

TO BE OR NOT TO BE MAYOR? THAT IS THE QUESTION

The news group had an exclusive interview with Ken Livingstone, a man who is currently deciding whether or not to leave the Labour party and stand as an independent for the job of the mayor of London. Here is a transcript of our interview.

What do you actually have the power to do as mayor?

Well, the mayor's got a lot of power to sort out the transport problem. If I became mayor I'd have the power to say we should increase the fares, reduce the fares, run more buses, put conductors back on the buses. I'd have the power to say that adults can't drive into central London without paying, say, £5 a day, to try and stop them driving into London, things like that. Providing I could get the government to agree I'd have the power to build a new tube line, so all things like that. And, the transport issue is the big one the mayor has got to solve. I'd have the power to say to the police, I mean I don't think you are doing a very good job, you're not catching enough criminals, or you're being unfair to black people, they would have to come well, what should we do and all the tourists or- to come and meet and draw up a list of bad hotels and had bad service, and can set as mayor a clean poor kids with asthma have less pollution from to set a bio-diversity strategy, so we try and keep all the green spaces green.



But you have to get the government to agree on all this?

You have to get the governments approval on the money you spend each year. The mayor will have £3.5 billion, that's about £500 for the mayor to spend each year on every man, women, and child in London. But most of that has to go to the buses, paying the police and the fire fighters, things like that. So it's not like you can spend £500 on a party each year for everyone! But that's a lot of money, and you should be able to do a lot with it.

Photo: Dominic, Rosie, Harriet, Meera and Ken Livingstone. (Ardita, part of the news group, not present.)

Why does Tony Blair not support you?

Tony Blair would prefer Frank Dobson. It's largely because I'm still a socialist, I still believe that the rich people should pay more tax, I think anybody earning over £50,000 a year, all the money they earn over £50,000 a year, they should give half of it to the government to help things like the poor, paying teachers, things like that. And I suppose he thinks that's all a bit too left wing and radical and socialist, so that's basically what it's all about. He thinks Labour MPs should always say the government was right, and I've often said the government was wrong. About every 50 votes in Parliament, I vote against the Labour party once. That means 2% of the votes I cast, I vote against the government. I think MPs should have a mind of their own, and Tony Blair doesn't like that. I mean I think there's just something wrong with always voting for your party.

Do you think your life will change if you do become mayor? How?

My life has already changed. I'm busier than I've ever been before the Greater London Council was abolished in 1986. I'm way behind with everything and it's always a struggle to keep up. There are so many camera crews and journalists around me now. If I became mayor I would also have to give up being a member of parliament, so the hours would be better but I'd be working a lot harder, because I'd be indirectly responsible for everyone in London.

What don't you like in the job of a mayor?

There will be bits of it that will be difficult at times, and I'll be attacked when things go wrong, but I don't think there is anything I don't like in the job of a mayor.

What would be your first priorities if you became mayor?

Your first priority is definitely to set the thing up. I mean, there isn't a mayor at the moment, and all the bodies like police, fire brigade and transport don't report to anyone, they normally just do their own thing. And then transport is the big one, and you've got to prepare the budget for next year. I would want to do two terms as mayor anyway.

Thank you very much for doing this interview and good luck.

But of course, the one question that we can't answer is the one quivering on everybody's lips, will Ken Livingstone turn against the Labour party and stand as an independent?

Interviewed and Edited by Dominic, Rosie, Meera, Harriet and Ardita.