

BLACK CABBIE TALK *by John Kennedy*

We Shall Prevail and Prosper

What a year for the London taxi trade, we started in a reasonable fashion with concerns for the economy and hope on the political front in London that we may get a new Mayor. Well, Boris Johnson won a famous victory on May 4th and hope once again reared its head amongst our ranks, those who had the ear of Livingstone and his advisor Mark Watts certainly didn't see this victory coming and instead got too close to an elected politician and his administration, so much for independence and non political organisations.

However Mayor Boris Johnson appointed Bob Oddy of the LTDA to the Board of Transport for London along with others who gave the new Board a better feel. It seemed more balanced, yet within weeks we the taxi-cab drivers started to receive daft if not insulting letters from the Head of the PCO, the promised review of the pointless mid-year inspection was then to include private hire, or should I say mini-cabs, why I still do not know. It appears to all sensible taxi-cab drivers that somebody or a number of individuals within Transport for London can't accept the democratic choice of Londoners, a different agenda is sort to possibly harm the London taxi-cab driver and his/her business, the Public Carriage Office seem to have decided to interpret the 1998 Private Hire Act in the most oddest of fashions, with the licensing of kiosks within Leicester Square for example and the complete inaction with regards to illegal mini cab ranks outside most nightclubs. Couple this with the minicab rank in Whitcomb Street with Metropolitan Police protection and you will suddenly come to the conclusion that this Industry is in serious trouble. Your job really is under threat, you won't just experience a recession next year you will witness a explosion of clipboard operations!

You see we just happen to be self employed, many individuals and many great minds, the vast majority of us just wish to work hard, earn a reasonable living and provide for our families. I think the Mayor and the public understand this but I'm afraid the PCO do not, my message to those in authority this Christmas is clear and simple, we will campaign to divest the private hire operation into a separate body, they have nothing to do with our industry, the PCO must be split in two. The Mayor of London and the Board of Transport for London must decide what they believe a mini-cab office to be, the 1998 act is clear, it should be a premises with a address, yet the PCO licence kiosks and clip boards. Parliament didn't pass legislation to destroy the world's finest taxi trade, they passed 1998 Private Hire Act to bring about control and order to mini-cabs in the capital, get my drift Mr Thompson?

Where next for us in the London taxi trade? well I via the pages of the Londondailynews.com will continue to highlight problems and injustice within our trade, but this is not enough. From time to time I've taken a swipe at those who represent taxi-cab drivers in a written and verbal fashion, the time for infighting is over. I have decided to rejoin the London Cab Drivers Club under the chairmanship of my friend and colleague Grant Davis. Only last week I was having a heated discussion with Grant in his office, only last night I spoke with hard working night drivers and the wonderful Thomas the taxi from the Anderson Shelter taxi blog at the Royal Oak, plus all the drivers who use the Astral cafe, Chelsea bridge and Clapham common teas stalls. It is clear we must all row in the same direction and the more of us that get on board the stronger we shall become, for this industry is under threat from within and certainly from external bodies and forces. I will still be launching a political lobby company for you the taxi-cab driver because we need to highlight to those at the Gasworks (Parliament) the very real problems we face within this trade, but I intend to work with Grant at the Club and you the London taxi-cab driver. Now if any of you are wondering why the change of heart - well it was over a well know hotel, an establishment that has always been served well by the London taxi-cab driver which jumped on the clip board operation bandwagon, yes me and you bringing them customers night and day only to see the late night bread and butter work handed to you've guessed it illegally ranked mini-cabs at the rear. Now I am of the understanding after speaking to management of this hotel group that the Clipboards are to go, well done to LTDA.

With a recession here, a bleak economy, job cuts in the city and our customer base certainly feeling the financial strain and the TX4 nightmare we seem to be heading into a abyss, however no matter how long or dark the tunnel is before us we have each other, fellow badge holders who will stand by each

other in times of trouble. We laugh and joke in the good times and certainly have a passion for a job like no other trade or industry because the common bond that brings us all together is that of a working class upbringing, not a silver spoon lifestyle, those moments on the Knowledge when you nearly gave up, but something inside said carry on, that feeling of disappointment when you didn't get your "drop", but the feeling of elation when that badge with a boot lace or chain was placed about your neck. Never forget that moment because the challenges ahead will need the same level of commitment from us all, no matter what is thrown at us, we shall organise, we shall stand shoulder to shoulder, we shall never surrender a rank or the right to "ply for hire" for we earned that right unlike others who fail to meet the demands of their customers on Friday and Saturday nights.

Maybe the PCO should concern themselves with the awful waiting times people experience when booking a mini-cab, maybe there is a link between touting and waiting times at night at the weekend? Time to have a look at an industry that isn't as well run as some would make you think, drivers who receive half the billed fare, drivers forced to work excessive hours just to make ends meet.

We may well be in that very long dark tunnel but our for hire lights burn brightly, our customers know we deliver value for money especially when travelling in groups and bench marked against all other forms of transport of whom the vast majority receive taxpayers money via subsidy. We were born and regulated by a great man Oliver Cromwell and we may well be heading towards "civil war" but let's be under no illusion we can meet the challenges ahead because we have done so before and if those who licence us choose to ignore us and continue to work to a different political agenda. I will publically call for their heads to roll, after all it is us who pay their wages and pensions. Independence will always be an option open to this Industry and it may well be one of many options we may have to consider based around a democratic reorganised and restructured Public Carriage Office, "One badge One vote" and a voice for our customers but no place for those who have links or partnerships with mini-cabs. A formation of a London Taxi Council which would govern this industry for the benefit of customers and taxi-cab drivers, a partnership delivering long term stability in a very uncertain world, this is only a idea but one I firmly believe in, for this industry lacks vision and the first thing you do when in a tunnel is turn your headlamps on and begin the long journey towards the light.

"We shall prevail and we shall prosper".

THANKS FROM WAR DISABLED CHARITY

The President, Chairman and officers of the London Taxi Benevolent Association for War Disabled would like to thank all our advertisers and sponsors who have supported us with this year's diary and also all the drivers who purchased a diary. As this is a major source of our income, we look forward to your continued support, so that we able on your behalf to continue the annual outings to Worthing which started in 1948 with 25 taxis and 50 ex-servicemen to the present day with 130 taxis and 400 ex-servicemen and women. We have also been able to give assistance to Combat Stress, The Haigh Homes, Morden, Queen Alexandras Home Worthing, St. Davids Home Ealing, the First World War Veterans Association, and supplying transport to Henry Allingham, the oldest surviving veteran of the First World War. We also supplied transport for the Ghurkhas in their journey to the law courts. 2008 marked the 60th anniversary of the Association and on the 7th to 11th May 2008 we took 160 veterans to Normandy. This coincided with the victory celebrations in France and the veterans were involved in the parade in the city of Caen on the 8th May 2008. On 16th June 2009 we are holding our annual outing to Worthing, when the guest of honour will be General The Lord Walker G.C.B. C.M.G. C.B.E. D.L. from the Royal Hospital Chelsea.

We wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

