

Failed by the State co-director Daniel Renwick: “Every day I meet people who have been politicised and have a deeper consciousness”

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Daniel Renwick is the producer, co-writer and co-director of *Failed by the State*. We interviewed him this week about the making of the documentary on the Grenfell fire and the attack against it by the *Daily Beast* and right-wing newspapers in Britain for being funded by a subsidiary of Russia’s RT network.

WSWS: Can you tell us about your background?

DR: I used to work for Ruptly. Redfish is a subsidiary of Ruptly, which is owned by RT. I left them over two years ago. My friends who used to work there were part of forming a team, with editorial independence. I got assured in writing that would I have the final approval of *Failed by the State*. I’m no Kremlin stooge.

What I did was tell the story from the community perspective. I even managed to get the community rights to the footage used. The only thing that can be commercially exploited, with half the proceeds going to organisations of my choosing, is the final film itself. The rest of it is for non-commercial purposes, held by the community.

There is no media in town that would have offered that! I asked for it to set an example of what is possible, and they did it. In all fairness to them, Redfish did it... I have no fundamental issue with working with them because of where their finance comes from.

It would be nice if the attacks focused on the narrative and the challenges that the film presents, not where the money comes from. They are trying to get it dismissed by association, with the kind of Russo-phobic times we live in.

I’m more than happy to contend with anyone over the narrative of the film or what the film contains or

claims. And I can put you in touch with my interview subjects and they will do the same thing. They don’t care about who commissioned the film. It has no relevance to the people of North Kensington, or the people engaged in the struggle more widely. It’s about what the story is and how it empowers the community and I think *Failed by the State* will do that more than anything I’ve seen so far.

WSWS: Why do you think the media has targeted *Failed by the State* for such a witch-hunt?

DR: This is not the first time the right-wing media have thrown mud. They’ve targeted Edward Daffarn [a member of the Grenfell Action Group who warned the local council that a “catastrophic” fire would be inevitable due to the lack of basic safety measures in the tower]. They’ve targeted Justice for Grenfell. The *Telegraph* did their hit piece. The *Times* have probably been the most rabid in their attacks.

They don’t want truths. They want to make out that Grenfell is an aberration, a tragedy in which the community of North Kensington came together, with an outpouring of aid nationally. They want to lionise the community, while pardoning the market state and its criminal culpabilities.

They don’t want to deal with the structural issues that Grenfell raised or the continued failings of the state. They don’t want us challenging them, but we are, and we will, and we’re better than them.

WSWS: What do you think are the main strengths of the film?

DR: What I wanted to do in writing the film was set up what every locality’s struggle is like. What

happened in North Kensington could have happened in many places across the country and world.

There is an incredible history that North Kensington can tap into. It has a real history of mass action and not going down a party-political route. The politicisation that comes with a thing like Grenfell kind of transcends party politics, as the world conceives of it.

Every day I meet people who have been politicised and have a deeper consciousness through what's happened. It's about building a media infrastructure and resources to get people to engage with the world critically and that's what the film is the beginning of.

Everyone else wants to 'humanise' the individuals in Grenfell Tower, to zoom in and pull on the heartstrings. That's what every major production on Grenfell is going to do and it completely decontextualises what actually happened.

There is the context of global neo-liberalism, the context of gentrification, it's the context in this country, of the Housing Act and the warfare against any sort of social housing. In North Kensington it's the battle over public space again and again and again—within one of the most contested spaces in London and therefore the world.

They don't want working-class low-income families living in North Ken. They haven't for a long-time. They've tried to push them from Holland Park and tried to push them from Notting Hill for generations and they are doing and it's violent warfare and it's very sharp. For a lot of people in that area, they see the cranes moving. They see the changes and it's horrible.

WSWS: I understand that you have long connections with the local area?

DR: I used to live in Ladbroke Grove. It's a place where radical post-war history was made. People talk about Cable Street. They very rarely talk about the anti-fascist resistance in Grove and figures like Baron Baker and others who took on the likes of [British Union of Fascists leader Oswald] Moseley and Colin Jordan [of the 1970s fascist group, the National Front] on the streets. There are proud traditions of radical working-class actions and global solidarity. Eight people from Ladbroke Grove died when they went to fight in the Spanish Civil War.

WSWS: What other films have you worked on?

DR: I've made several films on a local history project, mainly with the Octavia Foundation. Our

project, *Waking the Dead*, attempted to popularise figures buried in Kensal Green cemetery. A lot of radical activists are buried there, people like Feargus O'Connor from the Chartist movement.

I made a campaign video for residents resisting the merger of Notting Hill Housing and Genesis, a campaign video to keep North Kensington library for public use. I call myself a community worker, and I make films and I write. I have the YouTube channel *Malcontents* and there are a lot of videos after Grenfell happened—with survivors, on the first rally after the Silent March. And they got quite a lot of views at the time.

Nothing that has happened so far surprises me. The attack on *Failed by the State* is about corporate interests and the power of money and those beholden to it. The *Daily Beast* that started this is so Russo-phobic. They are the most neo-Con publication you could imagine. And they did their little investigation and then the right-wing press got going on the back of it.

They just want to shut me up and keep me out of the picture, I imagine. I'm more than happy to wade into this, because there is no one that can erase the indelible mark Grenfell has made on our country, our society and the world. I'm not going to shut up. I don't have any fear of them challenging my competency.



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