

Grenfell Fire Forum: *Failed by the State* co-director discusses smear campaign against his documentary

Our reporter
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The Grenfell Fire Forum showed excerpts from the documentary *Failed by the State: The Struggle in the Shadow of Grenfell*, which has come under vicious attack by the right-wing media.

Those attending at the Maxilla Social Club in North Kensington on Saturday took part in a question and answer session with *Failed by the State* co-director and co-writer Daniel Renwick, followed by a discussion on the political issues raised. *Failed by the State* interviews survivors and local community activists about the inferno that claimed at least 71 lives and the callous treatment of survivors. It indicts the Conservative central government, the Tory-run Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Council (RBKC) council and the companies involved for sharing collective responsibility.

The film was financed by the production company Redfish, which is part of the Russia-based RT network. On this spurious basis, the documentary was denounced by the Daily Beast, a US news and opinion website, for being “Supported by the Kremlin.” The *Times* and *Daily Mail* joined in the witch-hunt aimed at discrediting the film—not only for its indictment of the Tories, but for citing Grenfell as an example of the horrors inflicted by capitalism on workers the world over.

Renwick, who made the documentary along with local resident Ish—who lived in Grenfell Tower for 25 years—attended the forum meeting after the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), which initiated the Grenfell Fire Forum, mounted a defence of the film.

After a showing of four clips from the film and an introduction by WSWs reporter Robert Stevens,

Renwick responded to questions from local residents and people from other parts of London.

Two of those attending had been involved in the three-decades-long fight for justice for those who died in the Hillsborough disaster. Ninety-six people were crushed to death at Hillsborough football stadium in 1989 due to criminal neglect of the police and authorities.

Renwick said that after the Grenfell fire, it was clear that RBKC “gutted their own services to the point that they had no capability to provide.” They had “no understanding of what a duty of care is.”

He asked, “What do you do with that? I don’t think you go cap in hand. I don’t think you vote in Labour, especially when you know what they’ve been doing across the city.”

Renwick argued that the answer was to fight for “a level of autonomy or independence for North Ken[sington]. I think you have to be able to localise the struggle and draw boundaries. Not because you don’t have solidarity that extends beyond that, but because you need to have agency, you need to have power. ... And we chased them from town. That’s what people have done.”

Speaking of the mood that existed after the fire, with the council doing nothing to alleviate the suffering of the survivors and local community, Renwick said, “People could and arguably should have fallen into social unrest after what happened. They didn’t because they believe in a longer game. But that longer game is not getting a progressive coalition in the local elections that will get the same type of Labour-minded regeneration property developers into power, suitably disguised by platitudes of social democracy.”

He noted how the state was mobilised immediately

after the fire in preparation to suppress the local population:

“At 1:30 a.m. in the morning riot police were on the streets outside Latimer Road station. They were there for social unrest. You had armed response units walking down Bramley Road with their guns in their hands the day after and that was the case for four days. Armed police walking through a traumatised community.”

After Renwick’s presentation, a woman attendee expressed her support for the documentary, but disagreement with the pro-Labour stance of some of those featured. She asked why Labour MP Emma Dent Coad had been singled out for interview in the film, given the role of the Labour Party in social cleansing policies in the capital and its history of betraying the working class.

She pointed out that Tory councils on London “were getting rid of 37 council estates, but there aren’t many Tory councils. There are 22 Labour councils and they are getting rid of 150 council estates. That’s what the Labour Party is doing ... It’s not doing anything for the working class that I can see at all. “

An SEP member said *Failed by the State* is a valuable work, but this didn’t mean that viewers had to agree with all the points made in it. The SEP was not opposed to any comments Dent Coad makes in *Failed by the State*, but she is a representative of the Labour Party and should indeed be judged on that basis.

Local artist Dr. Livingstone, who oversees the “Wall of Truth,” a memorial area under the Westway Flyover outside the Maxilla Club, said that what the corporate media had done to Ish in attacking *Failed by the State* “is really bad. They call him a Russian spy and put down his film and intimidate my friend. This man lived and breathed that building [Grenfell] and I can’t take anything like that. It is breaking my heart to see what it is doing to him. These people [the corporate media] don’t like to hear the truth. So we have to stick together and keep that truth strong and we will get justice. Nothing is impossible in this world.”

At the end of the meeting, a resolution was passed opposing the attack on *Failed by the State*. It reads:

“*Failed by the State* has been singled out for attack by the Daily Beast in the United States and by the Times and Daily Mail because it tells the truth about the causes of the Grenfell Tower fire in which at least

71 people perished in a terrible death. It explains that this crime of social murder took place as the result of policies of social cleansing and the hostility to the residents of North Kensington by the representatives of ‘global capital’ in central and local government.

“The film was financed by the production company Redfish, which is backed by Ruptly—part of the Russia-based RT network. On this basis, the corporate media are attempting to taint the film by association—on the spurious grounds that it was bought and paid for by the Putin regime in Russia. This is part of a broader offensive in which all expressions of political and social dissent are being denounced by the powers that be as “fake news,” and attributed as propaganda emanating from Moscow.

“These lies are being spread despite the fact that the makers of the film, Daniel Renwick and Ish, had total editorial control over the content of the film.

“The Grenfell Fire Forum recognises that the attack on *Failed by the State* —and the ongoing censorship of left-wing, socialist and antiwar websites by Google and Facebook Twitter and other powerful information technology corporations—emphasises the significance of the January 23 call of the *World Socialist Web Site* to sponsor the formation of an International Coalition of Socialist, Antiwar and Progressive Websites to fight Internet censorship.”

For further information visit the Grenfell Fire Forum Facebook and Twitter pages.



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