

“People died because they used cheap cladding. It’s like war between rich and poor”

Anti-austerity protestors speak on the Grenfell Tower fire

Our reporters
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The *World Socialist Web Site* interviewed some of those participating in Saturday’s anti-austerity demonstration. The issue that dominated people’s thoughts was the Grenfell Tower inferno and its implications.

Andrew: “I live in a similar tower [to Grenfell] in Newham. We have not been told anything. They will not do what they have done at Camden and conduct a mass evacuation.

“You cannot prevent a fire but you can always reduce its impact. I work in information security, which operates on the same logic of reducing risk.

“I visit Silicon Valley regularly as part of my job. It does not matter if you have brains. It is only the few who become wealthy. The rich are hoarding the wealth. They try to make money out of everything. It is simply crooked.

“If we keep on following the same road then Grenfell will be the tip of the iceberg. Since 1991 and with Reagan, Thatcher and Gorbachev, we have had the oligarchs. Warren Buffett said, ‘Of course there is a class struggle and we are winning.’”

Tariq: “Grenfell is really the end result of more than just seven years of austerity. It really started in the 1980s with Thatcher and Reagan. They call it ‘neo-liberalism.’ There’s nothing liberal about it as far as I’m concerned; its ‘neo-corporatism.’

“Finally, I think that people are starting to wake up to ways of changing this. I think, what happened at Grenfell Tower broke people’s hearts in this country. People don’t just want answers, they want people to be held responsible.

“For people who’ve been aware of this for some time, I think it’s sort of like the full stop on the capitalist system of governance and control. They don’t just govern over us, they control us. Poorer people can spend up to 80, 90 or even 100 percent of their income just to get by. That’s not a type of society we really want to live in.

“It looks like the banks might crash again. There’s been no stringent reforms after 2008. Is it going to take another financial crash to wake more people up? I hope not. I hope people wake up before that.”

Laura: “I’m shocked about the Grenfell Tower fire. I’m on this demonstration today to oppose the cuts to public services, such as the lack of inspections at the tower, the cutting of corners in terms of the cladding used and the difficulties of the council staff to deal with the aftermath of the tragedy.

“As in the Hurricane Katrina tragedy in the US, ordinary people are moved but I feel that those in the council and the government are less concerned. I guess because it’s to do with social housing and largely concerns people who are less well off.”

Ayisha: “Everybody knows the Grenfell Tower disaster happened in Notting Hill. Everyone knows rich people live there, poor people live

there in council houses in huge estates. This wouldn’t happen to rich people. It’s the poor people that get affected, like many times before in the past.

“Fire-fighters said that the cladding wasn’t good enough. People in the tower had said that if a fire did happen these would be the implications. And now it’s happened. It was preventable.

“These conditions affect poor people all around the world who live in council housing, high-rise tower blocks, etc. They’re thinking: ‘This could happen to us.’

“In the last few weeks, we’ve seen that towers in Camden, all over London, have got the same cladding. People have been evacuated. They don’t want to live there. It’s awful. The government needs to do something about it. People are angry. People know this shouldn’t have happened. That’s why people are rallying here today. It’s austerity measures.

“Privatization started from Thatcher and continued. It’s the result of Thatcher, of Blair, of Brown. Blair might as well have been a Tory himself. It’s all culminated into this. All parties are to blame. For a lot of companies it’s all about money, competition for contracts, where will the profits go? It would have been more expensive to get the right cladding. A few pounds cheaper for every square metre. It’s all about profit. ‘Where can we save money? Where can we cut costs?’”

Noura: “Grenfell is a symbol of the austerity in Britain that’s been happening for so many years. The inner city areas have always been neglected.

“People from all across the UK, and especially in London, who might not have thought about these issues are coming together. Many ask, ‘What is the point in marching when we’ve been ignored for so long?’ But I think we’ve reached a point where young and old are tired of it and want to make a stand.

“I come from north London and a similar event happened there and we’re worried that our tower block has cladding on it. We’re sick of it. Many in the UK have had their moral compass stirred and are thinking, instead of taking a back seat, they’re going to do something about it. That’s what we desperately need.

“The government don’t care about young people coming up. They don’t care about how much they’re impacting people.

“Take one look at Grenfell Tower. If you go up in person you can see how horrific it is. Concrete doesn’t burn. They had the option to use less flammable material—but they decided to save a few pence and risk the lives of hundreds of people. We don’t even know how many survived—79—are you kidding me?”

“I guarantee you that if this happened in Surrey or Kent, or anywhere

with a less multicultural population, a lot more would be done. They don't care about the minorities. They don't care about the working class. They don't care about the people who actually build this country, who are mending the community through their own actions.

"The government and local authority are absent. Theresa May is saying the communities are doing a great job—yeah we are, but what are you doing? You've just given a billion pounds to the Democratic Unionist Party but you don't want to fund the emergency services."

Syed: "The Grenfell fire was terrible and made me very sad. Those people and the fire-fighters were helpless. The fire authorities were partly responsible. They could have done much more. The authorities told residents to stay inside the building while the fire spread.

"I'm from Bangladesh and I've seen similar tragedies there. I didn't expect this to happen in the UK, in one of the richest areas in the world. They spent millions on the building to make it look nice for the rich. If they spent five thousand extra on cladding they could have saved many lives. It shows the value they put on the lives of ordinary people."

Ben, a university student from Salford in Manchester: "I am tired of the social injustice. I feel like if we don't get together, unite and revolt nothing will change. It takes the working class to create the positive change for the whole of society. We should go against what we are told to do and should get together to go and get the elite who rule us.

"Grenfell Tower was absolutely horrific and avoidable. People need to be held accountable for it. The elite have an ulterior motive and an agenda and we need to make sure justice is served. Cuts and the way they see us as the working classes and the poor are the reasons which led to the fire."

Chris: "I've come from Derby today. I lived and studied in London. I have come down today because the Grenfell Tower disaster really struck a heartstring with me. Before my current employment, I was an architecture student. I think we need to look at how to improve things for the people of the city, rather than the wealthy few.

"The fact that costs were cut in order to create a false façade to prettify the image of the building, and which cost so many lives, is an absolute tragedy. We need to make sure that the media does not forget about it over the next weeks. We need to be talking about it week after week after week. It has such serious implications.

"We are a fractured society, and what is left of Grenfell Tower should stay and serve as a monument to all the people who died, and that you can't just move people out [of the area] through the negligence of the Tory government. Austerity cannot continue as it has been doing. Everybody matters in this world. People come to this country and contribute to the economy, and the government treats them like the people in Grenfell Tower.

"We need to make sure our voices are heard, and that we will not put up with austerity. Everybody deserves to be treated equally, and not be put at risk because of austerity."

Eva: "I came down from West London today wearing a tee-shirt with the I-heart-Grenfell logo to show my support for the people of Grenfell and for what it means on a wider scale, for what is happening with the political uprising that is going on in the country at the moment.

"The root cause of the fire was the utter neglect of the working class. It was the result of a 'trickle up' effect. They only concentrated on the people who were giving them the money.

"The disaster has touched many people, and not just in this country. We have been watching news on CNN on the day the Senator got shot, but they led with the Grenfell disaster. It shows what it means on a wider scale. It's neglect and negligence.

"In terms of the numbers in Grenfell Tower, the authorities know these are lower class families, and also big families. A lot of them are refugees—I came to this country myself as a refugee. It's not simply saying, there is a one-bedroom flat, we know more people lived there. I shared a room with my siblings. There would have been large families in

that building. They are not giving us the information we need. They are trying to control the population and control our reaction to this absolute tragedy. It is a crime. People should be put on trial with a judge. Someone needs to pay for it."

Jacqueline: "I made this poster because I feel quite strongly about what has happened to the Grenfell residents. I think it is a grave injustice and I want something to be done about it.

"I went to school in that area. There is a community of people there from lots of different cultures, religions and backgrounds.

"I've heard about the poisoned water in Flint, Michigan. It just shows that the lives of working people are just seen as worthless. Something has to be done about this whole situation.

"I read that the Grenfell Tower was put up in the 1970s and there have been some fires there in the past. However, it was only when the major refurbishment was done—with the metal windows taken out and replaced by plastic ones and the new cladding installed, and the gas pipes—that it was these things that caused the fire to spread.

"I don't like the fact the Grenfell residents were not listened to, and that some of them were even served with cease-and-desist letters because they had raised concerns. That is bullying, which is something I have experienced myself in my lifetime."

Liliane: "I am carrying a placard with a picture of Grenfell because I saw the fire maybe 10 minutes after it had started. I saw people phoning friends inside the tower. I heard someone say, 'I won't see you again. Goodbye.' The women next to me said, 'Don't say that.'

"My grandson was on the other side of the building, and he heard children shouting, 'Please help me! Help me!' He's 18 years old and came home traumatised. He's been crying so much.

"The people who want to save pennies are responsible for what happened at Grenfell, for the cladding. When they saw the cheaper price of the cladding did they stop to ask why? Or did they just think, well they're only immigrants living there.

"They just wanted the tower to look pretty, that's what it was all about. It was business people, those who want to make money. They want to blame it on people who they say were sub-letting. That's just bullshit.

"This is definitely a crime! We want an inquest, not an inquiry. We don't even know how many people died. I don't even want to think about it, it's so horrible."

Michelle: "I've come down today to see the people stand together against all the injustices that have happened throughout the Tory reign.

"My placard has a picture of Grenfell Tower burning and says, 'No one can be free, until everyone is free.' I made this because I live in social housing in Kingston, another one of the Royal boroughs. We are the minority there. The Grenfell Tower disaster really touched my heart.

"I know it has upset people, but for me, it has lifted my own voice. Before I thought my situation is my fault. I think this tragedy highlights to the world that that is actually not the case."

Suzan: "I am here today to seek justice for the victims of Grenfell Tower. I lost one of my closest friends there. He and his family all died there. People died there because they used cheap cladding. It's like war between rich and poor. It's not a matter of bad or good. It's a class war."



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