

Socialist Equality Party holds public meeting on Grenfell fire in London

Our reporter
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The Socialist Equality Party held a public meeting Saturday on the June 14 Grenfell Tower fire, titled, “Social Murder: A crime against the working class.”

Around 100 people attended at the Harrow Club, off Bramley Road, located in the shadow of the burnt-out tower, including a number of survivors, local residents and workers and youth from other parts of the capital and elsewhere.

Chairing the meeting, WSWs writer Robert Stevens explained that the SEP was “very aware that we are dealing with very emotional and sensitive issues today. People here and many others have lost loved ones and even saw them perish in a terrible fire.

“But it is our duty to discuss these questions—not in the manner of the cheap sensationalism of much of the media. We want to present the case for the prosecution of all those responsible for this appalling crime.”

To ensure that all felt free to speak, the SEP had denied a request from *Sky News* to film proceedings and told police officers who inquired that they were not welcome.

An attentive audience heard two reports.

The first, given by International Youth and Students for Social Equality member Thomas Scripps, was on the events leading up to and surrounding the tragedy.

The second, given by National Secretary Chris Marsden, was on the political implications of the fire and the perspective advanced by the Socialist Equality Party.

Scripps said, “The Grenfell Tower fire has impacted on every aspect of British life. So much so that it is possible to say that politics in this country can be divided into before and after Grenfell.”

It was the product of decisions taken “which all those involved knew were potentially life threatening, but which were carried out anyway because there was

money to be made.”

Scripps demonstrated how the fire started in a floor flat before escalating out of control due to the entire tower being encased in flammable cladding, showing a widely viewed *World Socialist Web Site* video.

Grenfell Tower became a death trap as the result of the social cleansing policies imposed by Conservative-run Kensington and Chelsea Borough Council and its arms-length company that managed the block—the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation.

Scripps noted that “Kensington and Chelsea Council was so keen to destroy social housing and to give Grenfell a cosmetic facelift because it stands to make millions by doing so.

“It is Britain’s richest borough, with the highest house prices in London—an average of £1.37 million last year—and is the site of one of the most expensive streets in the country, Victoria Road, average house price £8 million.”

“Grenfell has taken on the dimensions of a national disaster,” he explained, with hundreds of council-run tower blocks “similarly clad, including the Chalcots Estate in Swiss Cottage.”

“In addition, there are reports of fires involving cladding in the Middle East, Australia and elsewhere—pointing to the international dimensions of Grenfell. Indeed Grenfell was anticipated by blazes involving cladding in at least 20 major high rises all over the world.”

Expanding on this theme, Marsden said that Grenfell, “points to a common experience of the working class all over the world. In country after country, the super-rich get ever richer, while working people suffer an ever-steeper decline in their living conditions.”

He noted that just in the last few months the drive by

the capitalist class for increased profits had led to tragedies that have taken the lives of hundreds of people in countries including Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India and Sierra Leone and described these terrible events.

Marsden continued, “Finally, in the richest country in the world, our American comrades have campaigned for years to expose how in Flint, Michigan, Rick Snyder, a multimillionaire Republican governor, and his Democratic state treasurer, Andy Dillon, switched the city’s water supply to untreated water from the polluted Flint River,” with devastating consequences.

Marsden played a *World Socialist Web Site* video on Flint which has been viewed nearly a million times on Facebook.

The term social murder, Marsden explained, was first coined by the co-founder of scientific socialism, Frederick Engels, in his book, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, as long ago as 1845—at the very beginnings of industrial capitalism: “Yet no one today could describe Grenfell in better terms.”

Marsden declared, “The SEP urges all survivors, local-residents and workers everywhere to place no confidence in May’s rotten whitewash of an inquiry, or in Labour’s attempt to make it more palatable. They must rely on themselves alone, on their social power.

“Workers must demand that all those guilty of social murder at Grenfell in both political and business circles are arrested, charged and put on trial.”

But for this to happen means building the SEP as the political leadership necessary to make it happen.

Following the reports there was a lively discussion period lasting around two hours. The meeting heard moving contributions from survivors of the fire, including Nick Burton, who managed to escape with his wife, Pily, from the 19th floor, at 3:40 a.m.—thanks to the heroic action of firefighters. Sid-Ali Atmani, who managed to escape from the 15th floor, also spoke on his traumatic experience and his efforts to expose the official whitewash inquiry into the fire. Ali relayed the ongoing contempt with which survivors are being treated by the council and the powers-that-be.

The audience responded during and at the end of contributions with warm applause.

Jerry White, a leading member of the Socialist Equality Party in the United States, spoke during the discussion. What happened at Grenfell was a “crime” in which “lives were sacrificed due to financial and

political decisions that benefited a tiny minority at the top.”

White explained how in Flint, thousands of working class residents of the US industrial Midwest city had their water supply poisoned. As with Grenfell, this was due to political and commercial decisions made—in the US by Republican and Democratic Party politicians in alliance with big business—motivated by the drive to cut costs and increase profit. This has already resulted in the deaths of at least 12 people.

Marsden explained in his summation that the government, local council and Metropolitan Police were involved in a “massive cover-up” over Grenfell. He said, “Grenfell has shown one thing and that is the enormous ingenuity, dedication and seriousness of the working class.” To applause he said, “This was a crisis in which people were failed by the official system and everything that happened here happened because of the actions of local residents.”

The “issue we are confronting here is the crisis of political leadership. It is not because workers won’t fight, it’s because there is not a political tendency outside of this one that is prepared for a political struggle against the system.”

Marsden explained that the SEP will be holding a regular forum in the area at which residents can come together and discuss a way forward. The SEP would work to expose the government’s fraudulent inquiry into Grenfell: “We will counter their propaganda with the truth.”

Following the meeting, a collection of £380 was made in support of the Socialist Equality Party’s £100,000 Development Fund. Large numbers of audience members stayed on to discuss with SEP members and *World Socialist Web Site* reporters. Over the next days, the WSWs will publish coverage of the meeting including interviews with those in attendance.



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