

Grenfell Tower survivor: “We pray that whoever has done this will get punished”

Our reporters
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A Socialist Equality Party team has been campaigning in Ladbroke Grove, ahead of the public meeting, Grenfell Fire—Social Murder: A crime against the working class.

Munira is a survivor of the fire, who escaped from Grenfell Tower with her husband and children. She lived there for nine years, while her husband and their three children were all born there. Describing how she escaped, Munira was critical of the emergency services’ advice for residents to stay in the burning tower:

“It was around 12:30 a.m. when we left,” she said. “We have lost a lot of people. They were told, ‘Stay, we are coming to help.’ I called my friend at nearly quarter to three [more than two hours after the fire started] and I told her to calm down. Some people were told by the fire brigade they were going to bring a mask. If you are going to rescue people why don’t you carry a mask with you? By telling them to go down and come back up again, how many lives are gone?”

Asked who she held responsible for the fire and loss of life, she said: “The main people are Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) Council. We were against all this [putting flammable cladding on the towers exterior]. We had meetings and signed petitions. We said no, but they didn’t listen. They just went ahead and did it. We are signing a petition calling for all the cabinet to resign. They should be punished; they shouldn’t do this to anybody else.

“We said we were not happy about the cladding. What is it for, to look good? They built a new school [with similar cladding]; they wanted to match with it.”

Residents faced major problems with the lifts that “used to break down every day. My friend lived on the 23rd floor with two kids. She had to walk up and down every two or three days. She had to do that with the

buggy and a baby. I would call the school and say I can’t come in because the lift has broken down. They kept doing that for the past two years when they were doing the refurbishment.”

Munira lost many friends in the inferno: “I know about 15 families—husbands, wives, grandparents, children, aunties, about 30 people. A friend’s dad died in the lift, but the coroner said he threw himself out of the window. It was on the 18th floor. There was a family of five, but they have only found one body. Where are the rest of the bodies?”

“We pray that whoever has done this will get punished. We know they did it intentionally to get rid of us. I am saying this because since I got married, not one single day have we called the council for benefits or anything. My husband works day and night to provide for us. The only thing we get is for my father, but he worked in this country for years.”

Regarding the council allowing gas pipes to be put in the stair wells, Munira said, “We said, ‘no.’ Some people had the boiler put right in front of the entrance [to a flat]. So if you had furniture ... they put in hot and cold water pipes, they had to box them in. ... The guy came to ask permission to put the pipes in. I asked why couldn’t they be replaced where they were and they said it was ‘too expensive.’ So again it is all about saving money.

“My father-in-law has dementia and they would come and make him sign. That’s what Rydon, the contractors, did. They made him sign papers saying he was happy with their work, even though he wasn’t happy.

“People I know were independent, they worked like any other people. They pay taxes in this country like anyone else, so I don’t know why they classed us like this. They [the government and council] are the real

cheaters.”

Munira has no faith in the public inquiry: “The public inquiry is part of them, but we will stand together. We will fight them.”

She thanked the Socialist Equality Party for its fight to establish the truth about the fire and its demand that those responsible be brought to justice: “The support is making us stronger, and we are grateful people have come out to support us. They [the government and local council] didn’t expect society, the community would come out to support us.”

Juliette, a retired catering manager, said, “I am from Queens Park. It’s about 10-minutes walk from here, along the Harrow Rd. I think people were totally ignored because they are poor. Nobody cares about what they say. So to me, this is social cleansing. Even after the fire happened, nobody came to help—someone to give you food and water, anything. But nothing happened.

“After today, the money that people have raised online has been handed over to the Red Cross. Why would you give the Red Cross money when you know the Red Cross gives money to their executives? It doesn’t go to the people that it is intended for. Why is the money being given to them?

“Where are the survivors, how many people died? When are we going to be shown the pictures of the people who survived in the newspapers?

“They knew the cladding was flammable, but they wanted to cut costs to the tune of £10 million. It doesn’t make sense. They could have built a new building instead of revamping the one they had already.”

On the public inquiry being led by ex-judge Sir Martin Moore-Bick, she said: “I don’t understand why they have appointed rich people to lead the panel to deal with people they don’t really understand. Their social status is different. The woman they appointed [as council leader, Elizabeth Campbell] has no clue about living in the tower building, what is entailed in everyday life.”

Asked what she thought about the fact that the police were pursuing corporate manslaughter charges, Juliette said: “This was murder. They knew it was flammable, but they wanted to use the cheapest option they had. You can’t gamble with people’s lives. You can’t do that.”

On why no one had yet been arrested by the police,

Juliette said, “I think the people involved are also those that run the companies that made these products, so how can they be arrested? And they are selling to the same companies. They are all interlinked. So what are they investigating? Who is going to arrest them? They are all in each other’s pocket.

“I was on the bus to Edgware and you can see this tower building with same type of cladding being put on. Why are they still using it? Are they going to bring down 100 buildings in London? It’s really sad. Our children are going to grow up knowing that with their social status, they don’t really count in this day and age.”

On social cleansing in the area where she lives, Juliette said: “I understand there is a gym, a council gym, that has been sold. We signed a petition to stop that happening. I think more than 100,000 signed it. But it doesn’t matter what you say or what you vote for, they don’t listen.”



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