

Corporate mass murder in London

Robert Stevens
17 June 2017

Shock and horror has boiled over into raw anger and fury. Thousands protested in London Friday to demand justice and the punishment of those responsible for mass murder in the worst housing fire in modern British history.

Hundreds chanting “We want justice” for the victims of the Grenfell Tower inferno surrounded Kensington Town Hall, London to demand answers from council officials who had barricaded themselves in the building.

Prime Minister Theresa May, while visiting Kensington, was forced to remain in a church and then chased away—surrounded by a heavy security detail—with protesters booing and shouting “shame on you” and “coward.”

This sentiment finds its echo throughout Britain and worldwide.

Millions are horrified by the loss of at least 100 and as many as 150 lives of working class residents in Wednesday’s fire.

Most shocking of all, this took place in Kensington and Chelsea, Britain’s richest borough in one of the richest cities in the world. But like so many other areas of the capital, extreme wealth exists side by side with extreme deprivation.

Kensington and Chelsea is one of the most socially divided areas of London, with those living on the Lancaster West Estate, where Grenfell Tower is located, in clear view of the homes of multi-millionaires and billionaires. The most expensive street in the country, Victoria Road in Kensington, has an average house price of £8 million.

This imparts a politically explosive dynamic to unfolding events—which is why, incredibly, the police and council officials have stonewalled the appeals of residents’ families and friends and have still refused to admit the real death toll.

Grenfell is not only an appalling tragedy. It is a

crime. Those whose lives were taken were murdered just as surely as if a torch had been applied to the building.

Ruthless cost-cutting with no concern for public safety laid the basis for the Grenfell deaths and ensured the devastating, rapid spread of the fire from its initial source in just a single apartment.

The fire spread so rapidly due to the cladding on the building bursting into flames. It was added last year in a “refurbishment.” On Friday, what many already suspected was confirmed when it was revealed that the insulating material used was combustible. It was chosen because it was £2 per square metre cheaper than a fire resistant alternative. The saving made amounted to just £5,000.

This and other equally life-threatening decisions were taken or authorised by the Conservative-run Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation, who ran Grenfell Tower on its behalf. The tower block had no central fire alarm system, no sprinklers in place and just one exit stairwell. The authorities ignored repeated warnings from a tenants group and residents over many years who insisted that Grenfell was unsafe and a “death trap.”

Such flagrant criminality has deeper causes. The essential fact is that the Grenfell deaths are the product of class society and the “normal” workings of the capitalist system.

London is a world centre of speculation and financial parasitism. And the property market is a vital element of this global web of corruption. Land and housing in the capital have become one of the most lucrative commodities in the world. It is not only that London is home to 80 billionaires, but the fact that fully 60 percent of its skyscrapers and vast numbers of luxury houses and flats are owned by overseas companies or wealthy residents who rarely or never set foot in them.

Catering to this market demands the social cleansing from council estates of their poor residents, especially when they are located in a desirable area. This has become so routine that residents of the Lancaster West Estate are correct to insist that the failure to invest in Grenfell Tower was a deliberate effort to drive them out.

Similar equally anti-social decisions are made every single day by the money-mad oligarchy and their political flunkys who determine every aspect of people's lives to ruinous effect. Homes and schools are rendered unsafe. Hospitals closed, beds lost, vital social services withdrawn because someone, somewhere decides they are an unacceptable drain on profit—which must be maintained at whatever cost.

Forty years after Margaret Thatcher declared, “There is no such thing as society,” in order to justify the gutting of social services, privatisation and deregulation, the social conditions facing the working class have been reduced to levels once associated with the so called “third world.” This testifies to the immense class divide and social inequality that now exist in *all* capitalist countries.

On Thursday, in the face of mounting public anger, May ordered a public inquiry into the Grenfell fire. This is aimed at ensuring a cover-up and the protection of those responsible—above all within her own government.

Those responsible for these deaths must be arrested and face criminal proceedings, with the truth to come out in trials. Among these should be the former London mayor Boris Johnson, who is responsible for the slashing of London's fire service and mass deregulation, and Kensington and Chelsea council leader Nick Paget-Brown.

But while leading Tory figures such as Johnson were responsible for the last wave of ultra-gentrification in the service of the super-rich, all the bourgeois parties, including Labour, which runs many of London's councils, are equally culpable. Mayor of London Sadiq Khan must answer for his role in allowing this situation to continue unchallenged since he took office promising to remedy London's housing crisis.

It should be stressed that the death toll from Grenfell is expected to exceed the combined total resulting from every terrorist attack in the UK since the beginning of the so-called war on terror in 2001.

Whenever a terrorist attack has taken place in Britain over the last decade, the full force of the state has been brought to bear. Police have carried out raids on every person who is linked, even in the most innocuous way, to the individual terrorist. They have been immediately arrested and hauled off to be detained and grilled for days on end. In response to the Grenfell fire, not a single person in any responsible position has yet been arrested, let alone charged.

Instead we are promised a toothless inquiry!

Whatever the outcome of ongoing police investigations and public inquiries, they will not uncover the essential cause of the corporate mass murder at Grenfell because it is rooted in the failed capitalist system, which is reaping untold misery, death and destruction on the vast majority of the planet's population.

The appalling loss of life in London demonstrates the urgent necessity for the mobilisation of the working class behind a socialist programme and an end to the subordination of every aspect of social policy to the interests of the financial swindlers and parasites.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact