

Residents in Bradford, England: “We are all affected by what has happened at Grenfell”

Liz Smith
22 July 2017

Bradford Council announced last Friday that a sample of external cladding taken from Landmark House, a seven-storey building in the northern city of Bradford, failed government fire safety tests.

The city centre building contains 91 apartments. A number of commercial units have also had cladding removed.

Landmark House is not being evacuated, but hourly patrols have been put in place—not by qualified fire officers, according to the West Yorkshire Fire Service, but “appropriately trained” security officers.

The leader of the Labour-run council, Susan Hinchcliffe, said, “We have been advised that there is no need to immediately evacuate the premises. ... the Department for Communities and Local Government confirm that we are acting in accordance with their guidance and they are satisfied with the action being taken.”

One resident told the local *Telegraph & Argus*, “I noticed when they took the piece of cladding off, it was just like cardboard or brown wrapping paper, that’s all that was behind it. It’s taken a disaster for something like this to be done.”

Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to John, who has lived there since 2003. He said that many residents in Landmark House were Asian or eastern European and any information letters produced for the tenants should be in their own language. He noted that in Grenfell Tower 46 victims had been found in one room. They were all one nationality and he guessed they had congregated together for mutual support. John said that there should have been notices in the various languages spoken in the block so everyone was aware of what they needed to do in a fire.

Reporters also spoke to workers who lived in the high-rise flats situated at the bottom of Manchester Road.

Built in the late 1960s as part of a massive expansion of social housing to replace slums, the flats were initially coveted as the place to live. Following the oil crisis in 1973 and the subsequent hike in electricity prices, workers who lived there faced considerable debt. Many had no choice but to stop using the under-floor heating systems installed, which then caused widespread damp.

Things have worsened ever since. In 2003, as part of the privatisation moves of the Blair Labour government, all council-owned housing was transferred to Incommunities, an arms-length social housing company which owns and is responsible for tower blocks such as Douglas and Evans Towers, 15-storeys high, and the Courts, which are all 12 storeys.

John, who lives in Windsor Court, said, “What really irks me about what has happened at Grenfell is you have the Archbishop of Canterbury commenting on it. But where was he before? Has he walked around there? Has he heck! Putting people back into flats that have just had such a traumatic experience. They would have been better off asking me to sort it out!”

John explained, “Recently we had a lot of problems with kids setting off alarms, smoking in stairwells, etc. So what Incommunities did was to take out the fire alarms from the apartments, in the kitchen or near the kitchen, because it was costing them too much money for callouts. Instead of tackling the actual issue of the children or the people setting them off, or educating people, they decided to take them away instead because it’s cheaper. But my rent has not gone down.

“I work and it’s very high rents round here. It’s social housing, but it is £105 a week. They have been trying to get me out. I have been in and out of work. I had four jobs in one year. I need two bedrooms because I have my children on a weekend.

“I don’t have to pay bedroom tax now [a penalty on

claimants in an “under-occupied” council home] because I am working. But when I am not working I do, and I then have no money to feed the children on a weekend. They did it to satisfy the middle class, who don’t understand.

“This is not a bad place to live. I just wish people would stop driving past thinking we are all scum. I know lots of people in there that help people out. The working class club together more. They look after each other.”

David, who lives in Evans Towers, described the dangers of living in the block:

“If you go on every single landing and look at the fire doors they have all got gaps under them. The fire brigade was parked up the other day—an open day where you could go and speak to them. I told the fireman about the gaps under the fire doors. He told me they should be flush or have rubber sills. The fire door is there to prevent fumes getting out. He asked me if I had reported it. I told him I had, but had been no response yet.

“The wind that comes through the windows blows them open a good inch in winter, when there are high winds. It can take two people to even close the window and if you call them out and it is deemed to be not an emergency they charge you £80.

“The fire engines can only get to the seventh floor. I am at the twelfth floor. And when I get a shower you are lucky if you get a trickle out sometimes.

“We pay for a concierge and for each flat that’s £10.80 a week. The concierge is based in Ravenscliffe (4 miles away). It’s a complete waste of money. If you ring up he says, ‘There is nothing I can do. I am not allowed to leave the office. All I can suggest is that you or I ring the police.’ Part of that £10.80 each flat pays goes to the retirement scheme for Incommunities directors. So because a lot of people are unemployed the taxpayer is paying this. They have flats all over Bradford and elsewhere, all contributing.

“Just think if you are a full-time worker in Bradford paying tax and you knew that part of that money was going to pay Geraldine Howley, chief group executive for Incommunities retirement scheme!”

Some of the smaller blocks near the towers are being demolished. “These are all getting knocked down by Incommunities,” David said. “On the land here they are rebuilding a small estate—multi-bedroomed occupancies

with three, four, five, six bedrooms—owned by Incommunities. They know it is going to get funded by the government, because who around here can afford a six-bedroom house?

“People living here are all being moved out. The ones that are still living here are mortgage holders—about two in each block. The people that moved out got paid about £6,000 each and a free move. They kept it at £6,000 because, above that, you have to declare it and you could lose benefits. The taxpayer will be basically paying the rent.

“A few months ago gale force winds blew a lot of the cladding off that was damaged. They have had to replace the cladding, but since the Grenfell fire there has not been a person [living] there and that had been put up has been taken off!”

Socialist Equality Party campaigners spoke to these and many other workers about attending the July 30 public meeting, Grenfell Fire—Social Murder: A crime against the working class. Expressing her support for this appraisal, Jane, a shop worker, said, “We should be protesting outside the town hall as we are all affected by what has happened at Grenfell. It’s us and them and things have to change.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact