

Oppose media witch-hunt against “the left” over Grenfell fire

Robert Stevens
18 December 2017

Three right-wing national newspapers have launched a witch-hunt, demanding that any left-wing analysis of the Grenfell Tower fire and critique of the corporate and political figures responsible be outlawed.

The Socialist Equality Party and the Grenfell Fire Forum opposes this scurrilous attack, which was timed to coincide with the six-month anniversary of the tragedy and the opening of proceedings for the government-convened inquiry. Its aim is to conceal the fact that, half a year on, still no one has been questioned about, let alone arrested for the inferno that claimed more than 70 people’s lives.

On December 11, the *Times* published an article by its investigative journalist Dominic Kennedy, “How the far left tried—and failed—to hijack Grenfell.” Kennedy was followed by an article in the *Daily Mail* on December 12, “Far-left activists in bid to hijack Grenfell” and in the *Daily Express*, “The Left must not be allowed to exploit the Grenfell Tower disaster,” by Ross Clark.

Kennedy attacks the Justice4Grenfell campaign group. He highlights the involvement of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) as a “hard-left, Trotskyite group” that have used “events such as the monthly silent marches of the bereaved as publicity opportunities by displaying dozens of protest placards ...”

He writes that its “coordinators have included Moyra Samuels of the Socialist Workers Party, Sue Caro, former senior diversity manager at the BBC, and Ishmahil Blagrove, a documentary maker who has worked for the BBC and Channel 4.”

The smaller Revolutionary Communist Group is described as a “persistent Marxist faction active in west London,” whose supporters have “told the [Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea] council leader

Elizabeth Campbell to her face to resign.”

Nothing the *Times* or any other right-wing newspaper writes can be taken at face value. Apart from one individual quoted by the *Times* who refers directly to the Justice4Grenfell campaign, no one else refers to anyone associated with left-wing politics by name.

It has also emerged that the quotes solicited from a small number of Grenfell survivors were sometimes made three months ago and then taken out of context to misrepresent their views. Bellal El Guenuni, whose pregnant wife and three children managed to escape from the fire from the 18th floor of the tower, is quoted only as saying, “Justice4Grenfell? I have heard a lot that they are doing but I’m not involved with them and the majority of residents are not involved with them.”

This is hardly a damning statement.

The *Times* said that Sid-Ali Atmani, who escaped from the 15th floor of Grenfell, said, “A lot of people are trying to make it political. It’s wrong. Please don’t use our name. When [prime minister] Mrs. [Theresa] May came to the meeting she had a lot of respect from us. We are dignified people.”

In its response, the SWP states that “one of the two told Socialist Worker that he explicitly asked The Times not to be quoted and that what he did say was misrepresented.” It adds, “The Times appears to have since taken his quote down from its website.”

The *Mail* article denounces “far-Left rabble rousers of exploiting the disaster for political gain,” singling out in particular those campaigning “against the privatisation of social housing,” as if this were an illegal activity.

Samuels together with Blagrove—who won much support locally for attacking the corporate controlled media immediately after the fire—are linked together with Tahra Ahmed, with whom they have no

connection and who is quoted making anti-Semitic statements. Others attacked include Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) official Cathy Cross and Kerdesan Gallardo, a disabled woman who lived near to Grenfell and who watched it burn down along with her young children—one of whom had a friend in the tower.

The *Express* framed its contribution directly against Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn. His comment that it was a “disgrace that the majority of Grenfell residents have still not been given homes and that tower blocks across our country have still not been made safe,” is also considered beyond the pale. “As Corbyn well knows the tragedy had nothing to do with greedy capitalists,” writes Clark. “It is ridiculous to make out that the tragedy was the result of Tory ‘austerity.’”

Clark piles on the outrage, asserting that those in Grenfell Tower were in reality the recipients of local authority largesse. The tower had “just undergone an £8.6 million refurbishment, which works out at more than £70,000 for each of the 120 flats. It was a case of misspending money—on flammable cladding—not a lack of spending.” This is how Clark glosses over the fact that flammable cladding was chosen because it was cheaper than fire retardant alternatives, in a cosmetic refurbishment that left Grenfell more dangerous than ever before.

Clark then blames those who remain homeless six months after the fire for their fate—because they want to remain in the locality where many have lived for years, decades or all their lives. Clark complains, “One reason why many former Grenfell residents remain in temporary accommodation is that they have rejected flats offered to them because they have been very specific about the area in which they want to live.”

The *Express* insists that the left must be silenced so that nothing endangers the government’s cover-up inquiry into the Grenfell fire. The “serious work of the inquiry could be crowded out by attempts by the hard-Left to seize on the disaster for their own political ends,” it warns. The “serious work” of the inquiry is to ensure that no one is prosecuted and nothing of substance is revealed. Hence the insistence by its chairman, Sir Martin Moore-Bick, that there will be no reference to issues of a “social, economic and political nature.”

Clark writes that the inquiry will “carry out a forensic

examination of the factors that led to the disaster: the cladding which had been wrapped around the building, the fire procedures and lack of equipment which prevented people being rescued ...” As if all this has nothing to do with the capitalist system and the political and economic decisions taken by the powers-that-be at the expense of working people.

It should be noted that the *Times*, *Mail* and *Express* studiously avoid any mention of the Socialist Equality Party. This is incongruous given the extensive work that the SEP has carried out to expose the roots of this terrible tragedy.

More than 100 articles on Grenfell have been published on the *World Socialist Web Site*, circulated on social media and as leaflets in their thousands in North Kensington. Several videos produced by the SEP on the Grenfell fire have been viewed hundreds of thousands of times.

In August, the SEP held a public meeting attended by more than 100 people under the heading, “Grenfell: Social Murder—A crime against the working class.” From that meeting the SEP established the Grenfell Fire Forum and set-up a Facebook page for the group dedicated to exposing the official cover-up. Its regular meetings are attended by residents in north Kensington and from other London boroughs.

The SEP calls on all WSWs readers and supporters of the Grenfell Fire Forum to reject and denounce the right-wing media witch-hunt against “the left” and in defence of the Conservative government and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea—the guilty parties whose decisions led to the Grenfell fire.

Please like and share the Grenfell Fire Forum page:
facebook.com/GrenfellForum



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