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FOLNU TO THE RESCUE

Grieving local hero puts personal tragedy aside to help fellow citizen

Emdad Rahman

A Bangladeshi man is being hailed a hero after his actions and quick thinking helped prevent serious injury or even the death of a local woman who fell from a second floor balcony.

On the day Britain remembered its fallen heroes it was apt that one in the community came to the fore. Twenty three year old Sheikh Folnu Meah



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LABOUR AND TORIES COMBINE TO UNDERMINE REFERENDUM OUTCOME



ELN Report: In May 2010, the people of Tower Hamlets voted in a referendum to introduce a directly elected Mayor to run the Borough. On 29th November, Tory Councillors backed a move by Labour to claw back executive powers from the directly elected Mayor.

Labour and the Tories were never happy with the referendum vote – but they were even more unhappy when Tower Hamlets voters elected Lutfur Rahman as the Borough’s first Mayor. Before the election, the all parties had worked on a set of constitutional changes to transfer power to the Mayor, as required by the referendum. After the election, when the people’s choice was clear, Labour staged a last ditch effort to tinker with the new constitution. In a particularly vindictive move, they voted to reduce the

Mayor’s salary from the level they had previously thought justified. Lutfur Rahman responded with dignity: “I stood as Mayor to serve the people of Tower Hamlets. I have given up my job to do so. I am not in this for the money.”

Labour’s latest move was a mixture of taking a small number of powers away from the Mayor and a further cynical attempt to belittle him. Despite the referendum vote to transfer power TO the Mayor, Labour proposed to take BACK the power to decide the Borough’s strategies on employment, enterprise, waste and parks – all powers they were happy to give the Mayor before they found out who the voters had elected. These strategies will now be decided by the full Council.

This leaves the public in real danger. As Labour’s

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Kill the Bill!

The Con-Dem Coalition has been taking major new legislation on the NHS through Parliament. The Health & Social Care Bill, the brainchild of Health Secretary Andrew Lansley, is trying to turn our NHS away from being a public service and into a commercial operation which can shift bucket loads of taxpayers' money to private companies. With the "market" having landed the world in a gi-normous economic mess, you wouldn't have thought it was a good time to let that market have control of our health service. But that's just what the Con-Dems are going to do. Not content with bank bailouts, even more of our taxes will be siphoned out of the public sector to help the market keep on going.

Medical professionals and health

campaigners up and down the country have been left vascillating between despair and outrage at the various new measures the Bill will introduce – and many of them are warning this could be the end of the NHS as an efficient public service. There was such an outcry when the Bill was published that even David Cameron promised to listen to the people and have a rethink on the Bill. He duly rethunk, and then left the Bill virtually the same.

It's no wonder the Government is trying to avoid scrutiny of this very complex Bill, which is currently in the House of Lords. Although a small number of Lords banded together to try to persuade their fellow Lords to give the Bill proper scrutiny, a heavy majority of the Lords voted in favour of rushing the Bill through by

Christmas. It seems that the Con-Dem Coalition is happy to preach that other countries should become more democratic, but even happier when it can pull a fast one over the voters here at home.

The health campaign Keep Our NHS Public (KONP) is calling on everyone to lobby parliamentarians to challenge the Bill and back whatever amendments can be put to try to trim the worst aspects of this legislation. You can follow developments as the Bill goes through the Lords on their

website: www.keepournhspublic.com/index.php.

The NHS has never been safe from politicians who don't give it proper priority or who see it as a source of profit. It's always been up to those of us who use it to fight to keep it safe. Aneurin Bevan



MP, the Labour Health Secretary who was responsible for setting up the NHS, warned that the NHS will only "survive as long as there are folk left with the faith to fight for it." We are the folk. And we must fight.

Continued from front page>

Labour and Tories

actions are still being inspired by vindictiveness towards the person the voters elected as our Mayor, they will be able to use the strategies on these issues to attempt to sabotage the Mayor's administration by pushing forward policies which are in contradiction to the Mayor's priorities (which he put before the voters before his successful election).

The second prong of Labour's attack was an attempt to belittle the Mayor whom the voters have chosen. Up to now, the Council has chosen one of the Councillors to chair the Council meetings – and with Labour the largest political Party, the chair has been the councillor whom they have nominated. After Labour's amendments, the Chair of Council will be renamed the "Speaker" – which, with its association with the Speaker of the House of Commons, makes the post sound much grander. The Speaker will be the ceremonial head of the Council, the Borough's "First Citizen". Labour spelled out that First Citizen will take precedence at all ceremonial events, such as royal visits, civic receptions, etc. In other words, if the Queen visits Tower Hamlets during the Olympics she will be greeted by a councillor chosen by 32 Labour Councillors – not by the Mayor who was elected by over 23,000 voters.

Moving the amendments, Labour Group Leader Josh Peck (chosen as a Labour candidate by Labour Party bosses in London over the heads of local Labour Party members) claimed that Labour was correcting Mayor Rahman's abuses of power. Cllr Alibor Choudhury asked him what abuses of power he thought had occurred, by Cllr Peck refused to answer.

Cllr Peck also claimed a democratic mandate for Labour's move. He announced that there had been complaints from residents about the power structures in the Council: in particular, there was the issue of an incinerator which had been hidden in a document. Again, Cllr Peck did not explain why some residents complaining to him about an incinerator trumped the democratic mandate of Lutfur Rahman winning the Mayoral election across the whole Borough. He explained that these

residents wanted things taking to full Council so that they could complain about them. It is always welcome to see a Labour politician supporting residents; however, Cllr Peck was also the politician who halved the number of petitions which residents can bring to each meeting of the Council.

Labour's constitutional amendments included requiring appointment of local authority school governors to be approved by the General Purposes Committee. In the debate, Cllr Kabir Ahmed pointed out that a meeting of this Committee had had to be cancelled to allow some councillors to attend their party political conference. He thought members of the committee should prioritise their duties to serve the residents of the Borough, particularly if the Committee was going to get new powers.

Cllr Rania Khan pointed out that Labour has a dodgy track record on democracy. Labour Party bosses do not allow local party members to choose their own Council candidates (the method used throughout the rest of the Labour Party). These constitutional changes seemed to show a similar attitude to democracy: keeping as many powers as possible for a small, self-selected group of councillors rather than observing the democratic mandate of the electors. Cllr Peck took umbrage at this comment. He said that he had long suspected that independent councillors (such as Cllr Khan) had not read the constitution. He told her that the Council constitution did not refer to Labour Party candidate selection procedures. Observers in the public gallery were left feeling that Cllr Peck had rather missed the point.

The Conservatives cannot wait to get their hands on the policies which Labour has wrested away from the Mayor and backed the amendment in the debate. No sooner had the vote been taken at the Council meeting, than Tory Leader Peter Golds was asking senior officers to confirm they would pull a policy due to go to the next meeting of the Mayor's Cabinet – so the Council could decide it instead. Cllr Golds was utterly crestfallen when officers made clear that the Council has a proper process: strategy documents go to the Cabinet, to the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee... and only then to the full Council.

The constitutional changes were backed by 35 councillors, with 14 councillors abstaining. The Mayor was backed by 23,283 electors, with 11,254 electors backing Labour's candidate. Labour sees the voters decision as a mandate to take more powers away from him. Do we need to follow the "Arab spring" with a "Tower Hamlets winter"?

Folnu

put aside personal trauma to come to the aid of a female resident of Rutherford House on the Collingwood Estate.

Folnu, who had buried his father, 87 year old Shaykh Zahir Meah earlier that day, caught the 33 year old woman after she jumped off her balcony. His quick wits prevented a serious tragedy.

Folnu, who has lived on Brady Street, E1 all his life and has eight brothers and sisters, said: "I work at a local Bethnal Green gym and was returning home after finishing a personal workout. We had buried my father and it had been a very difficult day. It was almost midnight and I was standing outside talking to my friends.

"The lady came out on her balcony and spoke to us. This was unusual as it was late and she didn't know us.

"She told us she was always scared and worried about her safety, and then screamed that someone was going to kill her. We tried to calm her down as she was really stressed. She suddenly cried 'I can't take it any longer' and jumped. I leapt forward and luckily caught her. She didn't even touch the floor.

"People had come out and I asked a few women to hold her whilst I called the ambulance and police. I also asked the women if she had any children. They said she did have a child, and I asked them to go up to her flat to check the child was safe. They went up, and fortunately the child was fine."

The local ward Councillor, Mizanur Chaudhury, was full of praise for his constituent: "Folnu's courageous act to help a fellow citizen is an immense moment of pride for the people of this ward

and borough. Young people are not always given the praise they deserve, and Folnu is a shining example of the good they do. I would like to congratulate Folnu for his selfless act – putting aside his personal trauma to help a fellow human.

A resident who lives at Rutherford house said: "These young men are often looked down on, especially when we see them hanging about public spaces.

"Who are we to judge? Are our lives so perfect? Before we point the finger, we should stop and realise: these young men have it in them to be heroes too.

"As a whole community, we the residents of Rutherford House want to thank these heroes and give our appreciation to Folnu for saving one of our neighbour's lives."

Folnu and his friends congregate on the estate near what is known as the Red Pitch. He added, "There are youth clubs near here, but the younger teenagers don't like us hanging out there. My friends and I go to the cinema and bowling, but we can't do that everyday. Here in the park, we have our privacy and we can get away from our problems for a while."

Folnu's actions were praised by the police and paramedics who attended.

The modest hero who had four friends with him at the time added, "I'm just glad I could help. Anybody else would do the same."

Additional reporting with support from Faizah Sharif and Fatima Chowdhury.



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