

UK government's crocodile tears over burning of Grenfell Tower effigy backfire

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Millions were sickened by a vile video of a group of backward racists burning an effigy of Grenfell Tower on bonfire night, November 5.

The cardboard model had cut out paper figures with brown faces, looking out of the tower windows, with the perpetrators making derogatory comments about Grenfell Tower residents. As it is set on fire, one participant is heard saying, "Help me, help me!" and "Jump out the window!" Another says to laughter, in a reference to the failed "stay put" policy of the fire brigade, "Stay in your flat, we are coming to get you." In a reference to a woman wearing a niqab, one states, "The little ninja is getting it at the minute," Another comments, "That's what happens when they don't pay their rent."

According to reports, the video was circulated privately among those involved on WhatsApp, but soon ended up being posted on social media and going viral where it provoked widespread anger and condemnation.

The faces of many of those involved are seen in the video and five men from south and south-east London handed themselves in to the police on Monday night. Another man, aged 19, was arrested Tuesday after attending a south London police station. All six were arrested and charged on suspicion of a public order offence before being released under investigation.

Despite the abhorrent nature of the video, it is not clear that the perpetrators have committed any crime. Arrested under section 4a of the 1986 Public Order Act, a defence against prosecution can be made if the accused were inside a dwelling and had no reason to believe what they did would be heard or seen by people outside the dwelling.

It has since emerged that three of the six were members of a local Conservative Club, with one, Clifford Smith, having previously been photographed

on social media mocking homeless people.

Within a matter of hours, the political elite were queuing up to condemn the video in what was a display of nauseating hypocrisy. Prime Minister Theresa May posted a tweet, "To disrespect those who lost their lives at Grenfell Tower, as well as their families and loved ones, is utterly unacceptable."

Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, James Brokenshire, issued an official statement that the government "condemns this video in the strongest terms," adding, "I know that the police have been made aware of this video and will work to establish whether any offences have been committed."

Metropolitan Police Commander Stuart Cundy, who is leading the "criminal investigation" into the Grenfell fire, issued an appeal for information as to the identities of those involved. Following the first arrests, Tuesday morning saw the police conduct a search for around two hours of Smith's house in South Norwood, south London, where the bonfire took place, after which they took away two plastic bags.

The government's attempt to exploit the situation for political ends with pious expressions of sympathy rapidly backfired. Social consciousness has changed forever, as a result of the Grenfell inferno. After witnessing the callous and indifferent treatment of the survivors and bereaved of the tower by central government and the local Tory Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, many saw through the crocodile tears of May, et al.

Hostile comments were posted on Twitter within minutes, with one reading, "Didn't you [May] refuse to meet those affected by the disaster, initially after the disaster happened?" Another asked, "Do you really wanna open a dialogue on disrespecting Grenfell?"

One man pointed out when the first anniversary of the fire took place, May was wooing bankers at a European financial services event at a banquet in Whitehall. Another person tweeted, “The effigy they burnt was less flammable than the actual tower. So, save your pious fake outrage, re-home the families who are still in temporary accommodation—despite your lies—and remove this lethal cladding that’s still on dozens of towers around the UK.”

Many people drew attention to the most salient fact revealed by the furor: In the now nearly *17 months* since the Grenfell fire *not a single individual* has been arrested, let alone charged, in connection with the deaths of 72 people. It is now four and a half months since the Met bothered to even give an update on its investigation, when it revealed in July that only three people had been interviewed under caution in relation to the fire.

The author of one of the above tweets, pointed out that “FIVE people are (rightly) in custody for setting an effigy of Grenfell on fire. ZERO people are in custody for the actual Grenfell Tower fire. Something very wrong there.”

The many social media postings lambasting the government and police over their hypocrisy over Grenfell, articulating the views of millions of people shocked at the social murder committed at Grenfell, found no reflection in the media.

The *Guardian* even went into defensive mode in response to the filthy statement about Grenfell residents not paying rent. It commented, “The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, which owns the block, said only 44 of the 115 rentable tenancies in the tower were covered entirely by housing benefit, and 40 households received no housing benefit at all. Other flats were owned by leaseholders.”

That such anti-working-class diatribes are considered the subject of polite debate shows the extent to which far-right views have become common coin within the corporate-controlled media. Nothing said by the Grenfell effigy burners has not regularly appeared in the comments sections of right-wing newspapers such as the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express* and the *Sun*. It was only a few years ago that the now openly far right activist, Katie Hopkins, was handed a column by the *Daily Mail* and then the *Sun*, in which she regularly attacked immigrants, asylum seekers and welfare

claimants. In one column, she launched into a fascistic rant, describing refugees fleeing war and persecution as “cockroaches.”

A crime as enormous as Grenfell cannot be swept away with a few hypocritical gestures by political representatives of the capitalist class responsible for the 72 deaths.

Recognising this, the pro-Labour Party *New Statesman* commissioned Gavriel Hollander, a freelance journalist who has worked for *Inside Housing* and *Construction News*, to urge calm and justify official inaction. An article asking, “Why has no one been prosecuted for the Grenfell Tower fire?” insisted that the “growing clamour in some quarters to see signs of progress from the police investigating the disaster or from the public inquiry, which continues to hear evidence from survivors and the bereaved, is misplaced.”

“When six men were arrested the very next day, some compared the speed with which the police moved to the apparent stagnation of the investigation into the fire itself.” This comparison, Hollander, replied was “stark” but also “spurious.”

It is “easy to understand why a community that feels let down—fatally—by those in power should be distrustful of the authorities,” but everyone should calm down as “trust is essential if we are to get the kind of justice that same community needs.” This “should and will take time.”

Trust in what is an ongoing official cover-up led by Justice Moore Bick is rapidly evaporating, as it should, and appeals for patience, even from the well-intentioned, are beginning to wear thin.

The Grenfell Fire Forum invites readers to its next meeting to discuss these vital issues on Saturday November 10, at 4 p.m. at the Maxilla Social Club, 2 Maxilla Walk, London W10 6SW (nearest tube Latimer Road.)

For further details visit the Grenfell Fire Forum Facebook page.



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