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Attendees at SEP public meeting discuss Grenfell Tower fire

Our reporters
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Attendees at the Socialist Equality Party August 19 public meeting in London on the Grenfell Tower fire spoke to reporters.

Rabia said, “I came here because one of the survivors who spoke earlier is married to my cousin. She’s been struggling to find a place and is still in a hotel. They have a little child as well. And with them all—her cousin, her cousin’s husband and their child--being in one room, it’s very frustrating.”

Asked what she thought about the reports presented at the meeting she said, “This thing is happening world-wide, not just in London. For example in Sri Lanka, where that rubbish dump collapsed on all those people.

“In other countries, it seems that some areas are only for the poor so the governments think that they can do whatever they like there. In Kensington and Chelsea though, social inequality is visible because the rich and the poor live together. Here you have Holland Park [a wealthy neighbourhood in Kensington and Chelsea] and then you turn around the corner and you see a council flat. Here you can see the actual slums, and then you walk just a bit further and you see the houses of those people who are really upper class. But that makes it worse. Yes, Kensington and Chelsea is a rich borough, but the working class are also living here as well as the rich.

“In this area we’re getting the rich from places like Dubai coming in and buying up the properties, but also the land. It’s just money for the government. So who cares about the working class people? They just want to push them out and make this area the next Switzerland, where only bankers can afford to live. They’re doing it

in a very cruel way.”

Rabia was asked about the government’s public inquiry in Grenfell and the fact that the Labour Party are supporting it. She replied, “Of course they are. At the end of the day, he [Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn] wants to be the next prime minister. Somewhere down the line, he wants to live in a nice comfortable house. I feel like maybe he does want to help the people, but he needs to follow what the people want.

“It’s like Barack Obama. Lots of people in the US and the UK supported him thinking that maybe he did want to help people. But these people are just puppets, and there are other people behind them moving them by strings. People want to blame Theresa May for what happened at Grenfell, but she’s just a puppet saying what the people behind the scenes want her to say.”

Nina is a photography student at Lady Margaret School in Fulham. Asked what she thought of the SEP’s description of Grenfell as social murder, she said, “Yes I completely agree with the idea that there is blood on people’s hands and that those responsible should be brought to justice. This wouldn’t happen to rich people. In the system we live in, no one cares about the working class.

“My grandma lives in Dagenham and Barking in a working-class area where there is a large immigrant population. It’s where lots of South Asian immigrants were pushed to in the 1960s. But now I’ve noticed lots of little trendy places popping up all over, where my favourite restaurants used to be. I don’t agree with it.”

Nina said that whether the Tories or Labour were in power, social cleansing would continue. “I think it is

the fault of capitalism ultimately. No matter who's in government, we're still living in a capitalist society, so it's not really going to get any better."

Asked what she thought of the reports, she said, "It's not just something that happens in Britain, it's all over the world. Poor people are treated badly everywhere.

"I knew about cuts to the fire service, but I didn't know the extent to which it directly affected what happened on the night of the Grenfell Tower fire. That really hit home."

Michelle spoke in the discussion period of the meeting and told the audience she is fighting against a £2 billion mass social cleansing operation being carried out by Labour-run Haringey council.

She told reporters, "We need to focus on Grenfell, the fact that it is corporate murder and think about the survivors. This is extending across Britain and across the world. Why has this been allowed? Why isn't there any redress for the victims and the community? The community is having to do it all. Why is there this struggle for anything to reach the survivors? Why are they being treated in this way?"

Anthony said he lost a good friend in the fire, Raymond Bernard, who lived on the 21st floor of the tower and whose body has still not been recovered.

"We want to have a funeral for him but there's no body, there's nothing to bury. But we want to have that closure."

Asked what he thought of the Metropolitan Police's fatality toll of 80, he replied, "It's rubbish. It is a lot more than that. I know a fireman and he said there's a lot more people, but it'll take time to find people.

"Everybody above the 11th or 12th floor got no water [from the fire brigades hoses]. The water pressure wasn't high enough. They said they had that place under control, but they didn't because it burnt for 48 hours. The only reason why that fire went out was because it burnt itself out. It had nothing else to burn. By the time they got there with their hoses to douse it, all that happened was they washed away everybody's remains. They washed away everything. All the evidence that they needed has been washed away.

"I'm glad there is an archive of all the concerns that residents have raised. If they didn't have that archive, we wouldn't be here where we are today. They would have brought in construction already and that building would have been knocked down. And they would have

built on it, which they wanted to do anyway.

"This is not Hillsborough [the football stadium in Sheffield in which 96 people were crushed to death in April 1989 as a result of the actions of the police and authorities.] We are not going to wait for 15 or 20 years for anybody to be charged. Before that happens all hell will break loose. This is murder as far as I'm concerned. In the worst degree. We're not giving up.

"As we grew up, our instinct was that the enemy was the system and the police. That's what we were fighting against. Together we stand, divided we fall."

Jane, a WSWs reader, said, "The presentations were excellent. It was good to see the reaction of the community. Some people are reading the WSWs. You can see the anger. They know they need to organise. They know they are being led astray by all the official meetings. They are very suspicious. They have come to hear the SEP. So now the task is to convince them."



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