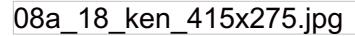


Mayor Ken – the real scandal

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2008-1-23

The row between London Mayor Ken Livingstone and anyone in the [media](#) who has the audacity to criticise him misses the real story. I think the media has done a good job at raising [questions](#) about the people around the Mayor and his ability to ensure probity. But why haven't the London politicians held Ken to account? [Sue Cameron](#) of the [FT](#) and my colleague Tony [Travers](#) at the LSE have put together an excellent analysis of what goes wrong when you create city mayors without accountability:



This week's explosive [Channel Four film](#) on Ken Livingstone, mayor of London, featured a long list of accusations against him (which he denies), including the use of public money to undermine his adversaries, his tax-funded advisers campaigning for his re-election in breach of local government rules and questions about the London Development Agency's use of public funds. Yet the really scary thing was the near total failure of anyone – bar the press – to demand proper scrutiny until now. True, some claims have been referred to the district auditor. He is liaising with the police, who are also looking at some of the allegations. I am told the Electoral Commission may have powers to investigate some of the other claims, depending on the details. The Standards Board for England or the local government ombudsman could also be brought in. (Talk about the bureaucratisation of Britain!) The elected London Assembly has very little power – it can veto the mayoral budget once a year but only with great difficulty. Nor do its 25 members seem capable of bringing less orthodox pressures to bear.

This pathetic, unaccountable system was set up by Labour in 2000. Tony Travers of the London School of Economics pinpoints the real scandal.

"Labour imported the 'strong mayor' model from the US but without any of the safeguards built into the US system," he tells me. "In America, at city, state or national level there is always a legislative body to act as a counterweight to the mayor, governor or president."

We do not just need a new London mayor. We need a new system.

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