

London residents on Grenfell fire: “Heads have got to roll!”

Our reporters
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World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke to residents of the Lancaster West housing estate near Grenfell Tower.

Jane, 16, lives with her parents at Barandon Walk on the Lancaster West housing estate. She explained that since the fire their homes had been without hot water or gas. Her family was left there for two days but is now in emergency accommodation in a nearby hotel.

“I knew a girl in the tower who went to my primary school, but she and her family sadly passed away. I knew some other people in there too, but luckily, they got out.” On the morning after the fire, Jane did her GCSE exams at a local church. “They gave us water, clothes, food. The community came together.”

Complaints about fire safety by residents at Grenfell Tower were common knowledge. “It’s horrible. If people are telling them from a very long time ago that there’s issues—the fire alarms aren’t working, there’s no sprinklers—then as a council you’re responsible. You should be the ones willing to put that in, so we are all safe. It’s like they knew this was going to happen, like they wanted it to happen. I still can’t believe it to this day—I can’t look at the building.

“Rich people never liked this building. It doesn’t look good. I think they just planned it to be honest—to move us all out of the area, because it’s a rich borough. But we’re a strong community. They’re not going to be able to do it. We’ll stick together and we’ll fight.”

None of the residents WSWS reporters spoke to believe the official death toll, and Jane said the number of lives lost was likely “in the hundreds”. “The way that fire was going—all of them are dead. The fire went up so fast I don’t think anyone could have escaped. More than 80 people lost their lives. Way more.”

Jane described how fire engines had trouble gaining access to the tower when the fire broke out. “The road

near Grenfell Tower is really narrow and tight, and because there were already cars parked there, the fire trucks were too big, so they couldn’t easily go through to help. The space around Grenfell Tower is very compact—there’s the park, the school, the leisure centre. It’s all very close, so there was nowhere to go.”

People waited to be rescued while the tower burned, but there was no equipment to save them. “If you’re building towers like this, you should fund the fire brigade to have equipment. But they don’t want to waste money on us. If it was rich people, they’d do it straight away. Without a doubt.”

Vanessa agreed: “To be honest, the government—I don’t think they care about us at all. What they’re trying to do is social cleansing. They don’t care about the working class. They’re not helping in any way. The only people who have actually helped is the community getting together, opening services. The government doesn’t care about us and they’re never going to care about us.

“We’re not like the rich people. They’re trying to social cleanse this entire area of the working class so that foreign buyers, whose properties cost millions, can move in. They know the working class don’t have the money to buy those properties. We need to stop that. It’s not right. Where’s everyone going to end up?”

Reporters showed Jane and Vanessa a WSWS video of a resident of the city of Flint in the United States speaking about the Grenfell fire. Flint’s population has suffered for years the devastating consequences of a scheme to build a new water pipeline. State and local officials switched the city’s water supply to the polluted Flint River, even though the city’s antiquated water treatment plant was unable to make the water safe.

Jane said, “That’s terrible. Just like she’s saying to

us that we've got to rise up, they've got to rise up too."

Davide Prevarin and Federica Silvi live on Barandon Walk, and like other residents they have been without gas and hot water since the fire.

"The advice from the local council is to go to the gym to get a shower, and it's been nearly three weeks," Davide said. "There's no other support. There were some policemen today asking if we need any support—but they had absolutely no information to tell us and couldn't help in any way, except giving us some leaflets."

For the first two days after the fire, police prevented residents from entering their homes to pick up clothes or other basic items. "We were lucky, we stayed with friends, but I can only imagine that for people who don't have anyone to rely on, how difficult it must have been."

Both were home on the night of the fire. "Firefighters were rushing to the scene, and the people on the streets were shouting because they could see that there were people moving inside their flats and using their phones as flashlights to make their presence seen. You could actually hear people screaming from the tower."

"The fire was just a bit on the one side of the building, just on the right, but within half an hour it spread to the rest of the tower, and at that point it started to be really, really strong. At about two or three in the morning we decided to leave because we didn't know if it was going to be safe, and no one was saying anything. And still when we returned we didn't know whether it was going to collapse."

"All we had was the BBC web site and the updates posted there," Silvi said, "because there was absolutely no one from the Council around here. The police knew nothing."

Asked about the deadly conditions in the building—no sprinklers, no central fire alarm, the installation of cheap, flammable cladding to save costs—Davide said, "That's the typical excuse that they give. 'Oh, it's red tape, all these regulations—let's get rid of the regulations to make business flourish'."

"And then you get this. These regulations are written in blood. And then after 10 or 15 years they'll say, 'These regulations are stopping business, we can't develop as we want, so let's get rid of that'... until another tragedy happens."

"You can try to elect an MP that is less conservative,

and try to form all your committees, you can try all these little solutions, but the biggest problem is that until the system changes then you'll just have to fight it with your own means, and your means are not enough."

Eddie Andrews, who lives near to Grenfell Tower said, "Heads have got to roll. From the council, from the government, heads have got to roll for this. Innocent people have died and someone has got to account for that."

On the public inquiry that Prime Minister Theresa May has announced into the fire, he said, "I don't trust the government choosing judges. I wouldn't trust the government to pick a judge and expect the judge to give justice to what I think the people deserve. They should have independent people."

On the fact that the local Kensington Academy school is covered in the same cladding as that on Grenfell Tower, Eddie said, "How much money did you spend on that? And you're palming it off like you're doing something good. If you've got money, spend money. That's why it's there. It's there for the people, spend it. You shouldn't differentiate between rich and poor. People are people regardless of their colour." Walking away Eddie shouted angrily, "But heads have got to roll!"



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