

Threats, bullying and cowardice: The inside story of the Tower Hamlets mayor election fraud

Parallels with Channel Four's Dispatches – Undercover Mosque here. Don't move against the perpetrators (hate speech in the West Midlands – Electoral Fraud in the East End) move against the complainants. From the [thrown out of office by a judge for corruption, vote-rigging and bribery](#), the Metropolitan Police called in one of the saga's key figures for an interview under caution.

But it wasn't the former mayor or any of his associates. The suspect the Met wants to talk to is Andy Erlam, the lead petitioner in the court case against Mr Rahman.

"I was sitting in court, listening to the judge read out the ruling, when I got an email from a CID officer asking me to attend an interview this coming Tuesday," said Mr Erlam. "It is Kafkaesque."

As Mr Erlam read this on his phone, the judge, Richard Mawrey QC, was giving his verdict on the "ruthless", "manipulative" and "lying" Mr Rahman, praising the "exemplary courage" of Mr Erlam and his three fellow petitioners, calling them "vindicated" in their claim that last May's election was stolen.

But the road to victory was strewn with potholes. Now the case is over, ["I think there's actual corruption here"](#) – there's a pattern of behaviour that doesn't make sense any other way."

Some of the intimidation has been more like Chicago in the 1930s than London in 2015. For many years, it can now be revealed, Mr Rahman has benefited from a group of “enforcers”, individuals attached to youth organisations heavily funded by his council. Any Bangladeshi speaking against the mayor could expect a doorstep visit.

During the election trial, it stepped up. According to Mr Erlam and Mr Hussain, at least 12 of their 80 witnesses suffered serious pressure. The wife of a witness against Mr Rahman was told by four men that they would burn down her house, killing her and her children, if he testified.

Another witness was assaulted by two of Mr Rahman’s supporters inside the Royal Courts of Justice itself. . . The police took no action in the second case. *In my day the RCJ Tipstaff would have taken action independently; his job was the security and peaceful running of the Law Courts.*

As the judge put it, “witnesses whose command of English turned out in the witness box to be rudimentary nonetheless produced polished English prose in their witness statements containing words that appeared to baffle them in cross-examination. The occasional witness claimed to have typed out his witness statement himself, oblivious to the fact that its appearance was absolutely identical to that of other (allegedly unconnected) witnesses. The nadir came when one witness gave a graphic account of how he had attended a polling station to cast his vote and found it a haven of tranquillity, only to be confronted with absolutely incontrovertible evidence that [he] had, in fact, voted by post.”

Evidence from the Telegraph – whose reporter testified – was crucial in substantiating a key plank of the case. As the judge explained, it was not necessary for the petitioners to prove enough votes were faked to change the election’s outcome. “One bogus vote, if arranged by the candidate or

someone who is in law his agent, will unseat the candidate, however large his majority.”

We revealed that at least three of Mr Rahman’s council candidates – all of them “agents in law” for Mr Rahman – had themselves cast bogus votes, from fake addresses where they did not live. . . At least one of the fake addresses has been known to police for years.

Mr Mawrey’s judgment makes clear his incredulity at the “blatant” and “bare-faced” lies told by Mr Rahman and his “hatchet-man”, Alibor Choudhury, in the witness box. Mr Choudhury, Mr Rahman’s election agent, was described by the judge as “arrogant, indeed cocky”. It is easy to see why. The reason misconduct in Tower Hamlets became so blatant and institutionalised is that over many years no one in authority held its perpetrators to account.

At election after election, journalists would reveal irregularities. The police and Electoral Commission refused to investigate seriously, doing enough to say they had looked into it but failing to follow leads or interview key witnesses.

The Met sometimes went further for Mr Rahman, at least twice issuing misleading statements which helped him. During the election Scotland Yard said there was “no credible evidence” of vote-buying in the council’s grants programme, and it would not investigate.

Not only has this now been disproved by the election court, it was known to be false even then.

The mayor and his team thought they could get away with anything. In Judge Mawrey, they met their match. Mr Rahman’s supporters were last night calling him the victim of a racist “coup”, and may well play the race card with a new candidate in June’s mayoral by-election.

The police investigation into Mr Erlam rumbles on, but no new investigation has yet been launched into Lutfur Rahman or the other guilty men of Tower Hamlets.