

Lutfur Rahman – Saint Or Sinner?

By **Alexander Baron** - May 5, 2015



Lutfur Rahman

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The current political uproar in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets is more than a little amusing, though curiously no one seems to have seen the funny side of it. Beginning with London in 2000, a number of mayors have been elected directly in England including in a handful of the capital's boroughs. Nearly five years ago, Lutfur Rahman was elected to the post in Tower Hamlets, a borough that is generally considered deprived.

Although Rahman was born in what is now Bangladesh, he is totally Anglicised, grew up in the East End of London, and qualified as a solicitor. He joined the Labour Party serving as a councillor, but could hardly be called left wing. After he became Mayor, Rahman appears

to have done a relatively good job, however, his route to the office was far from straightforward. After being elected Labour candidate, allegations surfaced that he (or someone) had rigged the election in his favour. This resulted in his deselection, as a result he stood as an independent, winning with 51% of the vote, which is more impressive than it sounds because this was far from a two horse race; Rahman received twice the vote of the Labour candidate and four times that of the Conservative.

Since he took office, Rahman has been accused of a number of irregularities, many of a financial nature. Others have included favouritism in the dispensation of local government grants. None of this mud stuck until April 23 this year when the High Court Queen's Bench Division issued a **stinging judgment** that led to his removal from office. Running to nearly 700 paragraphs, its findings of fact include that he was elected by corrupt practices, whether or not he was the source of that corruption.

Rahman remains defiant, his supporters cry *racism* and *Islamophobia*, as might be expected, but what is really going on here? One of the sources of Rahman's problems appears to be the BBC, whose *Panorama* programme painted him as little better than a Machiavellian schemer. His critics include Labour Party supporters who have accused him *inter alia* of stacking his administration with fellow Bangladeshis, which they say makes it "unrepresentative" of the community. This is a bit rich coming from the Labour Party, an organisation that has whined and wailed incessantly about *racism* calling for more minority (ie non-white representation) everywhere, even where it is not warranted. Now this has happened, they're claiming it has gone too far?

There is no real evidence that Rahman has had his hand in the till; furthermore his supporters are far from exclusively Asian, and the white ones are not entirely the usual suspects. Both white working class residents and Jews have spoken positively about Rahman.

This begs the question, is he really bent or the victim of a witch-hunt, or even of a conspiracy? One issue that may contribute to the venom emanating from certain quarters is his support for the Palestinian cause.

Whatever, England's first directly elected mayor, Ken Livingstone, has dismissed the criticisms of Rahman as sour grapes, pointing out that he was the victim of similar backbiting.

There are already a number of videos on YouTube which cover this issue, so the reader can judge for himself, even though for the moment the High Court has judged for officialdom.

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