

# Remarks by Jerry White of the SEP (US) at Grenfell Tower fire public meeting in London

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*Jerry White, a leading member of the Socialist Equality Party in the United States, brought greetings to the August 19 public meeting of the Socialist Equality Party (UK) in London on the Grenfell Tower fire. Published below are White's remarks, which found a strong response.*

I'm from the Socialist Equality Party in the United States, the sister party of the SEP in the UK. I want first of all to bring my sympathy—and, above all, solidarity to the survivors of Grenfell and the entire British working class.

When we saw this in the United States, images of the burning tower, we discussed the issue and workers in Flint, Michigan and in other parts of the US immediately recognised the same process. This was a crime. The lives of workers and their families were sacrificed as a result of financial and political decisions which benefited the tiny minority at the top.

Whether you're in the US or Pakistan, or whether you're in Grenfell Tower, the capitalist system subordinates every aspect of life, including life itself, to private profit.

This is a unique gathering. This meeting is about discussing strategy for the working class. Our energy and our determination must not be diverted into some bogus inquiry or an appeal to Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party. We must base ourselves on an understanding of the lessons of history and a class analysis.

As the reports made absolutely clear, Grenfell isn't the product of something that just happened yesterday. It was decades in the making. And it was carried out by Tories and Labourites in Britain.

If I can just for a moment review the situation in Flint that comrade Chris Marsden referred to. In April 2014, the city's emergency manager switched Flint's water supply from the Detroit system—which had supplied the

city for half a century—to the polluted Flint River. This was part of scheme to build a new pipeline that would be a source of profit for financial speculators and private contractors. The decision was made to allow the river water to go into Flint even though the city did not have the capacity to treat the polluted water.

As the water flowed through the old lead pipes, toxins were leached into the water that ran into people's homes. For more than a year the working class residents complained about the poisoned water. They showed bottles of brown water, they showed their children's rashes. But their complaints and protests were ignored by officials who said nothing was wrong.

Flint residents appealed to and won the support of scientists and medical professionals who proved the lead levels in the water and in the bloodstreams of the city's children were a dire threat to public health. They were still ignored.

Then finally, after twelve people died from Legionnaire's Disease, the crisis in Flint became national and international news. All of a sudden everybody feigned sympathy for the people of Flint. Everybody flooded in! The national news media, celebrities like Michael Moore and President Barack Obama, Bernie Sanders, Hillary Clinton. They all said: "We're gonna take care of you. We're gonna do whatever it takes."

And you know what, three years later—nothing has been resolved. Children continue to be poisoned. The lead pipes remain. They are even threatening to evict workers if they don't pay for the poisoned water. Workers have been made ill and have lost their life savings while the speculators and financial criminals have not only gotten away scot-free, but have been paid off in full.

All of those who tried to patronise the workers, telling them "We've heard your voices," represent a

different class. Just like Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn in the UK.

That is why the discussion here on the character of the Labour Party and the character of the trade unions is so important. A strategy for the working class must be based on the clearest understanding of the class forces arrayed against us. The most effective use of our energy and determination is to mobilise our class, independently of the ruling class and its political representatives, not to expend our energy in fruitless appeals to the powers that be.

These are the issues that confront the working class everywhere. Do any of you have any question about the fact that the ruling elites have universities and think tanks that work out their strategy against us? Why shouldn't we use science and historical knowledge to work out a strategy for our class?



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