

UK: Investigation into Grenfell fire will “take years, not months,” police say

Barry Mason, Robert Stevens
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London Metropolitan Police Commissioner Cressida Dick reiterated that it will be years before the “criminal investigation” into the Grenfell Tower fire is concluded.

In a December 19 briefing, Dick stated, “I am sure at various stages there will be consultation with the Crown Prosecution Service as to whether any criminal offences are made out and whether they could be proven. But it’s going to be a very long job. I’ve always said that from the beginning. We have been very clear this will take years, not months.”

Dick said the Met had 200 officers who were carrying out some “incredibly complex and thorough investigations.” These involved them speaking with “lots and lots” of people, some under caution.

Dick’s comments follow chairman Sir Martin Moore-Bick’s announcement at the conclusion of the first phase of the government’s Grenfell inquiry that the second phase is not likely to begin till autumn 2019 at the earliest. He too cited the “complexity” of the issues involved, including 200,000 documents that “need to be reviewed, redacted and digested” and then disclosed to core participants before phase two can even begin.

This confirms the insistence of the Socialist Equality Party and Grenfell Fire Forum that the inquiry and police investigation are not seeking to bring to justice those responsible for the deaths of 72 people but are integral elements of an orchestrated state cover-up.

The comments of Moore-Bick and Dick come 18 months after the terrible events of June 14, 2017 with not a single person responsible yet arrested, let alone charged. The destroyed shell of Grenfell Tower was designated a crime scene by the police since the fire until August 2. It then took over a year to complete a forensic examination of the building.

It was only in July this year that the Met

acknowledged having interviewed anyone under caution with no further details provided, despite Dick’s soporifics about speaking to “lots and lots” of people. An *Independent* article dated July 18, referring to the interviews, noted only that “Scotland Yard is considering whether offences including corporate manslaughter, gross negligence manslaughter and breaches of the Health and Safety Act have been committed.”

In this context, Dick’s statement that the Met will establish with the Crown Prosecution Service “as to whether any criminal offences are made out and whether they could be proven” is only suggestive of continued inaction.

The delayed second phase of the inquiry will focus on the circumstances and critical decisions allowing the fire to spread so quickly, leading to the disastrous outcome. But the extremely narrow frames of reference of the inquiry rule out any examination of the “social, economic and political nature” issues that were central to everything that took place. Instead, again in Moore-Bick’s words, the inquiry will be “limited to the cause, how it spread, and preventing a future blaze.”

With the police now speaking about their investigation taking years to complete, there is plenty of scope for the criminals responsible for Grenfell to kick things even further into the long grass.

The new timeframe for the inquiry means it will be at least two-and-a-half years since the fire before the second phase even begins. According to the 2005 Inquiries Act under which Moore-Bick is working, public inquiries cannot determine civil or criminal liability. But given that it is underway, any conclusion of criminal cases could be delayed for years due to the need to await its findings because of their relevance to any prosecution.

No one should accept that everything must be delayed for months and even years because things are “massively complicated.” The police have the resources necessary to mount and complete a criminal investigation, after which it is up to the legal teams appointed to make the case for establishing guilt or innocence in a court of law.

The senior figures in the political and corporate establishment involved in the fire should have been arrested, charged and placed on trial. The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea council and its Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation carried out a “refurbishment” of the Grenfell Tower in 2015-16. The entire tower was encased in highly flammable and toxic smoke producing cladding, which turned the building into a death trap. Evidence given at the inquiry has already proved this.

The inside of the building was just as dangerous and had only one exit stairwell that was rapidly engulfed with toxic smoke as the fire took hold. There was no central fire alarm system and no sprinklers in the building and fire doors did not work. Flammable material was installed in new windows, which quickly escalated the inferno.

This happened because key individuals and committees took minuted decisions with the aim of saving a few thousand pounds. Rydon, the main contractor, and Celotex, the company that manufactured the flammable insulation, have been allowed to maintain silence—withdrawing plans to make a closing submission at phase one of the inquiry—while Arconic was free to assert without challenge that the spread of the devastating inferno was not the result of the flammable panels it manufactured but the combination of materials used in the refurbishment, including plastic window frames and the insulation.

The SEP and Grenfell Fire Forum have insisted those guilty of social murder at Grenfell Tower must be arrested and charged, including former London Mayor Boris Johnson, Prime Minister Theresa May and her predecessors, David Cameron, Gordon Brown and Tony Blair.

Those instrumental in the decision to add the cladding to Grenfell must also be arrested and charged, including former Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea council leader Nicholas Paget-Brown; his then-deputy,

Rock Feilding-Mellen, and the former head of the council’s housing management organisation, Robert Black. The CEO of Rydon, Robert Bond, the managing director of Harley Facades, Ray Bailey, and other relevant figures must be asked to account for involvement of their respective companies.

- Justice for Grenfell means no cover-up and no inquiry whitewash!

- Arrest the political and corporate criminals responsible!

- Stop the scapegoating of firefighters!

- Quality public housing is a social right!

- For an emergency multibillion-pound programme of public works to build schools, hospitals, public housing and all the infrastructure required in the 21st century!

The Grenfell Fire Forum will be discussing these issues at its next meeting on Saturday, February 2, at the Maxilla Social Club in North Kensington, London. All are welcome to attend.

Grenfell Fire Forum meeting

Saturday, February 2, 4 p.m.

Maxilla Social Club, 2 Maxilla Walk

London, W10 6SW (nearest tube: Latimer Road)

For further details visit facebook.com/Grenfellforum



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