

"The rich want families with low income out"

On-the-spot report from London: Residents speak on Grenfell fire

Our reporters
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Residents near the burnt-out Grenfell Tower in Kensington, London, spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* reporters about the June 14 inferno that took the lives of at least 79 people and likely many more.

The public outcry over the horrific blaze has provoked the testing of some 600 tower blocks around the country, which have cladding like the external siding on the Grenfell Tower. The combustible insulation and cladding was a central factor in the spread of a small fire in one Grenfell apartment into a conflagration that engulfed the entire 24-storey structure within minutes.

By Tuesday evening, officials acknowledged that 95 tower blocks in 32 local authorities have failed fire safety tests due to combustible cladding. This is a 100 percent failure rate, with 500 tower blocks still to be tested.

Marie has lived in Kensington for 15 years. Marie's best friend and her daughter lost their lives in the Grenfell fire.

She said, "Even animals you can't treat the way they treated people here. They put up cheap cladding and exposed the gas pipes. My son goes to this school [adjacent to Grenfell Tower]. What if it had happened in the daytime? I worked in the [Grenfell] building in the daytime—my children would have been without a mum now. Can you imagine what I feel inside me now? By nature, I'm a strong person, but this is very difficult."

Asked what she thought about the role of the local council and government in the events, she said, "They know that they are responsible. When you live in a council property, you can't change anything."

Many Grenfell residents are being forced to live in

temporary accommodation such as hotels since the fire, with reports that some are being forced to sleep in cars and parks. Asked about this, Marie said, "The council should have been more involved, they should have been giving people support. They're hiding from people. They know what they're doing, and that's what is making people more upset. They should have had an office in the town hall, showing people more support."

"They said they want to calm [angry] people down. We've probably got 300 people dead. The council didn't do enough. When you ask them to come and do something they don't listen because all they're interested in is saving money—that way they get bigger bonuses. It's greed. They are going to have to pay it back in compensation now. But you can give me a million pounds and it's not going to bring my friend and her daughter back. They're gone forever."

Marie concluded, "When people raise their voice, they [the council] don't like it. They don't want to hear the truth. You need to get a mass of people working together with the same ideas as you."

Mel is a chef and **Gary** a taxi driver. The family were previously residents in the Royal Kensington and Chelsea Borough and were visiting the area with their son.

Asked what she thought about the situation facing working class people in London, Mel said, "There is a social divide, but we were accustomed to it." Previously, the city was generally "not as privileged as it is now. You quickly realised that the rich were starting to sharply divide away from us, like saying 'hey, this is us here'. You stepped over one side of the street and you would notice that the gardens were looked after very well and the other side was poor."

Mel continued, “In 2009, 2010, we were told that if you cannot afford to live in the borough, you would have to move out. People on housing benefit were being pushed outside London. They were not given opportunities to remain here. What has happened is testament to the hidden agenda that it was. The social divide is there. They said, ‘We want families with low income, families that don’t fit in the picture, out’.”

Gary said he blamed the Conservative government for the lack of social housing in the capital and working class families being forced out.

Asked what he thought of Labour’s record in government when social inequality began to accelerate, he said, “We had Tony Blair, he was really a Conservative in Labour clothes. I think this is what we are seeing in the Labour Party right now. We have all these Blairite members backstabbing [Labour leader Jeremy] Corbyn. They are making Corbyn out to be a villain, while I think Tony Blair was really the villain. He was really a conservative person under the guise of Labour.”

Gary added, “You know we need a big change, a change of leader, Jeremy Corbyn would be a big change.”

The WSWs reporters explained that the Labour Party was a capitalist party, which served the interests of the real estate speculators and the City of London. Corbyn, they said, was trying to conceal this fact to keep the working class trapped in the Labour Party.

Mel said she supported neither of the main parties. “I am going to be honest. Same meat, different gravy. It does not matter who you vote for. We need a new party. We need a new vision led and driven by the people. At the moment, it is not.”

On the Grenfell fire, she said, “How in god’s name can you sign off on this property and deem it to be safe. They signed a contract, saying, ‘We are happy, we are safe,’ and many years later we found out it was not. As long as people pay their bills, rent and other charges they didn’t care. How many lives have been lost?”

“All the parties say, ‘We’ll invest in schools, we’ll invest in social services’. Look at the schools now, no universal free school meals. Corbyn, as soon as he gets in, he’ll change. It’s the same thing, day in day out. I am not for Corbyn.”

Mesle is a self-employed artist and musician. He was travelling to the Lancaster West Estate in Kensington

with his daughter to pay his respects to the victims of the inferno.

Mesle was looking at a placard put up by residents on a fence near Grenfell Tower that read, “Why do the working class have to suffer? What gives the TMO [Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation—the authority that ran Grenfell Tower], the right to put money before our lives?”

Asked what he thought about the placard, Mesle said, “Peoples’ lives must come before everything else. Money should not come into the equation. I suppose in this area, a lot of cladding was put on to make Grenfell look good, because there are a lot of wealthy people living around here.”

Mesle said he saw TV news footage of the tower on fire. “Within 20 minutes it was all blazing. I just cannot imagine what it was like for those people.”

Speaking about the social inequality in Kensington and Chelsea and throughout London, Mesle said, “I am a musician. I see quite a lot of this kind of thing, when you play in a fantastic hotel and they pay you £50. It is that kind of thing. Then if you say I don’t want to do it, you don’t get the work, someone else takes the job.

“This is social injustice. I am going to work in a rich area, and they don’t pay you for the work that they should be paying.

“The banking crisis was something in which a lot of people got off lightly. All these rich people never ever get prosecuted. If those residents, for example, don’t pay the rent for one month, they are down on them like a ton of bricks. It is social injustice. I am sure things will change. It cannot go on like that.”



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