Residents confront head of government inquiry into Grenfell Fire

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Survivors and local residents denounced Sir Martin Moore-Bick, chair of the Tory government-commissioned inquiry into the Grenfell Tower fire, at a meeting in London Tuesday evening.

The second of a series of phony "consultation" meetings was presented as vital in drawing up the Terms of Reference that will be agreed between Moore-Bick and the government. It followed the pattern established by the first meeting held earlier this month.

Such consultations are an attempt to bestow much needed legitimacy on the inquiry, which has no legal powers to prosecute anybody or hold anyone to account.

Before the meeting started, residents speaking to *World Socialist Web Site* reporters denounced the government and the local authority.

Winston said, "People have lost their children. People have lost their homes, lost their wives. Elderly people have been put into homes that are fit for pigs, not for elderly people. All this has happened and its wasn't their fault. It had nothing to do with them. They were all burnt. Who is there to speak for us?"

Speaking about parliament's summer recess, Winston said of MPs, "They've all gone on holidays, most of them. The death of these people meant so much that they couldn't forget their holiday and stay here and support the people who need to be supported. The Muslim society, the black society, the white society, they all died together. We all feel the pain together."

Asked if he thought it was a crime of capitalism, Winston said, "Of course, it is a crime of capitalism. This is not a normal crime. If I went into a shop and walked out without paying, I'm going to get arrested."

In the meeting, angry participants repeatedly told Moore-Bick to stand down and "resign", and said his inquiry would not bring justice for the many killed in the fire, or the survivors.

Several residents insisted what took place in the tower was corporate murder and asked with incredulity why some six weeks after the fire not a single person had been arrested.

The meeting confirmed that the inquiry will produce only a rotten whitewash. Moore-Bick, in response to demands that the guilty be arrested and held accountable for the crimes that led to the incineration of the Grenfell victims, replied, "An inquiry is designed to find out what happened. I have no power to do anything in relation to criminal responsibility."

Residents raised their fears that those in political and corporate circles responsible for social murder at Grenfell were continuing their criminal activity. One resident said, "We've all heard that evidence is being shredded."

One audience member told Moore-Bick that after the inquiry into the 2009 Lakanal House residential tower block fire in Camberwell, south east London, in which six people died, it was recommended that sprinkler systems be retrospectively fitted. Nothing was done, explained the resident. In response, Moore-Bick replied, "What happens as a result of my report is not in my hands, I'm afraid."

Even after its terms of reference are set, Moore-Bick's inquiry will not start to gather evidence until September. He refused to set a date for when the inquiry would complete its work, stating, "I can't tell you how long [the inquiry] will take, but we will work as quickly as possible."

Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May chose Moore-Bick, as a tried and trusted representative of the capitalist state, to head the inquiry. Referring to the 2014 ruling the retired judge made that sanctioned Westminster Council's decision to relocate a resident

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50 miles away in Milton Keynes—part of the ongoing social cleansing of London of its working class population—a resident said, “This is why there’s a distrust in the community, because we look at your public record.”

“Your very presence is an affront to this community,” the resident added.

Another said the survivors of the fire “are suffering now. Most of them are homeless and are just living on little handouts. I don’t think you’re going to do us any justice. I’ve just watched you here. We need someone who is real and is going to investigate this properly. My heart goes out to everyone who has passed and I won’t stop until there’s real justice.”

He added, “We need some real lawyers to get involved to take it up to corporate manslaughter.” Someone interjected “Murder!”

He concluded, “We need justice and we need it fast. Six weeks people have had to wait for this and you are only just looking into this now? What are you taking people for?”

A resident spoke of the hostility of the Tory-led Kensington and Chelsea council who banned survivors and residents from entering the first council meeting after the fire. He said, “When people were trying to get into the council, a Tory official was mouthing the words, ‘Don’t let them in’. It’s like a horror film. The people were coming from a horror and were greeted by the horror of rejection. Don’t let them in! That has become a metaphor for our society. Keep them out, don’t let them in, don’t listen to them, don’t hear their voices, shut them up. But this community will not be shut up.

“And if the community was listened to, this could have been avoided. And if it could have been avoided and if the people were ignored, criminal charges need to be brought and people need to be accountable.”

A teacher who lives in social housing in Camden said that her friend, Hanan, lived on the 9th floor of Grenfell and “luckily managed to get out but lost her brother’s family on the 21st floor.”

Hanan had asked her to raise questions at the meeting including, “What safety checks were completed and where is the documentation?”

“When [Hanan] came down the stairs there were no signs on which way to get out. Luckily, she chose the right way out. Why in buildings like these are there no fire drills? Also, she wanted to make the point that a few years before the [2016] regeneration [in which flammable cladding was put onto the exterior of Grenfell] there was a fire on her floor, which was contained.”

The teacher lived near the four tower blocks that had recently been evacuated because they had the same flammable cladding on as Grenfell, but “also had all sorts of gas pipes in all sorts of places, all sorts of fire doors that weren’t right.”

She concluded, “I just want to say people have raised really important issues here and this isn’t just an issue for Grenfell as there are people living all over the country in tower blocks. There must be people every night terrified to go to sleep living in these tower blocks.” Concluding to applause, she said, “What I have to say about this inquiry, no disrespect to you, I’m sure you’re all well-meaning people, but this inquiry is being called by the Tory government, the same system that created this situation. If we want justice, we have to have our own inquiry, a workers’ inquiry.”

Moore-Bick left the hall surrounded by angry residents.

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