

Survivors and local residents speak out on Grenfell Tower Inquiry opening

Our reporters

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World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke to survivors and local residents in the aftermath of the opening of the government's inquiry into the Grenfell Tower fire.

In his statement opening the inquiry, Chairman Sir Martin Moore-Bick, claiming that he was “impartial,” explained that on this basis he had rejected submissions to appoint a local resident to act as an assessor to the inquiry.

Survivor Sid-Ali Atmani said he was bitterly disappointed: “He seems to be choosing his own people,” Atmani said. He was angered, as were many others present, that after his statement Moore-Bick immediately turned his back on the audience and left the room, refusing to take any questions—including one from the renowned barrister Michael Mansfield who is representing some of the Grenfell families.

“It was bad. We are not going to give up. He should at least have stayed for another 10 minutes to speak to our lawyers,” Atmani said.

Aisha said, “What we have just been through just proves this is a real con-trick that's going on. The judge sat up there looking so superior. Everyone stood up when he came in. I refused. It's all set up to intimidate us and trying to suck us in. I think the Grenfell people have to see through it all.

“The judge said he wouldn't include anyone from the local area to help him, but they are the people who suffered the fire and know what's really going on. Instead, he's appointed a load of people who have been involved in other inquiries which have led nowhere. They are ‘skilled in the art of deception’ as someone once said to me.

“I don't think any of us has any confidence in the inquiry or Moore-Bick. All the promises to help us have gone nowhere. I think they are just playing around with us. He says he won't even get the investigation

going properly until next year.

“They are hoping everyone's anger will have gone away by then. But they don't realise how determined we are. I agree with you that anger and determination is not enough, though. We have to do something more long-lasting. We have to work out a way to stop them dragging this inquiry out for years and end up making another useless report.”

Paul Menacer lived on the third floor of Grenfell Tower and managed to escape the fire. He was critical of Emma Dent Coad, the Labour Member of Parliament for Kensington, who paraded before the press prior to the opening of the inquiry to declare her solidarity with survivors.

Paul said, “I was a supporter of the Labour Party. After the fire I thought [Labour leader] Jeremy Corbyn had done a great thing by coming to see us. He talked to us, not like [Conservative Prime Minister] Theresa May when she came down. But when I sent an email to Jeremy Corbyn he did not reply to me.

“The majority of people in the area realise it is a fight between the rich and the poor. We voted for change in the last election. But there is no change. We have been let down by our local MP [Emma Dent Coad]. I've been going to the support centres and not seen her once. So for her to come down here and pose in front of the cameras is not on. It's just broken promises.

“The inquiry is a waste of time. I feel let down by the scope of the inquiry. The majority of people, like me, are still in hotels. We face a year in temporary accommodation and don't know what will happen in a year's time. Justice is needed for everyone.”

WSWS reporters spoke to Steve at Ladbroke Grove tube station. Steve lived just yards from the Grenfell Tower on the Lancaster West estate and is currently living in a hotel due to the trauma of the fire and the

impact on his physical and mental health. He said of the inquiry, “They should have someone from the tower as a witness. Why don’t they want that now? There were a lot of people complaining about the upgrading of Grenfell Tower [during a refurbishment in which the flammable cladding that resulted in the rapid spread of the fire was installed.] Why can’t we have a witness from Grenfell Tower in the inquiry?”

Gaynor is from West Wales and works in the media. She was in London for a few days and was met at Ladbroke Grove. She said, “I have seen the tower today and it’s absolutely shocking. It’s appalling that a situation like this has happened in the 21st century, in the United Kingdom, in the capital of Britain.

“I was talking to a friend today and I drew parallels with what happened in 1966 in a small coal village called Aberfan, when one of the coal tips slid down and landed on the local school. Over 100 children were killed and that has resonated through the last 50 years. The NCB [National Coal Board] used the money raised by the public to clear the tips. The government refused to finance the clearing of the tip and compensating the victims.

“To think that this kind of situation is still happening in the country 50 years later is appalling. The establishment has lost its moral compass completely and it’s selling out to the rich and just denying working people the right to live and work where they were born. Over the last few years, I have visited London. I used to live here 20 years ago, and what is apparent to me is the amount of building that is going on here. It’s just a blatant method of social cleansing. They’re getting rid of the working class people and people who make this city function.

“People are living in conditions which I came across in Eastern European countries in the 1980s and 1990s and this is the London of the 21st century. This country is going backwards and it’s just becoming a place for the rich.

“Every inquiry the government holds is a cover-up. It doesn’t get to grips with the situation. There’s just a massive cover-up of the vested interests of the establishment and the rich of this country and I’ve had enough of it. It’s horrible.

“It’s not a responsible state any more. They’re leaving us to sort out our own problems and we’ll have to do it ourselves, because they’ve washed their hands.

“In the Aberfan case, the Welsh Secretary George Thomas, who was a Labour Welsh secretary, just covered it up and turned his back on working people, the people he was there to represent. He would not stick up for them and that’s what happens time after time. There’s no progress. With this government, we’re just going backwards. We’re going back to the bloody 1800s.”

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, North Kensington, London. The first meeting will discuss the opening of the Grenfell Tower Fire inquiry and the way forward in opposing the government’s cover-up and establishing the truth about the fire and those responsible.

Meeting details:

Saturday, September 30, 2 p.m.
Maxilla Hall Social Club
2 Maxilla Walk, North Kensington
London, W10 6NQ



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