Anger grows over failure to prosecute those responsible for Grenfell Tower inferno

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Residents and survivors of the Grenfell Tower fire have rejected the lies and excuses offered up by the Metropolitan Police to justify their failure to arrest anyone connected to the inferno.

Over 200 members of the local community gathered at St. Clements Church, north Kensington on Wednesday, marking one month since the fire. They were there to hear from the government “gold command” response panel, including Metropolitan Police Chief Superintendent Robyn Williams, investigating officer Matt Bonner and Kensington and Chelsea Council leader Elizabeth Campbell.

Campbell, who took her post after the forced resignation of Nicholas Paget-Brown, was treated with deserved contempt for doing nothing for Grenfell’s residents.

She had prepared for the meeting with two interviews during which she refused to apologise for the council’s actions prior to the fire and admitted she had never been inside a council flat. The elected representative for Sloane Square declared pompously, “I totally reject the fact that, just because I live in the south of the borough, I have no understanding of what’s going on in the north of the borough. And I also totally reject the whole notion that, because we have people in the borough who are wealthy and people who are not wealthy, the wealthy don’t care.”

At the meeting Campbell spoke complacently of the moves taken to clean up the surrounding area, to which a survivor responded, “Why is this meeting even taking place? So we’re here to talk about scaffolding, housekeeping and people cleaning windows but what about those people in that building who died?”

Bonner’s attempt to justify police inaction aroused even greater hostility. He reiterated the claims that no arrests have been made due solely to the size of the investigation. Bonner demanded of his audience that they "listen... Unfortunately an investigation of this scale will not be quick.”

This well-rehearsed script satisfied no one.

When Bonner said the scale of the investigation was unlike anything outside of a counter-terrorism operation, several residents shouted, “It is terrorism!”

Another said, “This is mass murder. You didn't just burn down the tower. You murdered our friends, you murdered our families, you murdered our neighbours.”

The demand was made, “You're an officer of the law, arrest someone. Be a policeman, arrest someone.”

Another man said, “They knew categorically that [the cladding] would burn so rapidly. You can identify that person like that, that person needs to be arrested.”

Residents also rejected the estimates made by the police that the number of casualties will stay at around 81 and that the true figure may never be known. When Bonner said that the forensic investigation will take at least until the end of the year, a man said, “The pace is too slow. If you need 1,000 officers working round the clock, find 1,000 officers. This is a national disaster, a national disgrace, a national tragedy.”

Another asked, "What kind of time scale is this? Is it going to be another Hillsborough? [A reference to the 27 years it has taken to bring any charges against those responsible for the 1989 football stadium disaster in which 96 Liverpool supporters were crushed to death] When are we going to get justice? When will we get justice? We want to know."

Outside the meeting, local resident John Gregory told *Sky News*, "There is no connection between the upper class and working class whatsoever, and that divide is getting bigger and bigger, and in Kensington and Chelsea it's the biggest divide you'll ever see."

At the nearby memorial wall along Bramley Road,

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people gathered for a vigil. Families were in tears of sorrow and anger. Mrs. Abdo, together with her 12-year-old son Abeer, told the *World Socialist Web Site*that a life-long friend of her mother was living in the tower on the 24th floor. The lady, Fathya, was 70 and lived in a two bedroom flat with her son, her daughter and their respective families due to the housing shortage in London.

Fathya sent a video footage of her last minutes, filming her daughter and her two children before hot vapours and flames took their lives. Her son could not withstand the fire and jumped to his death from the flat. One of his sons tried to escape down the stairwell, but was later found dead. Mrs. Abdo said she wanted those who signed off on the cladding being fireproof to be arrested immediately.

Two residents of Grenfell have in fact been compiling their own list of the dead and missing -- Mahad Egal, who lived with his family on the fourth floor and his childhood friend, Karim Mussilhy. Mahad told the *Guardian* that he has spent every day knocking on doors, asking residents for information. "My list is still in progress but it is much more than 80 people presumed dead, more than one hundred, even."

Karim added, "It's been a month and there have been no arrests, no named suspects."

All of these criticisms are entirely justified.

When the Met first made its claim that the scale of its investigation meant that no immediate arrests could be expected, the *World Socialist Web Site* replied, "This is nothing more than an attempt by the police to hide the truth in plain sight by burying the most relevant information in a mountain of entirely secondary data... Yes, 60 companies are being investigated and hundreds of people are being interviewed, but the main people responsible for making Grenfell Tower a death trap remain untouchable."

This is understood very well by all concerned. But the mass media, the Conservative Party and the Labour Party are all intent on thwarting demands that real justice to be meted out to those responsible for mass murder at Grenfell and are seeking to steer public outrage into the dead end of Prime Minister Theresa May's bogus public inquiry.

On July 12, the *Guardian* admitted as much in a piece supposedly answering the questions posted by local residents on a nearby Westway flyover. To the question, "When is the trial starting?" the newspaper replied, "The simple answer is not this year, maybe next, and maybe not at all."

Faithfully echoing the excuses by the police that the criminal investigation was "unprecedented" and "complex," the *Guardian* added, "Grenfell's wreckage is a crime scene, but police cannot say what crime has been committed. Their starting point is manslaughter offences, including corporate manslaughter or gross negligence manslaughter." But these charges were all "complex to investigate and prosecute... Did they break a law, and are the laws even that clear cut?"

The *Guardian* then admits, "Four weeks on from the disaster, and the usual hallmarks of a criminal investigation are absent. There have been no arrests, no search warrant has been applied for, no one has been interviewed under criminal caution." But the article closes with the assertion, "The Met say they are content with the progress, with companies and individuals voluntarily handing volumes of material over. Police vow to use harder powers if they suspect evidence is being withheld."

The Met may be "satisfied," but only because their real role is to protect the guilty in high places. There is ample and ever-growing evidence already in the public domain of criminal practices by politicians and business leaders alike. But a despicable cover-up is underway. That is the reality behind the police claim that they are making such herculean efforts and their insistence that everyone must sit quietly while the wheels of justice supposedly grind "slowly, but exceedingly fine."

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