

UK: Scapegoating of firefighters for Grenfell deaths exposes fraud of official inquiry

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Fire Brigades Union (FBU) General Secretary Matt Wrack has said the government's inquiry in the Grenfell Tower fire is in danger of becoming a "whitewash."

He told the *Guardian*, "The views I am expressing are being expressed more bluntly in fire stations, that this is in danger of turning into a stitch-up of firefighters ... the only thing they did on the night was turn up to put a fire out and yet they are the people that have come under most scrutiny so far."

Wrack continued, "The stark, staring obvious problem is how can you wrap a building in flammable material like that. Everyone asked that within hours and yet we won't even look at that in three years and before they [the inquiry] start to reach conclusions on it, it could quite easily be 2021."

Addressing the two-phase structure of the inquiry headed by Sir Martin Moore-Bick, Wrack added, "The order of business was wrong ... Before any 999 [emergency] call was made the building was already a death trap. All of the safety arrangements had been compromised, but how we got to that stage we still don't know."

The first part of the inquiry opened in September 2017 and didn't end until last December, 13 months later. At its conclusion, Moore-Bick, the appointee of Prime Minister Theresa May, announced that the inquiry would be halted until at least the autumn of 2019, supposedly so that hundreds of thousands of documents could be scrutinized. The likelihood is that the second phase, dealing with the construction and refurbishment of Grenfell Tower and the circumstances and decisions leading up to the disaster, will not even begin to take evidence until 2020 and it could then last years.

The "stitch-up" taking place confirms the assessment made by the Socialist Equality Party from the day that the inquiry was announced that it would be a fraud.

The inquiry has proceeded along the lines predicted by

the SEP. For well over a year, its sole focus was on the few hours from when the fire started. Everything was focused on the role of the London Fire Brigade (LFB). There wasn't any reference to events that led up to the fire, including the massive cuts imposed on London's fire service that endangered the safety and lives of London's population, including the firefighters.

The SEP and the Grenfell Fire Forum explained that no inquiry set up by the Conservative government would ever bring justice for the victims of this atrocity. Its sole purpose has been to cover for the political parties and corporations whose decisions turned Grenfell into a death trap.

Under the terms of the 2005 Inquiries Act, established by the Blair Labour government, Moore-Bick has no power to prosecute anyone. Amnesty International stated as soon as it was legislated that "any inquiry [under the Act] would be controlled by the executive which is empowered to block public scrutiny of state actions ..."

Moore-Bick was adamant that the inquiry would be "limited to the cause, how it spread, and preventing a future blaze," and agreed with May that he would rule out any examination of issues of a "social, economic and political nature."

Wrack is a supporter of the pseudo-left Socialist Party. Under pressure from firefighters, he is now making correct points exposing the nature of the inquiry. However, like the Labour Party, the trade unions and various pseudo-left groups, he and the FBU supported it. This lent much needed legitimacy to the inquiry, politically disarming survivors, the families of victims and the entire working class and exposing his own members to the threat of victimisation.

In October 2017, the FBU issued a statement to its members that it "will participate as fully as possible in the public inquiry," having been granted "core participant" status. This support was granted despite Wrack stating

just two months after the fire, “How is it remotely possible to seriously examine the causes, spread and results of the fire without examining ‘social, economic and political’ matters?”

Wrack’s comments were made ahead of a documentary aired February 18 by Channel Four’s “Dispatches,” *Grenfell: Did the Fire Brigade Fail?* The 26-minute documentary accepts the basic premise of the inquiry that an informed judgment can be made based solely on an examination of what happened on the night of the fire. It concludes that people died in Grenfell because they got the wrong advice from the LFB. But this conceals the fact that *all* the main factors that ensured such a horrific loss of life had already happened long before June 14, 2017.

In the opening sequences, after referring in passing to the cladding that ultimately led to the disastrous fire and deaths, the narrator intones, “Over the last year a different scandal has been emerging ... ‘Dispatches’ reveals new evidence suggesting systemic failures within the London Fire Brigade may have led to many people dying who could have survived.”

“Dispatches” contends that 55 out of the 72 deaths at Grenfell Tower were a result of the fire brigade advising people to stay in the building once the fire was out of control.

But the “stay put” policy was long standing practice, based on the premise that high-rise buildings such as Grenfell Tower are built to be compartmentalized—a series of concrete boxes that if correctly constructed and maintained are isolated from each other, preventing the spread of fire. However, this principle had been fatally compromised in Grenfell because of the application of the highly flammable cladding on its exterior—as part of a “refurbishment.” The cladding acted as a wick to spread the fire across multiple floors so that the building was rapidly engulfed.

Grenfell was so dangerously compromised that a “catastrophic event” was only a matter of time, as the Grenfell Action Group warned the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea council months in advance.

With the entire building ablaze by 2 a.m., only around an hour after the fire started, the firefighters faced, as Wrack correctly states, an “impossible situation.”

The situation was exacerbated by years of funding cuts under both Labour and Conservative administrations. From 2008 to 2016, Tory politician Boris Johnson was London mayor and in 2013 alone cut £29 million from its budget. It was no longer even policy to send, as routine,

an aerial ladder to high-rise fires.

It is because the inquiry is no threat to any of the political and corporate criminals whose actions were integral to turning Grenfell into a death trap that one of the main guilty parties, Arconic, felt emboldened on the last day of its first phase to tell Moore-Bick that it would take no responsibility. Arconic’s brief said the spread of the 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. It was “impossible to argue” that its cladding was “non-compliant” with building regulations.

All the companies involved in the Grenfell inferno continue to trade as though it had never happened. The main firm in charge of the refurbishment, Rydon, reported within a year of the fire that its profits had soared by 50 percent to £19 million.

The Metropolitan Police are essential to the cover-up, ensuring that to this day no one has been arrested in connection with the social murder at Grenfell. Proceeding along the same glacial pace as the inquiry, the Met announced as the first phase ended that it could “take years” to conclude its own investigation.

What is taking place is class justice, in which the perpetrators of mass murder are walking free while firefighters are being targeted for blame. The only place that the documents still to be reviewed should be scrutinized is by lawyers as part of a criminal trial. The SEP and Grenfell Fire Forum urge workers and youth to demand the arrest and prosecution of all the political and corporate criminals responsible and that the cover-up and scapegoating of firefighters end immediately.

For further information visit the Grenfell Fire Forum facebook page.



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