

London protests demand “Justice for Grenfell!”

Our reporters
19 June 2017

On Friday, thousands joined separate protests in London demanding “Justice for Grenfell,” for the victims of the catastrophic fire that ripped through the apartment block early on Wednesday morning.

Hundreds gathered outside Kensington Town Hall, while thousands more marched from the offices of the Department of Communities and Local Government to the government district of Whitehall, past the prime minister’s residence in Downing Street and then to Oxford Circus and the BBC’s headquarters.

Protesters chanted “Justice for Grenfell,” “We want justice,” “May must go” and “Blood on your hands.” Many carried homemade placards denouncing government cost-cutting and deregulation that resulted in death and destruction for Grenfell Tower residents.

World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke to some of those marching.

Pablo is an architect from Spain who works in London. He said, “The fire could have been avoided. It was all about cutting costs. I work as an architect and I can tell that the authorities knew exactly what they were doing. They neglected this building because its residents were not rich. In architecture, we strive to build for mankind to have a decent accommodation and public spaces in buildings. This inferno goes against the universal principles of architecture.”

Pablo’s sister Valentina, a student in London, said, “Even in Spain we have not seen a tragedy of this kind in public housing. But it could happen anywhere because of cuts and austerity.”

She continued, “In central London, student friends rent beds in basement rooms to live near the university. These are not rooms but simply beds. It is disgusting and no wonder fires happen. We have been in London four and half years and we have seen the housing crisis getting worse. This could happen to anyone who is not

rich, but either middle or working class. That is why we are marching today.”

Ade attended the rally with her friend Jane. Ade said, “It is absolutely disgusting, it is disgraceful. The Conservative government, the Tory council, Theresa May, they had a chance to change the fire regulations and the laws on that and did not do it.

“They put that cladding on the building and it was just a torch. And they kept telling them to stay inside the building. That is valid if the building is fire safe, but it was not. They knew it was not. The same happened in Australia, the same thing happened in Lakanal House in Camberwell [in London in 2009]. People died and they don’t care, it is deliberate.”

Asked what she thought of Prime Minister May’s proposal to hold a public inquiry into the fire, Ade said, “You don’t want a public inquiry, you want an inquest. Because if there is a public inquiry, it is all going to be behind closed doors. The families will not have a chance to get any input, to have a say. We need an inquest. It is manslaughter.”

The WSWs reporter told Ade, “We say it is a crime against the working class,” to which she replied, “It absolutely is.”

Jane said, “The price difference between flammable and non-flammable cladding panel is minimal. It is two pounds for each panel that burnt and it was 24 pounds for the ones that did not burn.”

Patricia, a single mother from a council tower block elsewhere in London, has been hit hard by cuts to tax credits and higher council tax. “I have 200-300 pounds remaining each month to live on. Over the years, you have seen your bills going up and your welfare help going down. I am a lone parent, I just need a good life. I don’t want to be rich.

“There needs to be justice for the victims,” she

continued. “Kensington and Chelsea is a very rich borough. There are such wealthy properties around the estate, and a rich shopping centre. What is so insulting is that the cladding went up to make the tower just look nice for the rich people.”

Megan, a former librarian who lives on a council estate in Hackney, spoke about the impact of austerity cuts: “It’s the National Health Service, the housing, the fire brigade being cut, as they are paying out so much for wars. Health and safety legislation has been weakened.”

Made redundant last year after her library at London Metropolitan University was targeted for cuts, Megan said, “You are lucky to get a council flat. A lot of people pay two-thirds of their income in rent. In London rents have always been out of proportion to what people earned at the bottom. You can see that they want poorer people out of London.”

Megan said she agreed with WSWS reporters that the terrible housing conditions at Grenfell Tower were replicated throughout Britain and internationally. “Yes. It is happening everywhere,” she said. “And housing is a right, a human right, as is food, health and free education.”



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