

UK: May government finalises Grenfell Tower Inquiry cover-up

Robert Stevens
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The public inquiry into the Grenfell Tower inferno, called by Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May, will begin its deliberations with a preliminary hearing on September 14. Its findings are not due to be published until next Easter, fully 10 months after the fire took place.

The Socialist Equality Party has consistently warned that the inquiry is a fraud—aimed at covering up for those responsible for the economic, social and political decisions that led to at least 80 people perishing terribly.

Even today, the full number of those killed has not been confirmed, such is the contempt of the ruling elite for the working class residents who suffered. Not a single person has been arrested, or even questioned under caution. This is despite it being a matter of public record that the fire was the result of the decision made by Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation and its contractors to use combustible cladding, during the tower block's refurbishment, to save money. Grenfell Tower residents who warned of the dangers of an impending catastrophe were silenced and threatened with legal action.

The fate of those who died in Grenfell was sealed by the implementation of austerity measures that further compromised safety, including the closure of 10 fire stations and the loss of 600 firefighters' jobs by then London Mayor Boris Johnson, all of which left firefighting measures woefully inadequate.

While the inquiry's appointed chairman, Sir Martin-Moore Bick, has been engaged in a fraudulent "consultation" with survivors and local residents, the reality is that most of the survivors remain in temporary accommodation, with inadequate support. Some 20 survivors are estimated to have tried to commit suicide since the fire, as a result of their trauma and the

continued indifference to their suffering.

The inquiry has no intention of achieving real justice for the victims of Grenfell—nor remedying the dangers faced by thousands of other tenants across the country, who live in tower blocks clad in the same inflammable materials.

Its terms are restricted to "the immediate cause or causes of the fire and the means by which it spread to the whole of the building." While it is meant to consider the adequacy of regulations relating to high-rise buildings, and the actions of the local authority and the London fire brigade, no one can expect anything but a whitewash.

The inquiry was called under the 2005 Inquiries Act, which states, "An inquiry panel is not to rule on, and has no power to determine, any person's civil or criminal liability."

Critically, it will not consider broader issues of "social housing policy," i.e., of the social cleansing policies of successive Conservative and Labour governments over the last three decades that played a significant role in the inferno.

Moore-Bick recommended that any issues of a "social, economic and political nature," should be barred from the inquiry, which May was only too happy to accept.

A former judge, Moore-Bick is notorious for ruling in 2014 that Westminster council—the equally wealthy neighbouring borough to Kensington & Chelsea—could rehouse an ill single mother of five more than 50 miles away in Milton Keynes.

Many local residents have rightly denounced the inquiry as a cover-up. But May is only able to proceed with this criminal farce due to the support of Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and the trade unions, including the Fire Brigades Union.

Corbyn endorsed the inquiry from the beginning, with the sole caveat that it be held in two parts. In a letter to May, he wrote, “It is ... a relief that the inquiry is now up and running, and that survivors are one step closer to the answers they so desperately need.”

While calling on May to “immediately set out a clear, independent and thorough process for identifying and addressing the broader failings that led to the Grenfell fire,” Corbyn added, “This process should work closely with Sir Martin Moore-Bick’s inquiry where appropriate...”

The various proponents of identity politics are also supporting the inquiry, as a means of concealing the essential class divide that it laid bare.

A critical role in this is being played by BME (Black Minority Ethnic) Lawyers4Grenfell, an umbrella group that includes, among others, the Association of Muslim Lawyers, the Society of Black Lawyers, Operation Black Vote, NHS BME Network and Society of Asian Lawyers.

In a BMELawyers4Grenfell press release, Peter Herbert, Chair of the Society of Black Lawyers, stated that Moore-Bick “has little or no personal or professional insight into the cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity represented by the Grenfell community.”

A letter addressed to May and Moore-Bick from a law firm representing the family of one of the victims of the fire, Hesham Rahman, states in part, “It is important that there is *trust and confidence in the inquiry* by the bereaved families, survivors and affected local residents, *otherwise this could undermine the inquiry, its findings and any recommendations.*”

It adds, “Given the concerns already expressed ... we are sure that you would wish to avoid any further criticisms [so] we ask that you appoint panel members who have the ability to reflect the diverse multi-faith community who will make up the majority of the core participants for the inquiry.”

Herbert welcomed this letter, stating that it stressed the “*the importance of ensuring trust and confidence in the Inquiry in order to achieve justice*” (emphasis added).

The fraudulent character of the inquiry is not fundamentally the result of the racial or religious make-up of its panel, which can be remedied by greater “diversity.” It is a fraud because it has been convened,

and will be overseen and directed, by the very capitalist state apparatus and its political representatives that are responsible for turning Grenfell Tower into a death trap.

Time and again, official inquiries and inquests—lasting decades in some instances—have been utilised by the British ruling elite to conceal the truth of events that have resulted in massive loss of life, including those after the Aberfan and Hillsborough disasters.

No faith can be placed in the government inquiry or the police investigation. Workers must demand that all those guilty of the social murder at Grenfell are immediately arrested, charged and put on trial.

In the coming weeks and months, the WSWS will dissect the inquiry and expose its lies and evasions. The work of political exposure is an essential part of mobilising workers and youth independently of the political establishment to secure genuine justice for all those affected. This must include full and immediate compensation; permanent, decent rehousing in the borough, and an emergency programme of public works nationally—funded out of the ill-gotten gains of the banks and super-rich—to ensure all social housing meets the needs of working people, not private profit.

The Socialist Equality Party is holding the first in a series of regular meetings on the Grenfell Tower fire on September 30 at the Maxilla Hall Social Club in North Kensington. The first meeting will discuss the issues addressed in this article. Full details are below.

Saturday, September 30, 2 p.m.

Maxilla Hall Social Club

2 Maxilla Walk

London, W10 6NQ (*nearest tube—Latimer Road*)

The author also recommends:

Socialist Equality Party holds public meeting on Grenfell fire in London

[21 August 2017]

Closing remarks by Socialist Equality Party National Secretary Chris Marsden

[26 August 2017]



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