

London's Mayor Livingstone gives aides massive salary rise

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The newly re-elected Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, has appointed six of his closest aides to jobs in the Greater London Authority (GLA). Their salaries will be £111,000 each—more than the mayor of New York.

The six, who were all Livingstone's personal advisors, will be appointed directors in various positions. The new posts were not advertised. Dubbed "Ken's cronies", all directors were on previous salaries of less than £75,000.

The six are Nick Coleman, who is director of business, planning and regeneration, John Ross, director of economic and business policy, John Duffy, director of environment, Lee Jasper, director of equalities and policing, Murziline Parchment, director of major projects and service delivery, and Redmond O'Neil, who becomes the mayor's deputy chief of staff.

Lee Jasper is the most high profile of the six, and epitomises the social and political type whom Livingstone is surrounded by. Jasper is an avowed advocate of racial politics, even going on record in support of black schools. His black radical phraseology has served as a platform for his personal advancement as a supposed "voice of the community". He has headed an extraordinary number of pressure groups including the National Black Alliance, National Black Caucus and Operation Black Vote, and the National Assembly Against Racism. Probably more lucrative was his past role as policy adviser to the now defunct Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) and his role as an adviser on race relations to the Metropolitan Police. He is a member of Lambeth Police Consultative Group. He also sits on the Criminal Justice Consultative Race Sub Group.

Livingstone will pay Jasper such a high salary

because he knows he can be relied on to try and quell opposition amongst Londoners to police brutality and social deprivation and hopefully help mobilise the "black vote" for Livingstone.

Jasper has recently made gushing tributes to the Metropolitan Police saying, "It is nonsense to suggest that low morale is a result of the McPherson report. The Met has risen to the challenges of the report, and has realised the importance of building trust in them from all sectors of the community."

The McPherson report into the racist murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence accused the police force of "institutional racism".

The other politically significant promotion by Livingstone is that of Redmond O'Neil who is a member of the group Socialist Action, an affiliate of the Pabloite United Secretariat. Several of Livingstone's key advisers are members or supporters of Socialist Action, acting as his stooges—particularly in his dealings with other middle class radical groups. O'Neill is playing a major role in organising the European Social Forum to be held in London later this year.

Livingstone pushed through the appointments using powers under the GLA Act, instead of putting the appointments through a selection panel that would have included political opponents.

The pay rises are completely out of kilter with those awarded by local authorities around the country. In London the mayor of Newham, in one of the poorest boroughs in the UK, gets a salary at £65,000 per year. In Enfield the council pays its leader £15,000. In Cardiff the council leader is paid £50,000.

The salaries given to the six advisers in the GLA are in keeping with the fact that the mayoral office in London is more akin to a corporate headquarters in the

City.

The number of staff employed by the mayor has more than doubled to 630. In the original White Paper it stated that the GLA should have up to 250 staff at a cost of £20 million. According to the Conservative opposition's figures, Livingstone now has over 630 staff at a cost of almost £60 million. The GLA has 19 press officers, 15 marketing assistants, 16 equality advisers, as well as publications and events, at a cost of almost £1 million, 12 economic advisers, and seven lobbyists in the mayor's own European offices in Brussels at a cost of £376,000.

The fact that Livingstone used his powers to put forward such high salaried appointments highlight that the mayor's office has become a gravy train for a privileged elite that operates solely in the interests of big business. Livingstone has earned the praise of the City financiers for pushing through policies such as the bond scheme that paved the way for the privatisation at the London underground.

In 2000, he appointed Judith Mayhew, then chair of the Corporation of London, as his adviser on business issues. Her successor, Michael Synder, said somewhat modestly, "Ken does engage to a reasonable degree with the business community".



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