

“It’s certainly not going to shut me up”

Grenfell fire: Joe Delaney answers right-wing media witch-hunt

Robert Stevens
14 March 2018

Joe Delaney, a local resident, has a record of seeking justice for the victims and survivors of the Grenfell Tower fire that has earned him the respect of the entire local community in North Kensington. Having lived in a flat adjacent to Grenfell Tower, he was evacuated after the inferno that claimed at least 71 lives and left behind a toxic and burned out shell. He has been forced to live in hotel accommodation ever since.

His plight was used by the Sunday Times to mount a filthy attack in a February 25 article, “‘Homeless’ Grenfell Tower activist Joe Delaney has flat.” It ran with a subtitle alleging, “A campaigner claiming cash for food while put up in a hotel is still using his own home.”

The Times, Daily Mail, the Sun and the Daily Express all ran with claims that Delaney is living the high life on the public purse, with the Times writing that Delaney is “still using his north Kensington apartment,” while “claiming food allowances of up to £300 per week and has a hotel room funded by the taxpayer.”

The Socialist Equality Party and Grenfell Fire Forum opposed the attack in an article published on the World Socialist Web Site on February 28. WSWs reporter Robert Stevens spoke to Joe Delaney.

Robert Stevens: The right-wing media claim you are living in the lap of luxury in a four star £120 a night hotel!

Joe Delaney: I am in a hotel room that is 9 or 10 feet by 9 or 10 feet, so I can assure you it’s hardly the lap of luxury. It certainly doesn’t look anything like the picture that they ran alongside their piece!

Everyone that was in my part of the estate has access to their flat. And because the hotel rooms are so small, we all often come back, just to grab things because we can’t keep everything with us in the hotel rooms.

There are certainly no times when I have slept at the flat because I find that impossible. I did try a couple of times, on the advice of my therapist to see if I could. But this was well before Christmas, in the immediate aftermath.

The only other times I have been there overnight was when I had to get my emails together to submit to the police inquiry and when I had to write my Core Participant Application for the public inquiry. All the information that I needed was on my desktop computer.

I think it is something like 40 percent of the people from my part of the estate have left in total to be put in hotels and temporary accommodation. The council have been saying from the start that you can come back, but it’s at your own risk. When the building still hasn’t been declared fire safe, despite the work they’ve done since June 14, it’s just a shocking indictment on them as a landlord. How dare they say to people ‘Come back at your own risk?’ They haven’t even properly told us what those risks are.

There are a couple of [evacuated] people in the same hotel I am because it’s one that allows dogs. £120-a-night is cheap for staying in the capital. It would get you a Premier Inn if you are lucky! And they are not paying

that much either, because they’ve made so many bookings for so long I know that they’re getting a discount.

RS: The *Sunday Times* article was a political sting operation, including undercover photography, and suggests they had access to your personal data. Where did they get this from?

JD: I’ve complained about this to Kensington and Chelsea council. I think the only place that information could have come from was the council because the *Times* knew that I was in another hotel, prior to the one that I’m in now. That rules out anyone at the current hotel saying anything as they were unaware of this fact. The reporter knew the date that I moved into this hotel, because he asked me to confirm it.

There is the timing of the story as well—it is just a bit too convenient for the council, particularly the Conservative members. They had just wound up the Scrutiny Committee [Grenfell Recovery Scrutiny Committee] because they were saying that they’d been threatened by locals, which is nonsense. I’m on the Scrutiny Committee, and while they got a bit boisterous at times, no one was in any danger.

The other issue is the Grenfell Task Force, the central government body, is due to submit another report on the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea very soon, and that’s going to be absolutely scathing because I’ve spoken with some of the civil servants involved.

The third issue is that we have elections coming up in May. And the Conservative group is absolutely determined to keep hold of RBKC council. They think that if they do lose control, they will lose their power to determine how the council responds to the public inquiry, and it could mean that some of them end up behind bars.

These are the same tactics employed while the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation [who managed Grenfell Tower on behalf of the council] was in place. There were regular smear campaigns against people who raised what proved to be 100 percent legitimate safety concerns.

RS: The *Sunday Times* made repeated reference to the fact that you are accessing a £300 weekly food allowance, implying you are not entitled to it with the claim that you are staying at your flat.

JD: That’s £42 per day. To give you an idea, to get one meal in a hotel it’s £20. So even two meals a day at the hotel a day would eat that up. The other thing they were offering was £90 per day if you chose to take it as room service. I chose not to because I thought that was a ridiculous waste of money. And frankly, I didn’t want to feel like a school child where I had to report to a certain place at a certain time every day to eat. Also, I have not been able to work since the fire, so giving me £300 per week means the council have got an absolute bargain because I guarantee I earned a lot more than that when I was actually working.

RS: The *Times* secretly took surveillance photos of you.

JD: My treatment doesn’t surprise me. The only negative pieces that

have appeared about anyone to do with this campaign have been hatchet-jobs originating at the *Times* or the *Sunday Times*, so they know their audience.

They had pictures of me leaving my flat early in the morning. Well, there were quite a few mornings when I would go back to the flat early. It doesn't mean that I stayed there at night! They didn't release those pictures to me, despite me asking, or tell me what days they were taken so I could give them an explanation for those visits.

I've had to go back on several occasions quite early in the morning, because the council wanted access to undertake fire safety work that should have been done years ago. I've had to come back for CO2 tests, for a new door being fitted. Every time the council made an appointment with me, they never kept it! I would usually have to spend two or three days here, just to get work done that should have been done in one day. My post still comes to the flat, which I have to collect because it's not been redirected to the hotels.

The other issue the *Sunday Times* raised was that I hadn't spent every night at the hotel. That's true. I've often spent nights at family or friends' places, which I am perfectly entitled to do. The hotel is meant to be my home for now, and no one is forced to spend 24 hours a day, seven days a week cooped up at home—and not in a single room. I should have a base from which I can work, and I don't.

RS: Have you any legal redress?

JD: Not really, it's not like I could just get money to mount a case against them. And given the way that they wrote the piece, it's very iffy whether I could prove that it was libelous or defamatory. You would be looking at thousands of pounds to instruct a solicitor, to instruct a QC, then take the matter to court, and then there's also the issue of costs if you lose.

But I can prove that the *Sunday Times* attack is spurious by citing the admission of the journalist involved! Gabriel Pogrund sent an email to my legal representatives stating, "I have at no point made any allegation of fraud whatsoever or even used that word."

He says they had no intention of implying that I was committing fraud, so why was the piece worded that way then? The whole tone of the piece implied I was collecting funds that I was not entitled to, and that I was being dishonest and manipulative to do so.

That's not where to look for dishonesty. People are being asked to pay rent and service charges by the council for places that don't meet the decent homes standard, which is outrageous. Those charges were restored again on February 5. They're saying we'll charge you 100 percent of the rent, and then people can apply to have 50 percent of that refunded.

I threatened them by saying, 'If you start charging people service charges, I will help everyone write letters of claim to you about every single issue.' At the moment, people are willing to let things slide when they're not being charged for services they don't actually receive!

A smear campaign is underway against all those seeking to establish the truth about Grenfell. Conservative councillors have a lot to be worried about because quite a few of them should be facing jail terms: The former leader of the council Nicholas Paget-Brown for starters, and the old deputy, Rock Feilding-Mellen. Those two most definitely should be facing a prison term.

Rock Feilding-Mellen authorized the change to the cheaper flammable cladding, which was against the European Union procurement regulations. They'd taken the contract specifying one type of cladding and then he wanted to save money. An investigation by BBC *Newsnight* had leaked emails to show this.

It was annoying to have the *Sunday Times* thing published about me, but they have not been able to refute any of the arguments I've put forward. That's exactly what happened with Stormzy [the grime artist who attacked the government live on TV during the BRIT awards]. The narrative with him was, "Well look, he grew up in a council house, so he

should be grateful for what he has now, so shut up. This is none of his concern, none of his business."

It is 72 deaths by the way, because I attended the funeral of victim number 72 on Saturday. [Maria Del Pilar Burton was the wife of Nick Burton. Both managed to escape from Grenfell tower and were hospitalised as a result.]

The police are trying to argue that Maria's death had nothing to do with the fire, but everyone around here knows that's utter nonsense. We're up to 72 deaths, but the police are currently saying that her death won't be included as part of the final figure.

The other issue I have had with the police is the methodology used to calculate who was in the tower and who wasn't at the time it burned. That tower burned at temperatures hotter than a crematorium, so it's very likely you're not going to find any remains of some people. The only way you're going to guarantee who's in there is to use some of the tactics used during the London riots, where they positioned where people's mobile phones were.

In this part of London, you can do that to within about one square meter, because there are that many mobile phone masts in the area. Why are they willing to employ that for a few pounds' worth of property damage, but not to find out whether people were killed in Grenfell?

RS: The campaign against you followed an attack by the same newspapers on the Justice For Grenfell group and other groups and individuals in December and then on the film that tells the truth about the Grenfell fire and its causes, *Failed by the State*.

JD: Yes, there was the attack on Justice For Grenfell, there was the attack on Ed Daffarn, who was from the Grenfell Action Group I work with. It's shooting the messenger again. I know Dan Renwick and I know Ishmael, the two people behind *Failed by the State*, and I can assure you that neither of them are Kremlin agents! They are just local residents—Ishmael lives on the estate, Dan lives in the area. They are just people who wanted certain questions answered and wanted to put certain information out there.

Let's be honest, I'm white and well spoken. That's how come I was picked on. That was why *Failed by the State* was picked on—it was well presented and well articulated. That's what they don't like, because then it doesn't fit with their claim that the tower was packed up to the rafters with illegal immigrants who shouldn't have been there anyway.

There is absolutely no justification for why that tower burned. There is no reasonable, understandable explanation that can be given for the events that led up to that disaster. Or the appalling handling of the fallout from that disaster since June 14. It's easier just to paint a picture that we're all like characters from *Shameless*, milking the system for as much as we can and taking advantage of a tragedy. We're certainly not doing that.

It's our friends and family that died in that tower. So how dare anyone, the council, central government or the media, present us as people attempting to cash in on this appalling tragedy that affected people that we know, or that we are related to, or that we lived next door to? That is an utterly outrageous smear.

No similar *Sunday Times* investigation has taken place into individuals among the entities who made the decisions that led to the Grenfell inferno. Are they following Rock Feilding-Mellen on his country estate, which he's fled to since the night of the fire? Are they following anyone at Rydon? Are they following anyone at the Building Research Establishment? No, they're not. They threw time, money and resources into having me followed, and what were they able to come up with? That I'd been back to my flat!

Their smears are not going to stick. I am back with the police on Friday for another lengthy interview about events prior to Grenfell and the night itself. I've already given hours of testimony and I've got hours more to come. It's certainly not going to shut me up. I say, bring it on!

At its next meeting on Saturday March 17 at 2 p.m. at the Maxilla Social

Club, the Grenfell Fire Forum, initiated by the Socialist Equality Party, will discuss the issues involved in the attack by the Sunday Times on Joe Delaney. All are welcome to attend. Full details below

Grenfell Fire Forum meeting

Saturday, March 17, 2 p.m.

Maxilla Hall Social Club

2 Maxilla Walk, London, W10 6SW

(nearest tube—Latimer Road)

For further information visit the Grenfell Fire Forum Facebook page.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact