

Grenfell fire: “They don’t give a damn because for them life is just cheap”

Our reporters
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World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke to residents in Ladbroke Grove about the Grenfell fire.

Tina lived in the Grenfell Tower on the fourth floor. Tina and her brother managed to escape from the fire. She said, “I had three very good friends in the tower and they haven’t recovered their bodies yet. I wouldn’t like to say how many people died, but it’s definitely more than the 80 that the police are saying.

“We’ve been put in a hotel. We’ve had to change rooms three times. We’ve had no Internet and no reception on our phones. We have been sent a ‘Key Worker,’ if that is what you want to call it. They are just social workers who are trying to do an extra job.

“Basically, we are still waiting to be rehoused. We were offered a place in St. John’s Wood, but we don’t know St. John’s Wood. We don’t want to be there as it’s too far. We were born and bred here all our lives. Our parents and grandparents are from here. And then we were offered a place up in Westbourne Park, which is in Westminster and it’s an estate with a bad reputation.

“We were on the floor where the fire started, the fourth floor. We are not sure if our flat was fully destroyed. There is a team going in to some flats recovering what they can. But they said that every flat has definitely been smoked damaged.

“We all want to know where the donations [raised by the public for the survivors] are. It is between 14 million and 19 million pounds. From what I can gather there is only 14 percent of the money that has reached survivors. I also know of only four funerals that have taken place so far.”

Regarding the lack of any safety systems in Grenfell, Tina said, “It was the only tower block I have ever seen that has a stairwell inside the building. The stairs were not outside the building like on other blocks. These

stairs were in the middle of the building. There were no windows in it.

“After the refurbishment [in 2016 in which flammable cladding was attached to its exterior which was critical in allowing the fire to spread rapidly] it did look nicer. But if it was going to cost people’s lives it’s not worth it. No one wanted the cladding anyway. No one wanted the new school there [that was built on the former Grenfell Tower car park and fire assembly point]. The firemen could not get access during the fire. Before it was a major car park and sports field. No one wanted the school there in the way. Everyone opposed it because you can’t get near the tower. This was a no-win situation for the people that lived there.”

Bonita is a telephone engineer. She said, “I believe there are over 100 dead. And the way they said the fire started, I don’t believe it. What we have been hearing is that a fridge exploded. How does a fridge explode? I am an engineer and when I first saw the flames they were blue. Blue flames are from gas not electric.

“For an extra £5,000 they could have secured that building. There were no smoke alarms, there were no sprinklers. This happened because it was a case of ‘Let’s get rid of you and we can build big houses for the rich’. They don’t give a damn because for them life is just cheap and that’s what angers me. For the sake of £5,000 they killed all these people.

“Somebody has got to be held accountable, somebody should be charged with manslaughter.”

Bonita was skeptical that anyone would ever be brought to justice by the authorities. “Let’s put it this way. We are looking a good 30 years before we find out anything. People are not going to wait that long, but it doesn’t mean it’s going to happen any sooner.”

“I live in the South Acton estate. I have been coordinating drop-offs and where you can take stuff

[for the survivors of the Grenfell fire]. I work with Acton Homeless Concern and we have been delivering stuff as well.

“I live in a council flat. They are knocking down all council properties in London and rebuilding because the council no longer wants tenants. They want you to move to housing associations, where the rent is higher. It’s like saying ‘Get out of London, we don’t want you here’. I am going nowhere. I have worked in London for the last 43 years, I am not going anywhere. My children are here, my grandchildren are here.

“I have been working since I was 16. I am a telephone engineer. I have seen [house] prices go up and facilities go down. People are not getting the kind of care they need. You used to be able to ring the council and say ‘The lights in the block are not working’ and within two or three hours someone would be there to deal with it. Now you will be lucky if they come in seven days.

“When the news came on, I thought ‘Hang on, this is England, this shouldn’t be happening here. This is not a third world country, so why are we doing this?’ I hope people and bodies are held accountable. It is manslaughter.

“People have got to be held accountable for this. In places like this, on this estate, you have a lot of people with friends and families staying over. Who knows how many people were staying over? One of the messages they put out in the early days was ‘Even if you weren’t supposed to be there, but you were, come and let us know, we are not going to do anything about it.’ Well not right now, but two days later they will get after you and send you back to your country.”

Bonita volunteers at a foodbank in Acton. “It’s a small foodbank but there are quite a few in the area. There is one in Southwark, one in Ealing, one in Chiswick, one in Hammersmith. You get a lot of people using it on a Friday. They are so desperate and these are working class people and for whatever reason their benefits have been stopped. Why would you want to cut someone’s benefits? I often look at them and think, ‘I could be on your side of the table’.

“The government now want you to work until you are 66. When I get to 65 they’ll probably change it to 70. This is so the government doesn’t have to pay anything. I’ve got grandchildren and I often think what is going to happen to them?”

Bonita said she would blow up a Socialist Equality Party leaflet to poster size and put it up in housing blocks on her estate. “I can’t believe that people died for the sake of money. They have just found another six blocks in Peckham that’s got the same cladding. They used it here because it was cheap, because it was working class people living there. They just thought, ‘You’re only working class people. You don’t matter.’ I get so angry when I think about it. You guys are doing a great job.”

Public Meeting Grenfell Fire—Social Murder: A crime against the working class London

Saturday August 19, 2:30 p.m.

Harrow Club

187 Freston Rd

W10 6TH (*nearest Tube: Latimer Road*)

Facebook event.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)