

London residents speak on Grenfell Tower fire

Our reporters
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On Saturday, a Socialist Equality Party team spoke to residents in Ladbroke Grove, west London, about the Grenfell Tower fire and its aftermath.

Samarah, who went to the tower shortly after the fire started, hoping to help in the rescue effort, said, “You could see people bit-by-bit burning. You see one window is full of smoke, and after the fire comes you expect people to come out.”

Samarah explained how frustrated he became with the apparent confusion among firefighters in attendance, saying, “When you see the fire brigade, the experts, you think they are going to save them. But they didn’t know what to do, so you want to take action yourself.”

Finding that the police were holding back people who had wanted to help, Samarah explained, “I thought ‘What’s going on?...people are burning here. Then I thought, is this a movie or is it real? Is this really happening? You didn’t really see any sympathy [from the police]. They were just standing there like there are criminals behind them and they’re pushing you. Come on, people are burning, kids are burning, we need to do something.’”

Samarah described how, at around 2:30 a.m., he was approached by a woman and asked to phone her pregnant daughter who was in one of the flats with a young child and had been advised to stay put. He said he later learnt they had left their flat and, although admitted to hospital, were alive. Samarah said, “She’s lucky but a lot of people were stuck there...there were helicopters and a lot of people thought that the helicopter is coming to pick them up, so they were running upstairs. Unfortunately, the helicopter was only there for the media [coverage], which breaks my heart, when I see little kids waiting for the helicopter.”

Samarah explained that he had attended a meeting two weeks ago held by the police officer in charge of

the investigation. He said the police refused requests from those attending the meeting to give the name of the person responsible for signing up for the external cladding on the tower. It was this that helped turn it into a death trap and was a central factor in the rapid spread of a small kitchen fire in one apartment.

Samarah continued, “Obviously there is a cover-up. As long as the rich people, special interests and the establishment are ruling, then there will always be a cover-up. Money is playing a big role. What I’m trying to explain is, the fight [for the truth] is not easy. The more the rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer, and it’s not healthy. The system is going to collapse. So they might start a war, a third world war.”

Contrasting the response to the fire and its aftermath by the working class, who did everything to help survivors, to that of the politicians, who did nothing, Samarah said, “That is something we should learn from ... It makes me proud and it gives me hope. People are very conscious, people’s hearts are good. It was shocking when [Prime Minister] Theresa May came and shook hands with the police and the fire brigade while refusing to meet the families of the victims.”

Questioning the Metropolitan Police’s official estimate of the number of deaths of around 80, Samarah declared, “By my estimation around 300 people are dead...those bodies are still there, they can’t even recognise them. It’s a crime. They were innocent people. This Grenfell Tower is symbolic. There were people of all types of religion and nationalities ... burning together. That is a great symbol ...greedy people don’t give a shit. They don’t care as long as they stay in power.

“Grenfell is a symbol of inequality, of the gap between rich and poor. They only polished the exterior of the building, not the inside. We need to learn from

that ... to stand for the truth. Those who are accountable need to face justice. Transparency and accountability are very important. They have to face justice for the sake of everybody's trust. I think consciousness is growing", Samarah concluded.

Jane, who lives near the tower, explained, "I could see it burning from my bedroom window. I have been emotionally affected by it. I was in absolute shock. It was 4 o'clock in the morning, and I was due to start my first day at work in a new job. I felt devastated, absolutely devastated. If the people in charge had heeded all the complaints by the tenants over a number of years, this would never have happened. So people should be held accountable."

She spoke of the deteriorating social conditions in London: "Some of these estates are like a third world country. People are starving ... the system has to change. It's every area of life, whether it's health, education, the infrastructure, transport. Every area of life is blighted by privatisation, marketisation and financialisation—everything and everybody."

Asked who she thought was responsible for this situation, Jane answered unequivocally: "All politicians. This Tory government is quite extreme, but the last Labour government, which was full of Blairites,...did a lot of damage to the National Health Service. They continued the neo-liberal agenda that has been going on for 30 years under all politicians in this country."

Jane agreed that behind the politicians, the banks and major corporations were dictating policies, declaring, "Absolutely ... the politicians and the corporations go hand in hand, money going round and round in the atmosphere somewhere, not touching anybody's life in any meaningful way."

Returning to the role of politicians, she added, "They are a bunch of bloody criminals as far as I am concerned. Most of them should be in jail."

Asked to comment on the inquiry into the fire that has been set up under Sir Martin Moore-Bick, she said, "I am very sceptical ... I don't expect much to happen."

When the WSWS reporter pointed out that under the 2005 Inquiries Act, no one would be held criminally responsible or even any compensation paid, she replied: "It is to be expected ... look at the football disaster [at Hillsborough in 1989 in which 96 people were crushed to death due to the actions of police and authorities]...if

it wasn't for ordinary people banging on continuously, nothing ever would have happened ... That's the way we do things in this country, first we have the lies and cover-up and everything, then stringing things out hoping people will forget."

Jane thought a Labour government under current leader Jeremy Corbyn would be a better alternative to the May government. When SEP members explained that the Grenfell Tower fire posed the necessity for a revolutionary struggle against the capitalist system as a whole, she agreed, saying: "There is movement in this country and throughout the Western world ... people are becoming aware that the system is broken and there needs to be a new system. I completely agree with you. People still have to live and put a roof over their heads. I am relying on young people to come to their senses and realise that we need a new system, a new way of governing."



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