

LONDON JEWRY AND THE LONDON MAYORAL ELECTION OF 2012: A NOTE

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This note addresses some features of the London mayoral election of 3 May 2012. This contest, which took place at the same time as elections for the London Assembly, achieved international media coverage. Seven candidates presented themselves to an electorate of some 5.8 millions but two dominated the event: Boris Johnson the incumbent and Ken Livingstone, his predecessor. Johnson is a politically Conservative idiosyncratic media personality who has openly challenged several policies adopted by David Cameron's Conservative-led coalition government and Livingstone, equally idiosyncratic is a stalwart of the Labour party's 'hard' Left who had served as Mayor from 2000 until 2008. I have already traced the history of Livingstone's tenure of City Hall and of his tempestuous relationship both with the Labour party and with London's Jewish communities.¹

In 2000 Livingstone had not been the official Labour candidate but ran as an independent. Expelled from the party he was reinstated as a party member and re-elected in 2004. In 2008 he lost to Johnson in a contest in which London's Jewish electorate (of perhaps just 118,000) played a quite disproportionate part.²

The reason for this lay not merely in Livingstone's much-publicised anti-Zionism but in a continual series of statements over two decades on the subject of Jews and Jewish values.³ I do not intend examining these statements here but it is important to note that they were more or less universally accepted as evidence of an antipathy towards Jewish people. Rarely since the end of the Second World War has this issue featured so prominently in an English local election. In the politics of London one would have to go back to the London County Council a century ago for a 'Jewish question' hanging over a capital-wide electoral contest.⁴

That this was so and that London's Jewish voters and Livingstone's perceived attitude to them might decide the fate of the 2012 mayoral race was not lost on Jewish Labour party members. On 1 March 2012 an extraordinary meeting was held in secret between some of these and Mr. Livingstone. We know about the meeting because it was the subject of a remarkable letter written on 21 March by some of those present to Labour

leader Ed Miliband (the first professing Jew to lead the Labour party). The meeting was supposedly private and its proceedings were conducted under Chatham House rules.⁵ The letter was subsequently leaked to the *Jewish Chronicle* – a fact of significance in itself.⁶

What were the motives of those attending the meeting? They claimed that they wished ‘to explore ways in which Ken could re-connect with Jewish voters in advance of the May 3rd mayoral election.’ Did they hope that he would oblige them with an attractive sound-bite or that he would give an assurance that during the mayoral campaign he would refrain from saying anything about Jews or Israel? If so they were bitterly disappointed. Livingstone (they reported to Miliband) saw Jews exclusively as a religious group, lacking any ethnic or national dimension. ‘At various points in the discussion,’ they continued, Livingstone ‘used the words Zionist, Jewish and Israeli, interchangeably, as if they meant the same.’ What is more, he ‘did so in a pejorative manner.’ And when asked to consider the importance of addressing the concerns of London’s Jewish electors Livingstone intimated that in his view this would be a pointless exercise since Jews were wealthy and – thus – firmly entrenched in the Conservative camp.⁷ Incredibly, however, the attendees still managed to end their letter on a note of optimism: ‘We firmly believe that Ken can turn this situation around, and can count on Jewish voters to help him be elected Mayor of London. But he does however desperately need to face up to the issues we raise.’

Livingstone failed to live up to this expectation. It is true that following the reported personal intervention of the Labour leader he wrote for the *Jewish Chronicle* (30 March) an uncharacteristically contrite article expressing the hope that the past (for which he uttered not one word of apology) might be forgotten. Some of those who had met with him on 1 March were aghast. The *Guardian* and *Jewish Chronicle* columnist Jonathan Freedland (who was present at the 1 March meeting) had already announced that he would not be voting for Livingstone.⁸ Other Jewish members of the Labour party indicated on social media websites that their support for him had ceased. Most dramatic of all was the intervention (on *Twitter*, 18 April) by Lord (Alan) Sugar, the Jewish entrepreneur and Labour-party funder who announced that he would not be voting for Livingstone and opined that ‘no one’ should vote for him – even though he was the official Labour candidate.⁹

Livingstone lost the electoral contest in a singularly significant way.

The 3 May local elections were a resounding success for the Labour party throughout Great Britain.¹⁰ On turnouts averaging just 38 per cent, their candidates gained control of 32 local authorities, including Birmingham, Glasgow and Cardiff. Of the 181 local authorities up for re-

LONDON JEWRY AND THE LONDON MAYORAL ELECTION OF 2012:
A NOTE

election in May 2012 Labour now controls 75 and the Conservatives only 42 (a loss of 12 compared with 2008). The Conservatives lost two and Labour gained four of the 25 seats in the London Assembly. With 12 seats, this made Labour the largest party in the Assembly, though it lacks overall control.

However, this achievement was not replicated in the London mayoral contest. Elections for Mayor of London are held under the Supplementary Vote system in which irrespective of the number of candidates voters can express only a first preference and an optional second. A candidate obtaining 50 per cent of the first preferences is declared the winner. If no candidate receives 50 per cent of the first preferences, the second preferences of all but the two leading candidates are redistributed to those two, thus producing a result.¹¹ In 2008 Livingstone had polled just 36.4 per cent of first preferences. In 2012 his proportion of first preferences actually increased to 40.3 per cent. Johnson's first preferences also increased from 42.5 to 44.0 per cent, but still short of a plurality.

As in 2008 the outcome depended on second preferences. Livingstone actually obtained 55.3 per cent of these compared with Johnson's 44.7. However, this strong showing by the Labour candidate was not enough to return him to City Hall. In terms of first and second preference votes combined Johnson's support totalled 1,054,811 compared with Livingstone's 992,273, a difference of 62,500 votes.

How many of these were Jewish and was Johnson's remarkable victory, bucking the national trend, due to a 'Jewish vote', a backlash against Livingstone's perceived antipathy to Jews and to Israel? Though no discrete survey of Jewish voters was undertaken at the time, some compelling evidence is provided in the results of some of the 'constituencies' for the London Assembly contests.¹²

The London boroughs of Barnet and Camden form one such constituency and contain some of the highest proportions of Jewish voters anywhere in the UK.¹³ The contest for the Barnet & Camden seat on the London Assembly, featuring two Zionist supporters, followed the national trend: The Labour candidate, Andrew Dismore easily took the seat from the Conservative, Brian Coleman on a swing of almost 12 per cent.

However, in the mayoral contest in this same constituency, the same voters behaved very differently, giving Johnson 49.4 per cent of their first preferences and 13.6 per cent of their second with a turnout three percentage points above the nationwide and London averages. Some 82,000 Barnet & Camden voters gave Johnson their first-preference mayoral votes, 29,000 more than had supported the Conservative in the Assembly contest. Livingstone received 58,000 first preferences in this

constituency, whereas the Labour candidate for the Assembly seat polled over 74,000.¹⁴

The patterns of voting behaviour in three other London Assembly constituencies with significant Jewish electorates were similar, though less dramatic. In Havering & Redbridge (an Assembly seat which the Conservatives held) Johnson's first preference votes were over 20,000 more than the Conservative Assembly vote. In Brent & Harrow the vote for Johnson was 18,000 higher than for the (unsuccessful) Conservative in the Assembly election. In Enfield & Haringey (which Labour held) the Johnson 'differential' was approximately 14,000 votes.

Even in mature democracies, electoral outcomes remain crude aggregations of individual decisions and it would be foolish to argue that Boris Johnson's victory over Ken Livingstone was due solely to the Jewish vote. Nevertheless, there was only one other Assembly constituency – Ealing & Hillingdon – where the voting pattern for the mayoral contest differed from that for the Assembly seat. As in Barnet & Camden, Labour took the Ealing & Hillingdon Assembly seat from the Conservatives but the Johnson mayoral vote there exceeded the Livingstone vote only by some 12,000 first preferences, half the differential (over 24,000) in Barnet & Camden, and on a lower turnout (37 per cent).

Although, as already mentioned, no discrete survey of Jewish voters was undertaken at the time of the London mayoral contest, one polling organisation did survey a sample of London voters generally over a wide range of issues, one of which concerned 'the poor relationship between Ken Livingstone and the Jewish Community.' Specifically, respondents in the sample were asked how important that factor was (along with many others) in determining how they would cast their mayoral votes. Of those respondents who declared themselves first-preference Johnson supporters some 40 per cent specifically identified Livingstone's attitude to Jews as either a 'very important' or a 'quite important' factor in propelling them to vote for his Conservative opponent.¹⁵

It should be noted that Livingstone had made enemies elsewhere. When mayor, he had annoyed London's gay community by hosting at City Hall an Egyptian Islamist preacher who openly called for the execution of homosexuals (and for legitimating wife-beating). During the 2012 mayoral campaign Livingstone and Johnson had traded public insults on tax avoidance: the Conservative Johnson did not operate through a company (an arrangement with significant tax advantages) whereas Livingstone the Socialist did. While this negative publicity for Livingstone might have resulted in and accounted for Labour abstentions it is hard to demonstrate that it led also to an increase in support for

LONDON JEWRY AND THE LONDON MAYORAL ELECTION OF 2012:
A NOTE

Johnson — except where the Jews were concerned. Livingstone had gone out of his way to alienate them and he seems to have reaped the whirlwind at the ballot box.

NOTES

¹ Alderman, G. (2010), Jews and Electoral Politics in the United Kingdom: A Contemporary Note. *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* **52** 69–74.

² I arrive at the figure of 118,000 by applying to the total number of self-identifying Jews in London the ratio of registered voters to general population in Great Britain; this ratio is of the order of 2:3. The total number of self-identifying Jews in Great Britain (as suggested by the 2001 census) is approximately 266,000 and the best estimates suggest that two-thirds of these live in Greater London. For a discussion of the likelihood of Jews not identifying themselves in the census, see Graham, D. and Waterman S. (2005), Underenumeration of the Jewish Population in the UK 2001 Census. *Population, Place and Space* **12(2)** 89–102.

³ See G. Alderman (2009), *The Communal Gadfly* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press), Chapter 3 passim; G. Alderman (2012) “Red Ken” Redux. *The Jerusalem Post*, 1 April; M. Shaviv (2012), ‘Candidate Ken’s attitude to Jews ...,’ *Times of Israel*, 27 April. <http://tinyurl.com/6pdlewn> [accessed 14 May 2012].

⁴ See G. Alderman (1989), *London Jewry & London Politics 1889-1986*. (London: Routledge).

⁵ This means that nothing that was said could be attributed. However, Livingstone let it be known that he was happy for his remarks to be both reported and attributed.

⁶ *Jewish Chronicle*, 23 March 2012, 8. The full text of the letter is at: <http://www.thejc.com/node/65426> [accessed 14 May 2012].

⁷ An assertion which is demonstrably false, as Livingstone subsequently admitted.

⁸ *Jewish Chronicle*, 30 March 2012, 4.

⁹ ‘I don’t care if Ed Miliband is backing Livingstone [Sugar wrote to his reported 1.8 million Twitter followers]. I seriously suggest NO ONE votes for Livingstone in the Mayoral elections.’ ‘Livingstone is [the] real issue,’ he added: ‘Livingstone must NOT get in on 3rd May.’ At the time Sugar did not say – at least publicly – that his advice was directed specifically at Jewish voters. It was however widely interpreted as such and after the election Sugar himself confirmed this when he spoke at a Jewish Care business breakfast (*Jewish News*, 17 May 2012, 6).

¹⁰ Apart from failing to regain the London mayoralty there was only one other significant reversal of Labour fortunes. This occurred in the West Yorkshire city of Bradford, where the ‘Respect’ party headed by former Labour MP George Galloway took five seats, one from the Conservatives and four from Labour, including that of the outgoing Labour leader of the city council. Two months earlier Galloway had himself been elected MP for the Bradford West

parliamentary constituency, taking the seat from Labour following a campaign in which Respect's Islamist and anti-Zionist credentials had played a prominent part: see G. Alderman, 'The upside to Galloway's win', *Jewish Chronicle*, 13 April 2012, 21. Bradford boasts the third largest Muslim population in England and Wales (after London and Birmingham), with around one-fifth of its population from South Asia (see Office for National Statistics data at <http://tinyurl.com/8323tj6> [accessed 14 May 2014]). The positive response of young Anglo-Muslim voters to a British political party with a palpable anti-Zionist agenda is undoubtedly a portent.

¹¹ The voting system is fully explained at www.londonelects.org.uk.

¹² The analysis which follows is based on voting figures available at the BBC website: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-17540438> [accessed 14 May 2012]. A useful list of the London Assembly constituencies, and an outline map locating them within the Greater London area, may be found at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_London_Assembly_constituencies [accessed 31 May 2012].

¹³ The precise percentages, derived from the 2001 national census, are reproduced in Alderman (2010), 'Jews and Electoral Politics,' loc.cit., 72.

¹⁴ The Barnet & Camden result may thus be regarded as a classic example of the phenomenon of so-called 'split-ticket' voting, which is becoming more common in proportional-representation systems and which is said to reflect increased voter sophistication. On the phenomenon generally see Lewis-Beck, M.S. and Nadeau, R. (2004), Split-Ticket Voting: The Effects Of Cognitive Madisonianism. *Journal of Politics* **66:1** 97–112 and Burden, B.C. and Helmke, G. (2009), The Comparative Study of Split-Ticket Voting. *Electoral Studies* **28** 1–7.

¹⁵ The poll was undertaken (27-29 April 2012) by 'Populus' for *The Times*, and was reported in that newspaper on 30 April. The precise data relating to the 'Jewish' question can be found at the Populus website: <http://www.populus.co.uk/uploads/Times-May-2012.pdf> : table 16.