

# Demand Bankstown council provides accommodation and answers for Euro Terraces residents

Socialist Equality Party (Australia)  
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More than two weeks after the Bankstown apartment blaze killed Pingkang “Connie” Zhang and left Yinuo Jiang seriously injured, hundreds of residents of the Euro Terraces Building B are being left to fend for themselves, with totally inadequate assistance in securing alternative accommodation.

More than 300 students and workers have no idea when they will be able to return or whether the serious faults in the construction of the building will have been rectified when they do.

Immediately after the fire, the Bankstown City Council, which bears central responsibility for the unsafe conditions that led to the tragedy, washed its hands of the crisis, contemptuously telling residents to go and see the Salvation Army if they needed help.

Meanwhile hundreds of other residents in the neighbouring Euro Terraces Building A live in fear that a similar disaster could engulf them at any time.

The refusal of any authority to provide accommodation and address the numerous concerns of residents reflects the attitude of the entire political establishment, starting with the Council and going right up to the state and federal governments.

As far as they are concerned, the residents, many of them low-income immigrant families and overseas students battling to make ends meet, are simply cash cows for milking money to line the pockets of the developers responsible for the shoddy construction of the apartments. Profits—not human lives and the right to decent, affordable and safe housing—are their only concern.

No information has been released to residents about how such a disaster could occur in a relatively new apartment block in the middle of the Sydney metropolitan area, on the grounds that there may be a coronial inquiry—which, if it even occurs, will not begin for at least

six months, and possibly several years.

Residents, however, need immediate answers to a whole series of critical questions.

- How was it that Bankstown City Council approved Building B when it clearly had substandard fire doors, an atrium roof that trapped intense smoke inside the building and no sprinkler system? If, as the Council claims, it only approved the initial plans, and not any of the subsequent modifications, what checks did it make to ensure the safety of the residents living in an area under its jurisdiction?

- The Council has claimed it issued fire safety compliance orders for Euro Terraces. When? What issues were raised in these compliance orders? Were they complied with? If not, why didn't the Council act to enforce them?

- Revelations made in a *Sydney Morning Herald* article published on September 21 indicate that additional bedrooms had been constructed inside some of the apartments in order to squeeze in more student tenants. Given the obvious health and safety implications, how was this allowed to happen? Did the Council know about it? If not, why not?

- Many residents have explained that Building B was notorious for false fire alarms. Was the Council aware of this? If not, why not? Why was nothing done to address the faults responsible for such alarms? Were compliance orders, which were certainly issued by the NSW Fire and Emergency Services, simply ignored? If so, why was no action taken to enforce them?

- What role did recent changes to building codes, at both state and federal level, play in creating the conditions for the uncontrollable Bankstown blaze? How can fire safety be guaranteed to residents when building occupancy approvals rest with private certifiers, paid by

developers and construction companies?

- Why does the federal government's Australian building code require sprinklers only in apartment buildings over 25 metres high? How can it justify not requiring sprinklers in a 10-storey block of apartments housing up to 400 human beings?

Every aspect of the Bankstown fire points to the subordination of the interests of the working class to the profit requirements of big business. Property development, which provides financial bonanzas to developers, construction corporations, real estate agencies and banks, has been one of the few engines of economic growth since the global financial crisis erupted in 2008. Governments at every level have actively colluded in ensuring that the speculative boom continues. The events of September 6 are the result.

The issues raised by the tragedy affect the working class as a whole. According to one estimate, more than two million people in the state of New South Wales alone live in buildings with inadequate fire safety. Only when society is completely reorganised from top to bottom on a socialist basis, to meet the pressing social needs of the vast majority, not the profits of the wealthy few, can ordinary people be guaranteed the fundamental right to safe, high quality and affordable housing.

The Socialist Equality Party urges the residents of the Euro Terrace Blocks, along with residents throughout the suburb, to attend the meeting of the Bankstown City Council on Tuesday night at 6pm at the council chambers (Round House), on the corner of Chapel Road and The Mall, to demand free, emergency accommodation for the residents of Euro Terraces and Building B, as long as they are locked out of their apartments, and to insist on answers to the life-and-death questions raised by the tragedy.



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