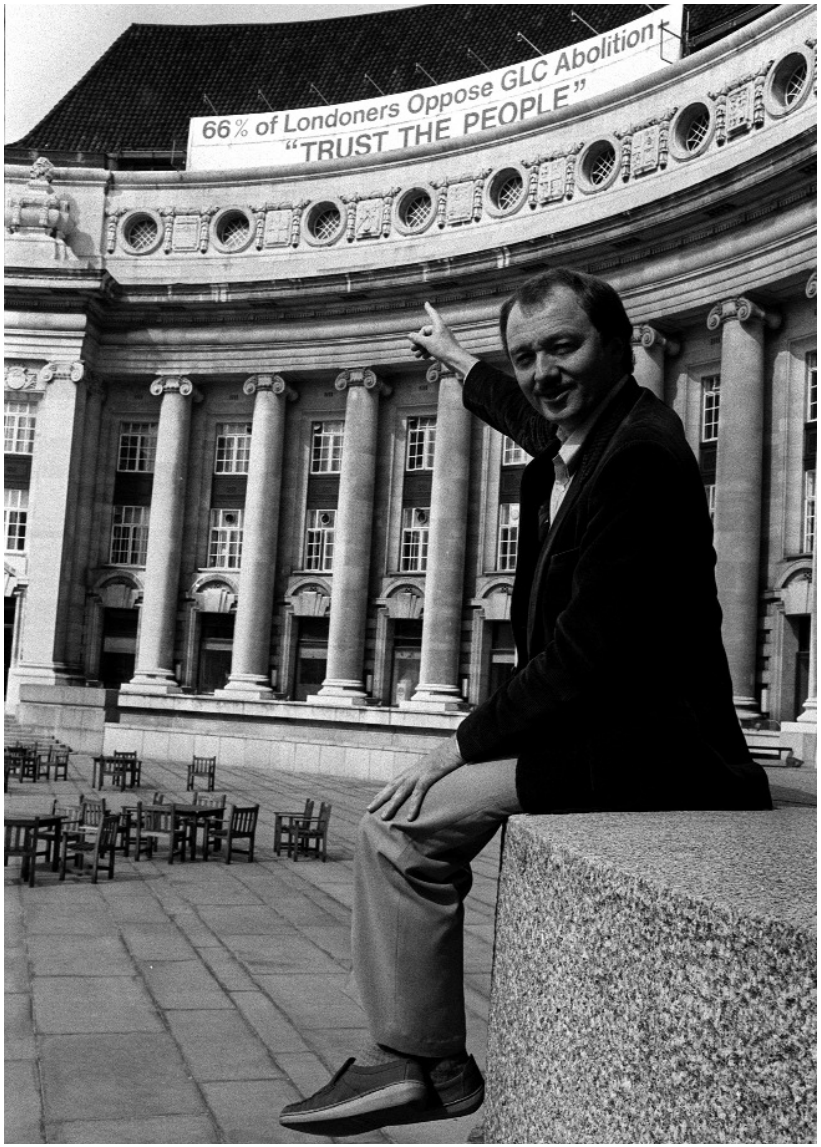
a 6% fall in cars entering London in the rush hour. It seemed preposterous that such a sensible strategy for Londoners should have been defeated in the courts - justice was with the Council but the law was against it. The GLC didn't give up entirely. A low-fare travelcard initiative called Just the Ticket followed in May 1983, again leading to very positive signs of increased public transport use and fewer cars. And a 'lorry ban' was implemented in central London from December 1984. By then, though, the government had removed responsibility for public transport in London from the GLC and given it to a new London Regional Transport Board, appointed by Ministers. Fares rose again from January 1985. Even so, in the memories of a generation of Londoners from 1981 on, it was better to have tried and lost than not to have tried at all.

Abolition on the agenda as GLC reaches the height of its popularity

Across the river in the Palace of Westminster, to have tried at all was seen as treason. Fares Fair, the travelcard and Ken Livingstone's charismatic leadership had made the Labour GLC both more recognisable and more popular, despite its risible extravagances of leftist gesture politics, than ever before in its brief history. It was, perhaps, typical of Margaret Thatcher that she chose to abolish the GLC at the moment it seemed most secure in the support of Londoners and when the abolition movement had been dormant for five years or so. The decision was, it seems, very much hers. Apparently mooted in secret for some time, it still came as a thunderbolt to London Tories. Alan Greengross, their leader on the GLC, learned of it just three days, perhaps even less, before the commitment to abolish was made public in the Conservative general election manifesto of May 1983. When Margaret Thatcher won that second term, she could claim a popular mandate for scrapping the GLC and scuppering Ken Livingstone.

The DoE White Paper in October 1983 justified GLC abolition as a cost-effective attack on 'the 'national overhead'. When public transport was taken from the GLC, it would have little to do. "This generates a natural search for a 'strategic' role which may have little basis in real needs" and might also "conflict with national policies which are the responsibility of central government." Abolition was needed in the interests of 'Streamlining the Cities', the white paper argued.

These were weasel words and Londoners knew it. They saw the only organisation prepared to do something to ease their transport problems being abolished because the government didn't like it spending money to do so and because it hated Livingstone and all his works. Opinion polls showed increasing, and soon overwhelming support for retaining the GLC. Abolition was opposed by a significant band of Tory



"Margaret Thatcher chose to abolish the GLC at the moment it seemed most secure in the support of Londoners "

rebels in parliament, led by Ted Heath, and in County Hall by Alan Greengross. The Times, the Guardian, the Financial Times, the London Chamber of Commerce, the Royal Town Planning Institute, the LSE and almost everyone other than Conservative Central Office, all raised their voices against abolition. Thousands of representations in response to the 1983 white paper flooded in but the government refused to publish any, or even to say how many were in favour of its proposals. It proved to no avail. The 1985 GLC elections were cancelled to ensure that the wishes of Londoners could not find expression at the ballot box. With a monster firework party from the South Bank, London said goodbye to the GLC on 31 March 1986.

The GLC's demise was much lamented but not for its achievements, which were both very limited and very costly. It was, indeed, remembered most fondly for its heroic failure over 'Fares Fair', where it had marshalled the large majority of Londoners against what seemed to be a well-off suburban minority, and against antediluvian judges who seemed to be in the pocket of an overweening government. Then, of course, there was the manner of its passing, which no reasonable person could stomach.

When it came to construct a new London government in 2000, one theme was quite frequently heard. Many were clear that a London-wide government was most certainly needed, but they didn't want another GLC. And it's not hard to see why.

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6. The interregnum, the boroughs and the GLA, 1986-2000

Nirmala Rao

Towards the end of its life, the Greater London Council had come to be seen by some as "either too weak to be effective or too powerful to be acceptable."[1] The one serious attempt to resolve this impasse in the form of the Marshall Inquiry led nowhere. However, the GLC's abolition in 1986 left decision-making and governance highly fragmented. A network of joint bodies struggled to build a basis for the planning of the metropolis, while the case for a London-wide government gained new momentum. Abolition was a massive administrative exercise but the predicted chaos did not materialise and London continued to function.[2]

The private sector advocated partnership as a panacea for London's ills, but by the mid-1990s the limits of partnership became clear. It had become over-dependent on elaborate structures of cooperative joint action and there was an absence of any overall responsibility for formulating and implementing a vision for London. Indeed, commentators and academics alike had condemned London's dismemberment as an act of political vandalism. The analysis of the problem of London government soon became more sophisticated. Opinion moved towards creating a 'voice for London' that might, or might not, take the form of an elected mayor with executive powers.[3]

The interregnum



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The post-GLC period also witnessed the emergence of other local government structures. Some London-wide functions passed directly to the boroughs in their own right. The principal example was education. Prior to GLC abolition, ILEA had existed as one of its subcommittees with its members comprising the GLC councillors from inner London constituencies together with representatives from the inner London boroughs. Amendments to the 1987 Education Reform Bill brought about ILEA's abolition and the transfer of education services in their entirety to the boroughs in 1990.

Beyond education, there were several GLC functions for which immediate Londonwide arrangements had to be made, several requiring joint action by the boroughs. The London Boroughs Grants Scheme was one of a number of funding sources established to replace the GLC's voluntary groups funding, with all London boroughs, and the City of London, as its constituent members. The lead borough, Richmond-upon-Thames, supported a Grants Unit, which became responsible not only for administering schemes and advising the committee but also for monitoring social needs in Greater London. Part of the GLC research and intelligence function was reconstituted under section 88 of the 1985 act as the London Research Centre. Accountable to a joint committee of boroughs, Islington took the lead borough role. With a budget in excess of £150 million, the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority (LFCDA) was one of the major authorities that undertook several important functions on behalf of the London boroughs and the City Corporation.

Continuing Londonwide Planning

Far more important and controversial was the arrangement made for London regional planning. Following the abolition of the GLC, primary responsibility for strategic planning was transferred to central government, but the London Planning Advisory Committee (LPAC) was established to advise the Minister and the boroughs, with Havering as lead borough. Advised by a panel of senior officers comprising chief executives, borough planners, engineers, surveyors, and finance officers, LPAC was funded by London local authorities contributing on a per capita basis. LPAC's main task and statutory raison d'être was to propose strategic guidance on behalf of the London boroughs to the Secretary of State, which acted as a framework of general policy within which boroughs prepared their Unitary Development Plans.[4]

LPAC also gave advice on behalf of all London boroughs to local planning committees on major development proposals and it defined criteria for distinguishing major from minor developments. LPAC became an important player within the London and South East Regional Planning Conference (SERPLAN), a body which, established some years before, continued its monitoring and advisory role on major transport and planning issues affecting the region. It also coordinated joint policies on waste disposal, regional shopping centres, maintenance of open land in the green belt, and the allocation of building land for housing.

Waste disposal was one of the GLC's largest functions, which was transferred to the newly established Waste Disposal Authority (WDA). It was made up of four statutory joint authorities covering Western Riverside, East London, West London, and North

London. Twelve London boroughs linked together into three voluntary groups covering Central, South London, and South East London, which worked alongside the joint authorities to form the WDA.

At the national level, the Conservative government established a Cabinet subcommittee to link up separate Whitehall departments. In the following year, John Gummer was appointed Secretary of State for Environment and he was also given a new and brief as Minister for London. In 1994, the Government Office for London (GOL) was set up as one of ten regional offices in England. The machinery was now in place to enable Whitehall to function effectively as a strategic authority for the metropolitan area. Accountable to Gummer's Cabinet subcommittee, GOL was an inter-departmental entity bringing together the regional offices of the Departments of Environment, Transport, Trade and Industry, and Education and Employment. GOL was in no sense a monolith, as its component parts continued to report to their own sponsoring departments.[5]

By the mid-1990s, the London boroughs, working with GOL, had considerably increased their role, individually and collectively, in London's government. This was itself partly a reflection of the emerging leadership role of private sector-led bodies. A new organisation, London First, brought together London borough leaders, the voluntary sector, and leading private-sector interests, and took the lead role in shaping the debate on the future of London government.[6] Chaired by Lord Sheppard, London First enjoyed the support of more than 300 businesses, and latterly, the London boroughs.

The London Pride Partnership was launched by London First, and its private sector partners included the CBI London region, the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Training & Enterprise Councils. London government was represented by the Association of London Government (ALG), LPAC, and the Cities of London and Westminster. In his role as Minister for London, John Gummer set up a Joint London Advisory Panel in 1996 composed of the twelve ministerial representatives on the Cabinet subcommittee and eleven private sector representatives of the London Pride partnership. These initiatives aimed to promote London's locational advantages as a world city and business centre and to demonstrate that GLC abolition and the lack of a firm planning and investment framework created the space for business and the City to promote their priorities.[7] But the Partnership did not escape divisions. The business partners were keen to concentrate on London's central area, while the borough members insisted on taking a broader view including the suburbs.

Rethinking London Governance

As the general election approached, the time seemed ripe for fresh thinking about London. A number of prominent Labour politicians had picked up Michael Heseltine's proposal for a directly elected mayor and advocated it for London. In April 1996, Labour published *A Voice for London* (Labour Party 1996). For the first time, the proposal was put forward for a Greater London Authority (GLA), which would take an area-wide view but which would not be directly responsible for the provision of services. The GLA would promote economic, transport, planning, environmental, and policing strategies as well as inward investment. The services for which it would have responsibility, such as fire and police, would be run at arms length through appointed boards. Any idea, that the authority might be complemented by an elected mayor was put forward only tentatively.

According to Labour's leader at the time, London needed "a galvanising powerful vision of its future" and "for a vision, there does need to be a voice". The manifesto settled London's future. A GLA would comprise an elected assembly together with a separately elected mayor with wide-ranging powers of appointment and direction over the major metropolitan services, including police and transport.[8] The high-profile business group London First came out in support of an executive mayor or governor for London, although it preferred one untrammelled by an elected assembly. Speaking to the London First conference following his election triumph, prime minister Tony Blair acknowledged the business community's role in shaping the agenda and proclaimed the mayor's office to be

> "an immensely powerful position with the mandate of five million voters. It needs to be, because the challenges London faces are immense . . .What we need is government, business and the new Mayor to work together for the good of all London. That should be our aim so that we can make this city and our country ready to face the next century even stronger than it leaves this one."[9]

London under the Greater London Authority

The creation of the GLA in 2000 marked the opening of a new era in the governance of metropolitan London.[10] The institution of a directly elected executive Mayor and representative assembly was entirely novel. Drawing inspiration from the experiences of other great cities, the 1999 GLA Act replaced the plethora of other bodies and joint arrangements that had characterised the interregnum period. Yet despite the aim of streamlining London's government and to ensure that key services were provided in

a clearly accountable fashion, the reality is that in almost every respect responsibility is diffused between a host of statutory and non-statutory bodies.[11]

Take the example of promoting London as a world city. Much of the case for creating a Mayor as a single focus for promotion, the 'voice for London', rested on the assumption that the Mayor alone would act as the beacon for attracting inward investment and enhancing London's competitiveness in the world markets. In reality, the Mayor and the London Development Agency (LDA) do not have sole responsibility for promoting London. That role is shared with other bodies, many of which are overseen by different Whitehall departments. They include the London Tourist Board with its Visit London campaign to attract tourists and business visitors, which comes under the purview of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), as does London International Sport, which aims to bring international events to London. The successful bid for the 2012 Olympic Games and the establishment of a new delivery agency drew these bodies together, and embroils both mayor and ministers in detailed - and sometimes fraught - negotiations over planning for the Olympics.

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has an important stake through two partnerships involving mainly private sector bodies, Trade Partners UK with the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) for export promotion and the London First Centre, which attracts inward investment. At the local level there are five sub regional partnerships covering north, south, east, west and central London, which the LDA brings together through Team London. Inescapably, GOL attempts to take an overview of all these activities.

A second and very different example is the plethora of bodies concerned with the management of London's waste. The UK government has implemented European Commission Directives on landfill, recycling rates and producer responsibility, set regional targets for recycling and established the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) to develop new markets for recycled products. London Remade plays a similar role to WRAP at the London level, the London Community Recycling Network supports community engagement in waste and recycling, the LDA seeks to promote the 'green economy' and the Environment Agency monitors and regulates all these activities. Lines of authority and accountability are complex. For their part, the London boroughs have statutory obligations to collect, manage and dispose of waste, and a number of joint inter-borough arrangements have been developed to do that. The Mayor has few direct powers over waste management, while the boroughs themselves have different waste management processes, and relate to the central and regional funding streams according to their own local priorities and preferences.

The arrangements for energy policy are equally complex. The general thrust of policy is to move towards a low carbon economy. In the case of Ken Livingstone's Energy Strategy, there were virtually no formal powers at his disposal to secure any changes. The main instrument proposed in the strategy was a London energy partnership which will have to rely on extensive goodwill and collaboration amongst a wide and disparate range of stakeholders to succeed.

The blurred networks of responsibility for planning and transport

There are similarly blurred networks with responsibility for planning, roads and public transport. Here, arguably, considerations of accountability and transparency loom still larger. The Mayor is responsible for the overall planning framework through the London Plan, while the boroughs operate development control. The 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act replaced the former Unitary Development Plans (UDP), prepared by the boroughs, with Local Development Schemes (LDS). Approved by the Secretary of State, these are required to conform to the London Plan and will be subject to public inquiry. It will be some years before these borough schemes are brought into conformity with the London Plan. In the meantime, should conflict between the London Plan and a LDS arise in any appeal, it would be for a planning inspector to decide which should take precedence.

The GLA Act accorded only a general and strategic role to the Mayor. In relation to planning applications mayoral powers are essentially negative and while the mayor has power to direct refusal of a planning application of strategic importance, there is no power to direct approval if the borough is minded to refuse. There is some expectation that boroughs may be deterred from refusing applications by the prospect of the Mayor supporting the applicant at a public inquiry, and being liable for costs if they lose. The Mayor's determinations of planning matters are also subject to the overriding powers of the Secretary of State to call in applications of national importance.

A major planning issue for Ken Livingstone, when he was mayor, was the provision of affordable housing which is seen as crucial to the recruitment and retention of key workers in London's economy and public services. However, the diffusion of responsibility under the Act is such that the Mayor can only lead by persuasion, at least until enhanced powers were agreed in the 2007 GLA Act . Despite GOL taking a lead in this respect, accountability for London's housing development remains blurred. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Thames Gateway initiative, which covers a vast area to the east of the capital, extending deep into Kent and Essex. The Thames Gateway is identified in the government's Sustainable Communities Plan for major

expansion, aiming to provide 200,000 more homes in this area than previously planned with an allocation of £446m over three years for infrastructure. This ambitious initiative has spawned further institutional complexity. The Thames Gateway Strategic Partnership (TGSP) was to provide the overarching strategic framework for the whole of the Thames Gateway. A London Gateway Partnership Board was established to agree sub-regional strategies and priorities, in the context of this framework, the London Plan, the Regional Housing Strategy, and the LDA's economic development strategy. At the executive level, a range of delivery agencies have been established including the Thames Gateway Urban Development Corporation (UDC) which covers the section within London.

Under the 1999 GLA Act, Transport for London absorbed London Transport and the functions of the Traffic Director for London, together with some of the functions of the highways agencies and the Government Office for London. TfL was given overall responsibility for roads, buses, trains, and the underground, managing the traffic light system and regulating taxis and mini-cabs. The Mayor appoints the members of the TfL board and has the right to chair the meetings. The Mayor's overriding responsibility is to bring these several modes of transport together through the preparation of an integrated transport strategy for London. However it is not clear to what level of detail such a strategy could and should go and how far the powers of the Mayor and TfL extend to ensure its delivery. TfL has extensive powers to force the boroughs to implement its transport strategy but these may be too draconian to make them useable in practice. Notwithstanding the Mayor's formal powers, there is no discernible overall strategy for managing traffic and the road network in London and no single point of responsibility within this complex arrange array of agencies including TfL, boroughs, the Highways Agency, public utilities and enforcement agencies.

Managing the roads: A key test

The test for any strategy would be to ensure a coherent road hierarchy at borough level. The present strategic network is clearly defined. The Highways Agency is responsible for motorways within London: the M1, M3, M4, M11, M40 and the M25 which, although only partly within the GLA area, caters for orbital travel around and through London. The Mayor has responsibility for the Transport for London Roads Network (TLRN), the strategic network of 550 km (broadly the same as the red route network) which represents just five per cent of the total network, but carries a third of the traffic. The remaining 13,000 km of roads are the responsibility of the boroughs, and how the boroughs manage them has a major impact on the performance of the strategic network and of the transport system as a whole. Each borough's unitary

development plan (now being replaced by Local Development Schemes) defines priorities for roads, but problems arise where roads cross borough boundaries. Moreover, when boroughs choose to block through-routes or change traffic light timing, this may have a significant impact on congestion on the strategic network that an individual borough is not required to take into account.

Congestion is also exacerbated by roadworks to repair roads, introduce new traffic management measures, repair or renew outworn public utility pipes and cables, or to connect up premises. The boroughs maintain their own information systems for the roadworks that are a result of their own activities, but they do not hold data from the utilities or promote co-ordination with neighbouring authorities. The London media are quick to highlight the inconvenience of roads being dug up many times, a lack of urgency in completing the work, or poor re-instatement requiring further work to make good.

Finally, making the best use of road space depends on effective enforcement of traffic, loading and parking regulations. The police traffic wardens enforce parking control on red routes and borough parking attendants on other routes. Bus lanes are enforced partly by cameras operated by the boroughs, partly by TfL through bus-mounted cameras, and partly by the police. The police are wholly responsible for dealing with offences at traffic lights and yellow box junctions although it is now proposed to vest these powers in their wardens. However, the enforcement of traffic regulations is generally not a high priority for the police and the Mayor has had to provide funding for the Metropolitan Police from TfL's budget to pay for bus lane enforcement. The boroughs employ parking attendants to enforce parking regulations, who tend to concentrate on metered and residents' parking bays to satisfy residents and maximize the revenue from parking penalties. Preventative enforcement on major roads and bus routes, on the other hand, is expensive and, if successful, produces little penalty revenue. Borough enforcement then contributes relatively little to improving overall traffic flows.

Given the long lead times for rail and underground improvements, buses offer the quickest way to improve public transport in London. TfL designates the London Bus Priority Network (LBPN) and sets the programme for improving services through the London Bus Initiative (LBI). However many of the key components of the LBPN are borough roads and the boroughs are responsible for implementing bus priority measures on them, co-ordinated on a sub-regional basis. Implementing priority measures such as bus lanes is proving a slow process, partly because of resource constraints and partly because of the need to consult and take account of local concerns.

Over 400,000 people travel to central London by rail in the morning peak, with nearly half transfering to the underground to complete their journey. There are conflicts between national priorities for use of the rail system for inter-city and longer distance commuter services and freight - and London priorities for turn-up-and-go shorter distance and orbital services. The future of the relationship between TfL and the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) is uncertain, prompting the Mayor to bid to acquire the power to take forward and fund such developments projects as Crossrail, Thameslink 2000 and the East London Line extension. At present, such major projects are not the responsibility of any single organisation. The promoter may be TfL or the SRA (or both acting jointly in the case of Crossrail), but they are not empowered to make them happen. The Government has to approve the projects but does not take responsibility for driving them through. Priorities for rail projects are determined on a national basis and assessed on the basis of standard transport cost-benefit appraisal that does not take account of multiplier or regeneration benefits. Projects are often delayed because of obstacles in the public inquiry or legal process, arising from the national legislation for project authorisation, EU legislation and the Human Rights Act rather than the structure of institutions such as the London government.

Accountability

If the effectiveness of London's new government is to be judged solely as a strategic authority providing public services, then it is apparent that the confusion, conflict and overlap that arise as a result of the multiplicity of players impedes transparency and accountability. More fundamental is the underlying confusion stemming from the lack of clarity in the relationships between the Mayor and the Assembly. If the objective of the GLA Act was to create an authority for London with clearly focused and visible leadership, then the public needs clearly defined procedures for calling it to account. This, however, is far from the case. The institutions of Mayor and Assembly and the dynamics of the relationship between them, at least during Livingstone's two terms, were in constant flux.

That situation continues as we move into the new era under Boris Johnson. He is likely to pursue a very different approach to the problem of governing London than his predecessor. Already, the City Charter agreement has been made between the Mayor and London Councils. Together, they promise joint action in place of conflict, and a self-limitation of mayoral power in favour of consensus and local rights. How this will work, and how Boris Johnson will steer a new course among this plethora of bodies, remains to be seen.

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7. The Greater London Authority 2000 to 2008

Tony Travers

The election of Tony Blair's Labour government in 1997 signalled the restoration of elected metropolitan government in London. The struggle to find an appropriate system of governance for the capital had gone on for a very long time[i]. Labour and the Liberal Democrats had both been committed to a new institution in place of the Greater London Council since it was abolished in 1986. Labour set about a series of constitutional reforms, including devolution to Scotland, Wales and London. A Green Paper was published and in 1998 a referendum held on the proposal to introduce a Greater London Authority (GLA) for the capital. Blair had personally pushed the idea of a mayor, bringing an American political institution into the British governmental arrangements[ii].

The electorate in all London boroughs voted in favour of the new GLA, which would consist of an executive mayor who would be overseen by a 25-member assembly. The mayor would be elected by a 'supplementary vote' arrangement and the assembly by the 'alternative vote' system – a form of proportional representation. The new authority would be responsible for transport, economic development, spatial planning and, to a lesser degree, police and the fire brigade. It would have the power to set a council tax precept[iii]. The GLA was less powerful than the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly but it had a wider range of responsibilities than the GLC.



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The Mayor would run a small administration that would, in turn, be responsible for four key functional bodies - Transport for London (TfL), the London Development Agency (LDA), the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) and the London Fire & Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA). Each of these institutions would have a board and the Mayor would appoint some or all of the members. Policy would be determined by the Mayor in a series of strategies, the most important was a 'spatial plan' within which the boroughs would have to fit their own planning policies. The Mayor would also set the budgets of all four functional bodies.

Creating a new city-wide authority was welcomed by the boroughs and the City of London. There was a widely-perceived vacuum in the capital's government[iv]. Some of the GLA's powers, such as transport, economic development, planning and the police had been transferred from Whitehall, while others such as the fire and emergency services had been run by a borough joint committee after 1986[v]. The boroughs lost virtually none of their own responsibilities but, as with earlier systems of London government, there was some concern about the way the new mayor would use his planning powers.

The 2000 GLA election

For the political parties, the GLA posed a challenge. Directly-elected executive mayors were an innovation in Britain. New procedures were needed to select a candidate. The Conservatives, who had changed their post-1983 policy of opposition to London-wide government, chose Jeffrey Archer as candidate. Ex-GLC leader Ken Livingstone emerged as the leading contender for Labour. However, prime minister Tony Blair and his Chancellor Gordon Brown, determined to avoid signalling a return to the politics of the 1980s, created an electoral college to select their party's candidate. Former Cabinet Minister Frank Dobson won. Livingstone, a Labour MP at the time, decided to fight the election as an independent. Meanwhile, Jeffrey Archer had to be dropped after allegations of perjury in relation to an earlier court case emerged. Steven Norris was chosen to represent the Tories. The Liberal Democrats, with no fuss, selected Susan Kramer as their candidate[vi].

The 2000 elections for the Mayor and Assembly were the first of their kind in England. Campaigning took place in a series of hustings/meetings and televised debates between the candidates. The personality-based contest between Ken Livingstone and Steve Norris provided an easy-to-understand political competition of precisely the kind Tony Blair had envisaged. But despite the visibility and accessibility of the contest, turnout at the election was just under 35 per cent[vii], rather lower than had generally been achieved in GLC elections.

Livingstone won easily. He beat Norris by 58 per cent to 42 per cent when both first and second preference votes were counted. Despite his 'loony left' image at County Hall, his charisma and anti-authority image appealed to Londoners. He returned to lead London after an interval of 14 years. Mrs Thatcher's government, having abolished him along with the GLC, had created the democratic space for his restoration as London's leader. But now he was much more powerful, as a 'strong mayor' within London's new upper tier of government. It was, as Thatcher had observed on another occasion, a 'funny old world'.

Creating the GLA

Central government had arranged for London's new government to have a temporary headquarters in Romney House, a nondescript building in Marsham Street, Westminster. Whitehall had put a 'transition team' in place to enable the new mayor and assembly to start work. Two months were allowed, from May to July 2000, for the first Mayor of London to put his administration in place. The GLC, first elected in 1964, had run in parallel with its predecessors for a year before assuming control. Ken Livingstone had to work at a far quicker pace, appointing his Mayor's Office, board members and senior officials. The Assembly, similarly, had to appoint its own staff and to decide how to hold the Mayor to account.

Livingstone brought in a ready-made team of key advisors to form the core of his Mayor's Office. A group of advisors that had worked with him during his years as an MP, including Simon Fletcher as Chief of Staff, Redmond O'Neill (Transport), John Ross (Economy) and Mark Watts (Environment) were immediately embedded at the heart of the new system. These individuals remained in post for the full eight years of Livingstone's period of office. In the short term, the bureaucracy of Romney House continued to be run by the Head of the Transition Team Robert Chilton. Within weeks, Anthony Mayer was appointed as permanent Chief Executive[viii].

Livingstone appointed an American, Bob Kiley, to be Transport Commissioner, while an ex-GLC colleague, Michael Ward was made LDA chief executive. Board appointments reflected a different approach to the one Livingstone adopted almost 20 years earlier in his 'Red Ken' period. A number of the new mayor's old friends from the GLC were chosen; for example, Dave Wetzel, who had chaired the transport committee at County Hall re-appeared as TfL vice chair. However, there were also new appointees from business who would have been seen as 'the enemy' back in the high days of the Livingstone GLC.

The 1999 Greater London Authority Act had allowed the Mayor to appoint two political advisors plus a 10-strong policy unit. All other GLA staff were to be appointed by the Assembly. The government had hoped that a consensus would be created by balancing the Mayor's executive powers with the Assembly's appointment of the bureaucracy. It operated differently in reality. Livingstone did a deal with the Assembly to create a much larger Mayor's Office than the '2+10' he could directly appoint[ix]. By

2008, the Mayor's Office had over 100 people in it, a significant number of whom were, by any standards, politically loyal to the Mayor – rather than being merely civil servants temporarily within the core of the administration.

The GLA Act was optimistic in its hope that the Mayor and Assembly could proceed by consensual working. Moreover, senior figures within the Authority found themselves working both for the Mayor, as executive, and the Assembly, which was supposed to hold the Mayor to account. Thus, the Chief Executive, Director of Finance and other key administrators found themselves – uneasily – on both the 'executive' and 'scrutiny' sides of the Authority. There were other problems with the Act, such as the appointment of Assembly members to the boards of the police and fire authorities. This latter arrangement meant the Assembly was intended to scrutinise the activities of the MPA and LFEPA when their boards included several members of the Assembly itself.

Ken Livingstone's First Term

During the 'interregnum' from 1986 to 1990, Ken Livingstone had become the Labour MP for Brent East. In Parliament, he had opposed the creation of a directly-elected executive mayor. But he had stood for, and won, the first term of office of the new Mayor of London. The reason Tony Blair and Gordon Brown had been so opposed to his candidature was the perception that the ex-GLC leader was a political throwback to the early and mid-1980s when Labour's local government leaders were often seen as extremist and ultra-left wing. Livingstone embodied the doomed Labour Party of the Thatcher years and, even in the House of Commons, had proved an isolated figure.

After the 2000 mayoral election, a 'new Ken' emerged from the remains of the old one. From the start of his regime he embraced business leaders, rather as Blair had done in the run-up to the 1997 general election. Having spent years arguing for the abolition of the City of London Corporation, he now championed it. Although Livingstone had always been less ideological than his opponents suggested, he now took steps to hint at a new, consensual, style of government. His Conservative and Liberal Democrat opponents in the mayoral race, Steve Norris and Susan Kramer, were appointed to the board of TfL. The appointment of Bob Kiley, the former head of the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority, as Transport Commissioner signalled a professional approach to public services. An advisory cabinet embracing a wide range of interests was also created.

The 'Kenocracy' was not entirely different from the collective leadership during Livingstone's County Hall days. A number of his colleagues from that period returned to power, notably Michael Ward as LDA Chief Executive and several of the appointees to the boards of the functional bodies. There was, as at the GLC, a heavy emphasis on 'equalities' and on promoting minorities which were issues that had become more mainstream in the intervening years and thus appeared less politically contentious. The overall approach of the early Livingstone years, which would continue till his defeat in 2008, was to promote London's economic and population growth while simultaneously addressing poverty and social exclusion. In many ways, the 'New Ken' strategy was very Blairite. As often in the past, Livingstone had the capacity to surprise political friends and enemies alike.

The main policies pursued during the 2000-04 period emphasised Livingstone's continuing fascination with transport. In his 2000 manifesto, he had promised to introduce a 'congestion charge' to tackle the problems of the capital's roads. He was also committed to opposing the government's Public-Private Partnership (PPP) to re-invest in the London Underground. Both these policies were pursued with vigour. Despite significant opposition, a congestion charge started operation in central London in February 2003. The Mayor and his Transport Commissioner took the government to court in an attempt to stop the PPP, arguing that the rebuilding of the Tube should be controlled by TfL and funded by issuing bonds[x].

Even the Mayor's enemies conceded the congestion charge had been well implemented and that it operated as intended[xi]. Traffic and congestion levels fell within the small central zone. Compared with central Whitehall's serial incapacity to make large computer-based policies work, the congestion charge was a miracle of effective government. Opposition to the PPP failed and the Underground was handed over to TfL in 2003, but with its investment programme signed off into 30-year contracts.

Livingstone's administration prepared a London Plan. The GLA Act required the Mayor to produce a spatial development plan and the London Plan became a distillation of the administration's strategy for the capital, embracing the objectives of both his separately evolved transport and economic development strategies[xii]. Although different in scope, the London Plan was the linear descendent of the Greater London Development Plan which, on and off, had occupied the GLC for the whole of its existence.

The plan outlined a strategy that would see London's population and economy grow as quickly as possible. The Mayor was a 100 per cent convert to the idea that London

was a global city, competing with centres such as New York, Tokyo and Paris for dominance in financial and business services, cultural industries and tourism. Ever since his days leading the GLC, Livingstone had understood the power of marketing and promotion. Documents like the London Plan and the budgets of agencies such as Visit London were approached accordingly. Following similar practices at County Hall in the 1980s – initiated by Conservative leader Sir Horace Cutler in the late 1970s – Livingstone's City Hall began to emblazon the term 'Mayor of London' on Tube maps, public service adverts and other publicly-viewed manifestations of city government. The Londoner, a free newspaper that had been published by the GLC[xiii], was resuscitated. Once again in Livingstone's London, policy and propaganda became a seamless single entity.

The Mayor used his 'strong mayor' legitimacy to set up a number of commissions and institutions to consider policy areas or issues. There were such initiatives in housing, culture, public health and design. As the government intended, the scale of the Mayor's mandate gave him the capacity to intervene in more-or-less any sphere of public affairs, he chose. Livingstone, who had initially opposed the concept of executive mayors, came to relish this extraordinary capacity to act.

The London Assembly was less sure-footed than the Mayor[xiv]. Its members proved unable to veto his budget. Scrutiny of his policy was less appealing to many members than the traditional local government committee role. Livingstone's mastery of the business of government, coupled with the tightly-run administration at City Hall and the functional bodies, made it hard for the Assembly to unravel the detail of what the Mayor and his services were doing. By the end of the first four-year GLA term, there were calls for the Assembly's powers to be strengthened and/or for the existing powers to be used more effectively.

Ken Livingstone's Second Term

Following a narrower election victory in 2004, again against Conservative Steven Norris, the Livingstone team set about entrenching its particular form of power. A small number of new policies were delivered in the years from 2004 to 2008. Strong support was given to developers who came forward with proposals for tall buildings and/or major housing developments. Targets for 'affordable' homes were rigorously pursued. The congestion charge was extended into a new zone, just west of the original one. The 2012 Olympic Games were won for London. The Oyster card, a new pre-pay transport ticket was introduced. Some within-London commuter rail lines were transferred to TfL from the national rail system. Greater prominence was given to the

environment and 'sustainability'. After a series of terrorist attacks on London in the summer of 2005, the Livingstone regime increased its efforts to combat Islamophobia.

The Mayor also took a number of positions that had little to do with mainstream politics. In July 2004, a Muslim cleric, Yusuf al-Qaradawi shared a platform with Livingstone at City Hall. Whatever the purpose of the meeting, it produced a lasting, angry, response from a number of individuals and organisations representing women, the gay community and Jews. In February 2005, Livingstone became entangled in an exchange with an Evening Standard reporter at the end of a party at City Hall. The reporter, who was Jewish, took exception, as did his newspaper, at being likened to a "concentration camp guard". In December 2005, the iconic Routemaster bus was finally taken out of service, despite Livingstone having previously stated he would keep it. During March 2006, the US Ambassador was called a "chiselling little crook" in respect of his Embassy's refusal to pay the congestion charge. Livingstone became a high-profile supporter of Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez and signed an oil-for-advice deal with Caracas. George W Bush, the Saudi royal family and the editor of the Evening Standard were the subject of regular and aggressive attacks by the City Hall machine[xv].

There were other, similar, eccentric events during the second Livingstone term. None of them were particularly important in their own right. Yet each was seen as tactically vital by the regime at City Hall. With the benefit of hindsight, this approach provided evidence of an administration that had become tangled unnecessarily in tiny wars over matters of virtually no relevance to voters. Visits to Latin America outnumbered those to several outer boroughs. The war with the Evening Standard, which was a Livingstone classic, initiated a series of events – in particular a series of exposé articles by Andrew Gilligan concerning the London Development Agency that eventually caused electoral damage. The meeting with al-Qaradawi and related initiatives created new and articulate enemies on the Left of politics. The tone of the City Hall administration became miserable and embattled[xvi].

London however continued to boom economically. The city's population rose to 7.5 million, the highest it had been since the 1960s. Big business appeared to like the Mayor's encouragement for development and growth. Livingstone remained a hero, among the dwindling band of Labour activists, having survived almost 30 years as a high-profile anti-authority figure within the Labour Party. Moreover, his understanding of the business of government made it possible for him to lobby successfully for additional funding and responsibilities for the GLA. New legislation in 2007 increased the

Mayor's powers over housing, planning, skills, waste management and in the appointment of individuals to the functional bodies.

Further reforms to London government

The Greater London Authority Act, 2007[xvii] extended devolution beyond the powers given to the Mayor in 2000. Firstly, the GLA was given responsibility for the allocation of resources for social and affordable housing, previously in the hands of the Housing Corporation. The Mayor was also given increased powers to intervene in boroughs' housing plans if they fail to conform with his housing strategy. Secondly, the Mayor's planning responsibilities were extended to give City Hall development control powers over larger developments. In future, the Mayor would be able to give planning permission for major schemes even if the local borough rejected them. Thirdly, the Mayor was made chair of a new London Waste and Recycling Board, though the government resisted Livingstone's demands to take full control of waste disposal in the capital. Fourthly, the Mayor was given new powers to direct the policy of the fire authority. Fifthly, strategic direction over funding for skills and training was transferred to the GLA, with the Mayor to chair a new London Skills and Employment Board. Finally, the Mayor was also given the right to make additional appointments to the boards of functional bodies and, if he chose to do so, chair the police authority.

Assembly powers were also strengthened. In future, there would be a greater capacity to hold confirmatory hearings for senior mayoral appointments, though there was no veto power. The Assembly was also given the chance to propose amendments to the Mayor's strategies and to receive an explanation why their proposals had been accepted or rejected. The Assembly was given the power to set its own budget and a duty to publish an annual report. On the other hand, the responsibility to appoint the GLA's staff, apart from the Mayor's '2+10' appointments, was transferred to the Chief Executive.

The scale of the 2007 reforms was modest, but it suggested the government was sufficiently happy with its experiment of devolution in London to give the GLA more powers. There is little doubt that most senior figures within the Blair-Brown government believed that, despite their reservations in 1999 and 2000, Ken Livingstone had proved a successful mayor, despite his occasional eccentric political diversions.

The 2008 GLA Election

By 2008, Ken Livingstone had been mayor of London for eight years and the capital's leader, on and off, for 13. Herbert Morrison had managed just six years between 1934 and 1940[xviii], though Sir Isaac Hayward had led the London County Council in a highly centralised way for 17 years between 1947 and 65[xix]. As Livingstone faced his third mayoral contest, it was almost 27 years since he had become leader of the GLC.

The Conservatives, having lost in 2000 and 2004, sought a new candidate. They selected Boris Johnson, MP for Henley and a well-known journalist. The Liberal Democrats chose Brian Paddick, who had been a senior officer in the Metropolitan Police. As in the earlier contests, there were several other candidates, including the British National Party, Christian Choice, UKIP and Respect.

The campaign was long and high-profile, capturing the attention of the national and international media – perhaps providing them with a refreshing sub-plot to the endless, parallel, US presidential election. Livingstone relied heavily on his record at City Hall, essentially taking a 'you know what I stand for; you can take it or leave it' stance. His team mobilised their coalition of favoured interest groups and pushed a number of messages, notably attempting to portray Johnson as a racist and a reactionary. Much time was spent attacking opinion pollsters YouGov whose polls suggested Johnson was in the lead. In the event YouGov got the result spot-on.

Johnson's campaign was more traditional, concentrating on the threat of crime and the perception that Livingstone had ignored outer London. The Conservatives hired Australian political strategist Lynton Crosby to run the campaign and, importantly, to hold in check Johnson's capacity for verbal blunders. Although some Tory grandees were unconvinced by Johnson, a larger cadre of Labour commentators despised Livingstone and used their media presence to attack him.

The Guardian threw its weight behind Livingstone and the Evening Standard behind Johnson. The Sun came out for Boris, the Mirror broadly supported Ken. The 2008 mayoral election was a battle to the death, squeezing the Liberal Democrats badly. In the end and with second preference votes taken into account, Johnson beat Livingstone by 53 per cent to 47 per cent[xx]. This was a comfortable margin in a two-horse race. While Livingstone could reasonably point to the Labour Party's unpopularity in the parallel local elections, the result also suggests that however good a tactician the ex-Mayor had been, and however unique his brand, his time was over. Unlike Chicago and the Daleys, London had not embraced an incumbent populist for term after term until death.

The squeeze on smaller parties, visible in the mayoral election, could also be seen in the Assembly contest. Both the Conservatives and Labour gained seats, while the Liberal Democrats and UKIP fell back badly. The BNP won its first ever seat on the

Assembly. The Tories' total of 11 seats was sufficient to ensure Mayor Johnson would be unlikely to face a challenge to his annual budget.

The first Conservative mayor – Boris Johnson

Boris Johnson's arrival at City Hall was a reminder that London's politics are plural. Just as Desmond Plummer and Horace Cutler had won the GLC in 1967, 1970 and 1977, so the Tories vanquished Labour in 2008. Labour remained strong in parts of the capital and will undoubtedly re-capture City Hall at some point in the future. For the time being, the Conservatives are strong at both the borough and London-wide levels. The Liberal Democrats, though powerful in boroughs such as Richmond, Sutton, Kingston, Islington and Haringey, have bumped against a 'glass ceiling' of support. They fell back badly in the 2008 mayoral and Assembly elections.

In his first months in power, the new mayor faced significant challenges. Firstly, he had to appoint a new administration within a very short time period. Secondly, it was necessary to decide how to reform the large City Hall bureaucracy – some officials wished to leave, others would be asked to go. Thirdly, the new administration then needed to be attached to the remaining smaller machine. Only when these stages were complete would it be possible to issue policy directions and change the GLA's direction. If such policy were to have a visible impact, it would need to derive from a central 'narrative' of what the Johnson administration was seeking to achieve.

The new core team, unlike Livingstone's, was drawn together from a number of different sources. It was by no means ready made and was dogged by resignations in its first three months affected by the pressures of holding public office. A series of deputy mayors (DM) were appointed, closely following the New York model, including Ray Lewis who had the portfolio for Young People, Ian Clements for government relations and Kit Malthouse for policing. Tim Parker was made first deputy mayor. Assembly member Richard Barnes was made the statutory deputy mayor, as envisaged in the original GLA Act. Munira Mirza was made director of culture and Kulveer Ranger Transport Director. Sir Simon Milton was appointed planning and housing advisor. Neale Coleman, one of Livingstone's core team, was retained to advise Johnson on the Olympic Games[xxi].

These individuals came from various backgrounds - Parker from the private sector, Lewis from the voluntary sector, Clement and Milton were former leaders of London borough councils. Malthouse was an Assembly member, and Ranger was a public servant and Mirza came from a think-tank. The creation of the new regime was stage-

managed by Nicholas Boles, the former director of think-tank Policy Exchange and Conservative Parliamentary candidate. It was intended to appear diverse. Ray Lewis, Tim Parker and Johnson's political advisor James McGrath all resigned or were sacked in the first three months. The remaining deputies were previously senior council members, and were perhaps more capable of coping with the slings and arrows of government. Simon Milton was subsequently elevated to full deputy mayor status, with the clear implication he would become a key element in the Johnson regime. His formal portfolio was policy and planning, but his London and national government experience were such as to guarantee him a powerful position at the core of the new City Hall.

A demonstarion of the power of the Mayor's position occurred in the autumn of 2008 when Mayor Johnson in effect sacked the Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Ian Blair. Johnson explained that the leadership of the Met needed to change which led to Blair's resignation. The Home Secretary, who had appointed the Commissioner, was left powerless.

It will not be possible to fully assess the new Conservative administration at City Hall until it has been in office for a year or more. Early initiatives, such as a 'summit' on knife crime, introducing more police on to the buses, an alcohol ban on public transport and a statement opposing tall buildings were tactical activities that could be undertaken quickly, using existing officials at bodies such as TfL and the Metropolitan Police. Both the transport and police commissioners had remained in post during the early weeks of the Johnson regime, providing the possibility of 'quick win' policy changes. In the longer term, it is clear that senior officials will remain in office only if the Mayor has confidence in them.

The Johnson administration signaled a shift of power from the GLA to the boroughs. This is not the first time that Conservative control of metropolitan government has led to a move of this kind. Lord Salisbury recognised and responded to the desire for local autonomy within the capital's many sub-divisions. The Conservatives who ran County Hall in the 1970s also transferred power to the boroughs. Boris Johnson has, by his own words and by promoting senior figures from the boroughs, suggested that he also believes in a looser version of London government.

Once the Mayor has aligned the City Hall machine and determined his approach to government, it will be possible to judge the regime's success or failure. There is little doubt the change of political control in London in 2008 heralded the possibility of a new approach to government at City Hall. Much remains to be proved.

Conclusions - the lessons of the last 8 years

The 1999 Greater London Authority Act established Britain's first-ever directly elected executive mayor. It was a new kind of political arrangement for London, bringing an American system of city government to the capital. Although the concentration of power in the Mayor's office was probably not so different from the centralised operation of the London County Council in its latter years[xxii], the concept of the executive mayor certainly was. The GLA has operated in a very different way to the GLC.

Nothing, aside from the City of London Corporation, is forever in London's government. The boroughs, which are long established by the standards of British governmental institutions, have survived for just over 43 years. In that time, there have been three different upper-tier arrangements. Ken Livingstone from time to time called for a cull of boroughs – he would have preferred five 'wedge' authorities – but virtually no one else has lobbied with conviction to reform this tier.

It is almost 50 years since the Herbert Commission's report proposed a new Greater London Council[xxiii], following many years of encouragement to do so by academics such as William Robson[xxiv]. Interestingly, the concept of 'Greater London' has survived and, apart from occasional debates about the possibility of Slough or Dartford becoming part of London, there has been no significant effort to change the outer boundary. The question of governance machinery for the capital's region, the Greater South East, remains unresolved.

After eight years, and two mayors, it is now possible to make a number of observations about the operation of the GLA and how it might be improved in future.

American city government comes to London

The ministers and civil servants who evolved the legislative framework for the GLA had virtually no detailed experience of how an 'American' system of government operated. They had, like most other Britons, been brought up in the UK system with its classic Parliamentary features. Thus, for example, the idea of formally separating executive and legislative functions, with a constitution or other written document to establish how the system should operate, has never been applied in Britain, a country with an evolved, informal constitutional settlement. Regularly changing laws, influenced by custom and practice, guide the operation of both national and local government. In the US, by contrast, mechanisms have been created that are designed to ensure effective checks and balances on the executive – at the national, state and city levels of government[xxv].

In London, an executive mayor was adopted but without an effective legislative city council to provide oversight. The GLA Act had given the Assembly an annual opportunity to reject the Mayor's budget, albeit by imposing an alternative one by a two-thirds majority. This 'nuclear' option was to prove difficult to use in practice. Given London's political make-up and the proportional representation electoral system made it very difficult for any one party to win more than 40 to 45 per cent of the popular vote and, therefore, more than 10 or 11 seats. Labour and the Conservatives have each won between seven and 11 seats. Smaller parties tended to win two or three members. With such fragmentation, it has proved impossible for the Assembly to hold together a two-thirds majority against the Mayor's budget.

There is no requirement for the Assembly to vote on other mayoral policies. It can scrutinize the Mayor's strategies, but it cannot amend or reject them. There is no power of 'recall' over the Mayor. The Assembly cannot demand that the Mayor, in defined circumstances, face a fresh election. Moreover, the appointment of Assembly members to the boards of some of the functional bodies creates a conflict of interest and, in terms of the American government model, confuses the executive and legislative functions. The removal of Sir Ian Blair as Metropolitan Police Commissioner during the autumn of 2008 also suggests the issue of police accountability will need to be re-visited. The confusion of 'London' and 'national' policing responsibilities within the Met, coupled with the Service's complex institutional mechanisms, makes further change almost inevitable.

Short-term improvements

It would be possible to make immediate changes within the existing GLA legislation to improve the accountability of the Mayor, without threatening the benefits of the post-2000 London arrangements. Accusations of cronyism, made during the Livingstone's second term, or the undue use of mayoral power could be avoided if there were more effective mechanisms to ensure oversight of the Mayor's budget and expenditure. All future mayors would benefit from a new mechanism to provide independent oversight of the GLA's budget. There would also be advantages from publishing indicators showing the performance of the GLA and its functional bodies. There are currently few measures to test the success, failure or progress of mayoral policies. Because the GLA is unique, it is also impossible to make the kind of benchmarking comparisons faced by other authorities.

In the aftermath of the 2008 election, the Mayor and the boroughs have agreed to create a document that spelled out the formal institutional structure, institutions, powers

and duties of the London government system. In New York, there is a City Charter for this purpose. There cannot be a direct read-across from American to British political systems, but a charter of this kind would provide a more robust framework for the relationship between the Mayor, Assembly and the boroughs and the City of London.

There would be merit in sorting out the arrangements to be adopted in the appointment of the Mayor's office. Because the Mayor of London functions in the context of the British system of government, personal appointments made by the Mayor can appear political or sleazy. In reality, the American government model is intended to provide elected officials with the power to appoint the individuals who form their administrations. But because such personal mayoral appointments to executive positions are alien to British political institutions, they can be seen as somehow improper. Yet the mayoral system of government is supposed to work in this way[xxvi].

Possible longer-term reform

The creation of the Greater London Authority, including a directly-elected executive mayor, was intended by Tony Blair to be a radical presidential import into the British political system. In the longer term, there would be arguments for legislative change to strengthen the institutions created in 2000 to make them operate more effectively in a similar way to the American political institutions.

When it is next decided to review the GLA legislation, the government will almost certainly be encouraged to consider a number of improvements. For example, the Assembly could be given an enhanced legislative role and there could be an end to Assembly members sitting on the boards of functional bodies which the Assembly itself is required to scrutinize. The government could reconsider the issue of whether the Mayor needs to be responsible for all staff appointments to deliver his policy programme. The question of term limits could be re-examined, given the extent of the personal power in the hands of the Mayor.

Another issue, raised by the first changeover of mayor in 2008, was the question of how to facilitate senior Mayor's office appointments in the period immediately after a new mayor takes office. Attempting to create a new Mayor's office in a very short period is difficult within the normal British civil service or local government traditions where there are requirements about openness and due process in making appointments.

Any future reform of London government could reasonably consider the question of whether more 'Whitehall' provision could be transferred to the GLA. The funding and oversight of the NHS, commuter railways within London, full responsibility for the police and an effective system of local taxation would all be candidates for reform. Wales, with its 3 million population and Scotland with 5 million each enjoy far greater autonomy than London, despite its 7.5 million population. Now the Mayor and Assembly are properly embedded and functional, a full devolution of central government power is surely a possibility.

The first eight years of the GLA – success or failure?

The GLA is the capital's third system of city-wide government within a quarter of a century. The GLC had survived just 21 years when it was abolished. The interregnum lasted 14 years. The GLA has existed for just over eight years so far. At present, there is no lobby to scrap the Mayor and Assembly, though the quest to strengthen and improve the London government system continues. All three major parties support the concept of metropolitan government. Indeed, there is evidence that the Labour Party has considered exporting the GLA model to other city regions in England. The Conservatives have talked of extending the use of elected executive mayors to other cities.

The fact that Labour and the Conservatives have now won the Mayor of London crown is probably important in the longer term. It is likely that governments of both parties would wish to maintain and possibly enhance the post-2000 arrangements. The capital remains a key political battleground for all the parties. If only one party had won the mayoralty, or had permanently dominated the Assembly, there would have been a risk that the other would have lost interest. As it is, winning the four-yearly London mayoral contest will be one of the biggest prizes in British politics.

A two-term Labour mayor made efforts to centralise power at City Hall. The fast growth of the city demanded action at a metropolitan scale. His Conservative successor has tilted it back towards the boroughs. As Ken Young wrote in 2006

> "Strong executive models of metropolitan government tend to produce deep conflicts that, in time, erode their support and lead to their dissolution. And the threshold is reached at a lower threshold of conflict than many imagine…seeking a progressive concentration of Mayoral authority…is a route back to past conflicts."[xxvii]

If Young was correct, and history is on his side, Boris Johnson's decision to operate a 'weaker' model of City Hall power and to give the boroughs more autonomy may help to extend the existence of the GLA.

The Greater London Authority, consisting of the Mayor and Assembly has, by the standards of many British government reforms, been a success. In fact, it has been a success by any standards. London has regained its self-government and, to a significant extent, civic self-esteem. There is more accountability for transport, the police and planning than when such services were embedded within Whitehall. One mayor governed effectively. Another has now taken office and has started to get to grips with power. The city's politics remain plural and contested. Boris Johnson is the end of the beginning for the post-2000 arrangements. The process of London government reform will almost certainly never end[xxviii], but for the time being, it has reached a period of calm and stability.

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