

Fraud of official inquiry into Grenfell fire exposed by forced withdrawal of project management adviser

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KPMG, one of the world's biggest business restructuring and advisory firms, was forced to step down this week as project management adviser to the Grenfell Tower fire inquiry.

That it was ever considered for the role says everything that needs saying about the political fraud being perpetrated by the Conservative government.

KPMG withdrew from an inquiry supposedly aimed at uncovering the truth about a fire in which at least 71 people died only after “core participants” complained of conflicts of interest that should have prevented it from ever being offered a £200,000 cheque for its services.

The main organisations to be questioned about their role in creating the conditions that led to the Grenfell inferno are the Conservative-run Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea council (RBKC), Rydon, who refurbished the Tower in 2015—encasing it in flammable cladding—and Celotex, which manufactured the insulation material used as part of the cladding.

Yet KPMG was appointed despite having raked in more than £5 million from previously auditing all three entities! It was paid just under £1 million in audit fees from RBKC over the past six years, £3.4 million by Rydon since 2007 and £1 million by Saint Gobain Construction Products UK—which owns Celotex—since 2011.

Over the past decade, Saint-Gobain—the French parent company of Saint Gobain Construction Products UK—paid KPMG a staggering £109.2 million in audit and other advisory fees.

A letter of protest to Prime Minister Theresa May was signed by 70 campaigners, academics and opposition MPs who described KPMG's appointment

as “insensitive,” “inappropriate” and “sickening.” But no explanation or apology was forthcoming from either May or the inquiry's presiding judge, Sir Martin Moore-Bick—whose decades on the bench would require at least a passing acquaintance with what constitutes a conflict of interest.

Instead, an initial statement by the inquiry defended KPMG's role as having the aim of facilitating “limited planning and programme management support during its start-up phase in order to help the inquiry make rapid progress in its work.”

KPMG was appointed to the inquiry last August when its terms were first being established. But this only became public knowledge when London's *Evening Standard* disclosed it last week, citing work conducted by the research group Tussell. The Cabinet Office refused to say who had signed off on the appointment. However, an unnamed spokesperson admitted that this had been carried out without any consultation, telling the press, “Given the urgent need to obtain specialist support, a single tender procurement exercise was run, which is in-line with government procurement rules.”

Even after stepping down, KPMG stressed that while recognising the “strength of opinion about our role ... undermining confidence in the inquiry,” it remained “confident that no conflicts exist between our role advising the inquiry and our work for other clients ...”

Such claims were punctured by a former KPMG partner, Paul Moore, whose statements are a devastating indictment of the government and of Moore-Bick. He described KPMG's appointment as “outrageous”: “It's perfectly bloody obvious that KPMG shouldn't have accepted that engagement.

What they've done is a complete disgrace.”

The scandal over KPMG serves once again to dispel any illusions that the official Grenfell inquiry has anything to do with establishing the truth, ensuring that justice is served or holding the guilty to account. Its terms rule out a priori any evaluation of issues of a “social, economic and political nature.” Moreover, whereas Moore-Bick has no powers to prosecute anyone, he has absolute control even over what questions can be raised by legal representatives of survivors and other interested parties.

Such was the level of public scepticism over the inquiry that earlier in December, the UK's watchdog on human rights, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), announced that it would launch its own investigation into why more than 70 people perished in homes “managed by the State.” The EHRC's application to be a core participant in Moore-Bick's inquiry was rejected.

Opposing the attempt by the government to be in sole charge of its proceedings and appointing its leading personnel, a petition by survivors and their families demanded Moore-Bick accept a representative panel and not be allowed to vet questions. The petition, which gathered over 26,000 signatures, requested that May use powers granted her under the “Inquiries Act 2005 to appoint additional panel members with decision-making power” to “avoid a collapse of confidence in the Inquiry's ability to discover the truth.”

On December 22, just days before Christmas and with many Grenfell victims still living in hotel and other temporary accommodation, May rejected the petition, insisting to Moore-Bick that the Inquiry, as presently constructed, “has the necessary expertise to undertake its work.”

Everything is being done to ensure that the guilty in political and corporate circles evade justice.

The Inquiry is not set to hand over even its interim findings, on how the fire started and spread, until the autumn. Almost seven months after the fire, it is still holding “procedural meetings,” with not a single person or representative of the organisations who bear major responsibility for the fire and its rapid spread summoned to the witness stand. The inquiry announced this week that the next procedural hearing, due to take place on January 30/31, would now be held at the end

of February.

The Metropolitan Police inquiry into the Grenfell fire is part of the same state-orchestrated cover-up. No one has been questioned, let alone charged, in relation to the fire. And there is no likelihood of this happening in the foreseeable future, with Met Commissioner Cressida Dick telling the London Assembly in December that the forensic stage of the criminal investigation is unlikely to be completed until 2019 and that the full investigation could take years to complete.

The protest registered over KPMG's role by Labour MPs such as Emma Dent Coad (Kensington) and David Lammy (Tottenham) has not led the party to withdraw its backing for May's bogus inquiry or to make any criticism whatsoever of the Met's investigation.



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