

Haringey social cleansing exposes Labour's hypocrisy over Grenfell Tower fire

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Labour politicians have echoed popular denunciations of Conservative controlled Kensington and Chelsea Council for its responsibility for the Grenfell Tower fire. This includes raising the underlying aim of its Tenant Management Organisation (TMO) to socially cleanse existing occupants from this potentially high value real estate.

Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn declared, “What the tragedy of Grenfell Tower has exposed is the disastrous effects of austerity” and a “disregard for working class communities.”

Labour MP for Kensington, Emma Dent Coad, said TMO tenants had “a real fear that the development of the estates is part of a social cleansing programme” that would result in them being rehoused miles from London.

All true—but Labour is just as guilty as the Tories of imposing austerity and implementing social cleansing—especially of London's council estates and social housing.

Tottenham Labour MP David Lammy lost a friend in the Grenfell fire and has since portrayed himself as a man seeking justice. But his key political role is in attempting to divert class-based opposition to the social murder at Grenfell Tower into the dead-end of racial politics.

His main expressed concern was that the inquiry into the fire announced by Prime Minister Theresa May would be led by “a white, upper middle class man”—judge Sir Martin Moore-Bick. “I think the victims will also say to themselves when push comes to shove there are some powerful people here—contractors, sub-contractors, local authorities, governments—and they look like this judge,” Lammy declared. “Whose side will he be on?”

Moore-Bick's loyalties are clear for all to see. The issue being more carefully concealed is whose side is Lammy and the Labour Party really on?

Lammy's own political record epitomises the two-faced response of Labour to Grenfell. Since he began his career

as a rising star in the Blair government, he has been cultivated by such people (the likes of Moore-Bick) and profited both politically and personally. He has been a key figure in the gentrification and social cleansing process being pursued by Labour-controlled council in Haringey, in which his Tottenham constituency is located.

On July 3, the *Guardian* ran a major article on how two Labour MPs, Lammy and Catherine West, were urging Haringey Council to “pause” a £2 billion plan to privatise council houses, public buildings and land amid fears residents could be forced out. A joint letter to the council reads, “...in light of the fire at Grenfell Tower we write today with the utmost urgency to urge caution and call on the cabinet to pause and reflect further on whether entering into a public-private partnership is the correct decision for the borough and its residents.”

But Lammy's overarching concern is with the timing of Haringey's decision, taken this week with hundreds of demonstrators outside, to ratify what is the biggest ever act of social cleansing by a local authority in the UK.

Haringey's plans will provide a bonanza to developers, who have set their sights on the area, regularly describing it as London's “next big growth opportunity.” They gloat how property is being snapped up and fortunes made because of low prices brought about by endemic poverty and exacerbated by the stigma attached to the 2011 riots following the police killing of Mark Duggan.

Under the leadership of Labour's Claire Kober and eight hand-picked Labour councillors, a 20-year public private partnership, the Haringey Development Vehicle (HDV) will be created, owned 50/50 by the council and global developer Lendlease. Through this mechanism, virtually all of Haringey's assets—17 housing estates (including the huge Northumberland Park and Broadwater Farm estates), schools, clinics and 500 commercial buildings—valued at £2 billion will be privatised.

Lendlease is notorious for its recent public-private

partnership (PPP) with Labour-controlled Southwark council in London which 1,200 social homes on the Heygate estate were demolished and replaced by expensive private apartments. Only 82 social homes were replaced and just three of the original households have returned.

Under Haringey's HDV, reports suggest that of the 1,092 council houses on the Northumberland Park Estate, a maximum of 183 will be replaced. Of the 2,500 or so new homes that will be squeezed into the area, the council claims that 40 percent will be "affordable." However, most of these will be for sale rather than rent. Moreover, the idea of "affordability" is a fraud. It can mean people having to pay up to 80 percent of the market rate for rent, typically £1,155 a month for a one-bedroom apartment in London—double the national average.

In practice, virtually nowhere do the much publicised levels of "affordable" housing that herald the announcement of regeneration schemes materialise—including in Haringey.

In 2012, Haringey council agreed to Premier League Tottenham Hotspur Football Club's demands that planning permission for the redevelopment of the club's ground be revised. The club wanted its legal obligation to provide affordable housing removed and its "Section 106" contribution—the money paid to help the public costs associated with the redevelopment such as new or improved roads, stations, schools and health facilities—reduced from £16 million to £500,000.

The council agreed, scrapping the original 100 affordable homes and upping the number of homes for sale by 85. The council, together with the London mayor, agreed to take over the club's section 106 obligations and other costs to the tune of £27 million—a subsidy to one of the world's richest football clubs, whose profit last year was £63.3 million.

Lammy played his part. Alarmed at the possible loss of "the only international brand in my constituency," he lobbied the government to contribute funding for the new ground.

At Tottenham Hale, the same thing happened, with Haringey Council again agreeing under threats from the developer to pull out, to "re-negotiate" the Section 106 agreement linked to outline planning permission granted in 2007.

Lammy has no qualms about accepting the financial help of such property developers. Indeed the majority of the donations for his 2015 bid for London Mayor came from this milieu—two donations of £15,000 from

"London's leading property developer" Galliard Holdings, £20,000 from Sager House (Almeida) Limited, two £5,000 cash payments from Killian Hurley, co-founder of luxury property developer Mount Anvil and £2,000 from Beauchamp Estates. Jonathan Goldstein, the head of European investments for US investment house Cain Hoy, which had attempted a takeover of Tottenham Hotspur in 2014, told *City A M* that he was backing Lammy financially.

Lammy also accepted £10,000 in December 2016 from Lee Valley Estates, the company redeveloping Tottenham Hale.

Lammy was up to his neck in the MP expenses scandal that emerged in 2009, taking credit for claiming the largest expenses of any MP—£173,922 in 2010-11. But while having no qualms about his own dependence on public subsidies and dubious relations with property developers, he blames the 2011 riots on loss of morality and responsibility. Brushing aside any talk of the riots having anything to do with police brutality, poverty and social inequality, Lammy railed against young men who haven't followed in his own exalted footsteps. "Today's youth have other ideas," he declares. "To work for low wages in a uniform you hate is seen as naive, not sensible or dignified."

At last year's Labour Party conference, Corbyn boasted, "Across the country, Labour councils are putting Labour values into action in a way that makes a real difference to millions of people, despite cynical government funding cuts that have hit Labour councils five times as hard as Tory-run areas. It is a proud Labour record, and each and every Labour councillor deserves our heartfelt thanks for the work they do."

That is the rhetorical spin from Corbyn on the Labour Party. The actions taken by Haringey Council, with the de facto collusion of Lammy and the Parliamentary Labour Party, is the reality.



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