

# London's booming – and it's all down to me

Following the attack on the Mayor in Channel 4's Dispatches programme last night, we invited Mr Livingstone to reply to his critics. Here is his response



KEN LIVINGSTONE

**A** SINGLE marker shows how far London has come in the past eight years. In 2000, at the time of the first mayoral election, Londoners thought their competition was with Paris or Frankfurt.

Nobody in London thinks in those terms now. Probably the defining moment was when London beat the favourite, Paris, to win the Olympics. The feeling that spread across the capital was: our city can achieve anything it sets its mind to.

Londoners' comparison now is whether London is ahead of New York. The contest for number-one city in the world, with only two in the race.

Currently London is ahead. I believe London can increase its lead. But there is no room for complacency. We must continue further down the path London has followed if we are to enhance our position as the world's number-one city.

Even more important than international comparisons is what Londoners feel about our city. I could cite opinion polling on increased satisfaction with living in London, improvement in the transport system, and so on — but I think London's mood of confidence was really summed up recently by the incredible 700,000 people who attended the city's New Year's fireworks.

London's business and economic success is vital. But most important is how this translates into improvement in Londoners' quality of life and constant expansion of their range of choices.

My most central pledge at this election is therefore that London will continue to be successful; that I will not rely on the myth of automatic "trickle down" to ensure every Londoner shares in that success but take practical measures to ensure they do; and that London will tackle the great environmental problems, above all climate change, to ensure that our success is sustainable.

Eight years ago London's public services were disastrously run down. Now London is undergoing the greatest wave



**Crowd pleaser:** the spectacular New Year's Eve firework display on the Thames was watched by an estimated 700,000 people

of investment since the Second World War. Every day an extra two million people ride a radically improved bus system. There are 10,000 extra uniformed police officers, with crime falling for five years in a row. Despite the serious problem of teenage killings, murder in London is down by more than a quarter.

A 10 per cent increase in London's public transport capacity will be secured by a £16 billion investment in Cross-rail. On the Tube a £1 billion-a-year

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modernisation programme has begun.

New York is following London in introducing congestion charging — one of the path-breaking transport measures London introduced.

Carrying through this build up of London's transport system is the key to the city being able to sustain its success and also, because of its huge cost, the key to the city's finances.

London also faces the key issues of the beginning of the 21st century. We must continue to reduce crime. Despite the substantial fall in offences during the

past five years, there remains the serious problem of teenage murders. Due to increased police numbers, overall crime is falling at six per cent a year, and I believe that can be sustained across a new mayoral term, while simultaneously more resources are devoted to dealing with particularly serious crimes. I will spend £79 million to rebuild the youth programmes that were cut in the past 20 years and help reintegrate alienated young people into society.

The rise of the huge new economies of China and India, the greatest change in the world economy for 100 years, will affect the future income and job of every Londoner.

It will give tremendous opportunities to London if we seize them. Overseas companies and the tourist industry have already created more than 700,000 jobs here. That is why London has opened up offices in China and India, to attract investment and tourists, and therefore jobs, to our city.

Housebuilding in London is beginning to rise but there is a danger it will focus only on high-cost housing. This is why I have introduced the rule that half of all new housing must be affordable.

Another important improvement is the launch of London Overground — Transport for London taking control of part of the rail system. Few things could be more striking than the contrast between the freeze in fares this January on the parts of the transport system on which I set prices, and the huge fare increases imposed elsewhere by the private train operating companies.

Now, more of London's rail network must be brought under Transport for London so that the advantages of Oys-

ter cards, proper staffing and enhanced security can be spread to rail travellers.

I have never shared the Tory belief in "trickle down" to deliver benefit to all Londoners. That is why the Olympics are not only a boost to the city's tourism and the best party we will ever have; they are also the biggest regeneration scheme east London has seen.

It is also why I have announced that the Freedom Pass will be valid 24 hours a day. Today I confirm that I will extend the present 30 per cent discount that full-time college students are able to claim on season tickets to one-day Travelcards and Oyster pay-as-you-go — one of the most pressing demands on London's students.

Community relations in London are good. Racist attacks have fallen by almost two-thirds in the past eight years. But maintaining good community relations remains at the top of my priorities.

Finally the great new issue at the beginning of the 21st century is the environment and climate change. London has adopted the most comprehensive plan on this of any city in the world.

To strengthen these policies I have proposed a £25 daily charge for the most carbon-emitting "Chelsea tractors" using the congestion charging zone, and the introduction of a zero charge for low-carbon-emitting cars. Boris Johnson and Brian Paddick have already announced their opposition to this.

The choice in London at the next election for Mayor is clear: If you believe the direction London has been going in for the past eight years is fundamentally right and should continue further, vote for me. If you don't then you are right to vote for another candidate.

## The creative debt that writers owe to childhood

SEBASTIAN SHAKESPEARE  
... AND  
INCIDENTALLY



JG BALLARD'S new memoir, *Miracles of Life: Shanghai to Shepperton*, offers vivid and eloquent proof of Graham Greene's observation that childhood is the credit balance of a writer's life.

Ballard was born and brought up in 1930s Shanghai, where he saw the poor dying in the streets and witnessed a Japanese soldier slowly strangle a Chinese man with telephone wire.

The surrealism of everyday life provided him with indelible images that recur throughout his fiction — empty swimming pools, abandoned hotels and deserted airfields. "In Shanghai the fantastic, which for most people lies in their heads, lay all round me," writes Ballard. "I think a large part of my fiction has been an attempt to evoke it by other means." It took him 20 years to forget Shanghai and another 20 to remember.

The sense of alienation in childhood is one shared by the majority of writers — as is the need to exorcise ghosts. Graham Greene was bullied at Berkhamsted School, where his father was headmaster. The green baize door which separated the school from the headmaster's lodgings became a recurrent motif in his fiction and symbolised the friction between two different worlds, one familiar; the other alien, in neither of which he felt at home. His schoolboy tormentors were ridiculed in his later fiction.

Saki, aka HH Munro, the son of an officer in the Burma Police, was brought up by maiden aunts in England and they provided him with a rich seam of material — and ample scope for literary revenge — later in his life. Few who have read his short story *The Lumber Room* will ever forget the cries of the aunt who gets stuck in the rainwater tank pleading to be rescued.

Similarly, between the age of three and 15, PG Wodehouse barely saw his parents for six months in total and was brought up by a gaggle of aunts — the inspiration for his fictional creations Agatha and Dahlia. And John Le Carré's feckless conman father, Ronnie Cornwell, is often cited as the creative source of his writing and the reason for his preoccupation with double-dealing and moral ambiguities.

JG Ballard's own memoir was written under the shadow of illness — like WH Hudson's great memoir of his Argentine childhood, *Far Away and Long Ago*. The parallels between Ballard and Hudson are illuminating. Both were born and brought up abroad before moving to England, where they achieved fame for their books and were hailed as visionaries. It was as an old man, lying seriously ill in a Cornish hospital, that the first 18 years of Hudson's life were "all at once revealed as if by a miracle". To recall one's childhood with such visionary clarity is the greatest affirmation of life.

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