

Free Reis Morris! Grenfell Tower campaigner imprisoned while those guilty of social murder walk free

The Socialist Equality Party (UK)
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The Socialist Equality Party condemns the imprisonment of Grenfell justice campaigner Reis Morris. His jailing is a vicious act of class justice aimed at suppressing opposition and protecting those responsible for 72 deaths in the Grenfell Tower inferno.

The two-month sentence handed down against Morris on May 31 is especially vindictive as he will remain behind bars on the second anniversary of a fire that claimed a member of his family.

As the June 14 anniversary approaches and with anger at boiling point, the London Metropolitan Police announced yesterday that in nearly 24 months, just 13 people have been “interviewed under caution.” Not a single person has been charged for the devastating inferno, despite a mountain of evidence proving criminal culpability by the rich and powerful. This includes those heading the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Council, its tenant management arm, and major corporations that manufactured and installed flammable cladding that turned Grenfell into a death trap.

A petition started by local residents demanding Morris’s immediate release has already won more than 1,000 signatures, while the hashtag #IAmReisMorris is gathering support on Twitter.

Morris, a 29-year-old father, was charged over an incident in which he confronted London Fire Brigade site manager Matthew Hogan over the condition of materials used to cover the burnt-out ruins of Grenfell. Morris demanded to know why his repeated complaints and queries had not been addressed.

It is alleged that Morris put his hands round Hogan’s throat, saying, “I can keep on squeezing.” Yet this account is denied by eyewitnesses who have stated that Morris never touched Hogan. The prosecution’s own lawyers admitted Morris’s actions were nothing more than “a warning” born of frustration. They told the court that Reis “did not cause him pain or suffocation.” The two men had “mended their grievances”.

Morris’s defence solicitor Martin Davidson said in court, “Mr Morris grew up in the shadow of Grenfell. He knew some of the deceased. He is a very active campaigner but tensions ran overboard.”

Such mitigating factors counted for nothing as Magistrate Lillian Ibbett told Morris she had “no choice” but to impose a custodial sentence due to a previous suspended sentence.

That suspended sentence was also related to the ongoing state cover-up at Grenfell. At a vigil in 2017 to mark 100 days since the fire, Morris had confronted then deputy leader of the Tory-dominated RBKC, Kim Taylor-Smith. A despised figure due to his arrogance and contempt for residents, Taylor-Smith was shouted down as he tried to make a speech. As he left, Morris confronted him, demanding the councillor “look [him] in the eyes.” He told Taylor-Smith, “You have got eight weeks to sort this out, then I’m coming for you, I don’t care if I spend the rest of my life in prison.”

Taylor-Smith and his pampered cronies did nothing to provide for the needs of a traumatised, frustrated and angry community, but he did find time to report Morris to the police. Within a fortnight, Morris had been arrested, charged and convicted. He was sentenced to a 12-month community order—later increased to a six-week suspended sentence—plus 110 hours of unpaid work. In a final insult, he was ordered to pay £85 towards prosecution costs and £100 to Taylor-Smith.

That suspended sentence has now been activated, with another two weeks’ imprisonment added for the latest incident. Morris must also pay £100 costs and is banned from going to the Grenfell Tower site.

When Morris confronted Hogan in April, Conservative Housing Minister Kit Malthouse was admitting to parliament that 15 households from the Tower were still without permanent accommodation. Six households were in emergency accommodation, two in hotels, three in serviced apartments, and another was living “with family or friends.”

Morris's imprisonment has been met with justifiable outrage.

Under the hashtag #IAmReisMorris, EmmaLuna tweeted, "So you can imprison so readily, one of our traumatised community who has suffered huge loss & yet those complicit in #Grenfell atrocity #RockFieldingMellen; #GavinBarwell; #RobertBlack & so on, can just be left untouched by law that just keeps delaying."

Yasmeen Arden tweeted, "It's almost as if they are focusing on turning our powerful good community into the 'bad guys' rather than turning their attention on the actual bad guys who are busy living the millionaire lifestyle built on the lives of our people!"

And from Rupinder Hardy, "I was a responder during from day 3 of #Grenfell & the most organised, supportive, passionate, collaborative people I met were all the 'Reis' from Latimer. They were the glue that held things together. They were critical & hold an esteemed position in my view #IAmReisMorris."

Morris is an outspoken fighter for residents at the Lancaster West Housing Estate. Earlier this year he told an Oxford Union meeting that he had taken on the role of activist "as a necessity" "to never let anything like that happen again." "Injustice," he said, "relies on ignorance... You can't help what you don't understand."

In 2018, Morris appeared in the powerful documentary *Failed by the State: The Struggle in the Shadow of Grenfell*. He told filmmakers Daniel Renwick and Ish, "It's clear now there was no justice... I know people that didn't make it out, so it's rage. It's back to rage."

If social anger and distress is boiling over into individual acts of frustration, then responsibility rests solely at the feet of all those parties and leaders who have helped orchestrate a two-year cover-up for the guilty.

At the centre of this cover-up has been the government's official Grenfell Inquiry.

The first stage of the inquiry has been postponed yet again—until the end of this year—confirming that it was never aimed at bringing justice or establishing the truth.

On Thursday, Labour MP Emma Dent Coad spoke in parliament condemning Morris's imprisonment. Reis was "a friend to many," she said. "Is it right to punish this moment of fury with imprisonment?" she asked, before recommending that he be freed "at least so he can attend a memorial event on Friday week."

Dent Coad knows that her parliamentary colleagues are sitting on a social volcano. She and Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn are fully complicit in supporting the May government's Inquiry. Notwithstanding their criticism of Moore-Bick, Corbyn and Dent Coad promoted the lie that May's Inquiry would deliver justice.

Daniel Renwick, co-director of the WSWs, "Reis is not alone. Though he has often acted in ways that go above and beyond others, he has acted for the dead, the survivors and the community who know that power must be forced into delivering justice. He is a dear friend of mine and many and it hurts us all that he is denied liberty, especially when he has acted righteously. Those who lied—the accuser and the journalists who mythologised in order to criminalise—will have to answer for themselves."

Renwick concluded: "My friend will be free soon enough, but every day he is denied the right to see his children is a violation. When justice is denied it is taken. Hopefully the state will see—through the solidarity that has emerged—that they cannot pick off the radical members of the community one by one, and that we stand together in this fight for justice. It's sickening that those responsible for mass death walk free, while a man who stood up for his community is behind bars. But this dynamic will be reversed and every injustice has been catalogued. We will seek redress and we will never stop fighting until those responsible are punished and our state has changed enough to prevent anything like this happening again."

The Socialist Equality Party and Grenfell Fire Forum demand that Reis Morris be freed immediately and that those responsible for social murder at Grenfell arrested and charged.

The billions of pounds daily squandered on the selfish whims of the filthy rich must be confiscated and used to provide for the social rights of the working class. This includes an emergency program to build high quality and genuinely affordable housing for all Grenfell survivors and the immediate requisitioning of vacant properties across London to end the homelessness crisis.



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