

Grenfell fire anniversary used by pseudo-left to boost Labour and Corbyn

Robert Stevens
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The second anniversary of the June 14, 2017 Grenfell Tower fire drew thousands to the regular Silent March event last Friday evening. At noon the same day, 72 seconds of silence was held for the victims.

A bright green light, the colour adopted by the local community around Grenfell, was beamed onto the white sheeting which now covers the burnt-out husk of the tower.

The Conservative government of Theresa May—which has done nothing to bring the political and corporate criminals to justice—also cynically bathed the prime minister's official residence in Downing Street in green light. Kensington Palace, home to heir to the throne Prince William and just miles away from Grenfell, was also lit in green.

All the saccharine words and carefully orchestrated scenes on the part of the government cannot conceal the contempt they have for the Grenfell survivors, bereaved and all who demand justice for the perpetrators of this heinous crime.

Nothing has changed in the past two years. The second anniversary took place under conditions in which not a single person has been arrested, let alone charged and put on trial in relation to the 72 deaths. Hundreds of thousands of people still live in and regularly use public buildings that are unsafe.

On the day of the anniversary, research by the Building Safety Programme showed that 328 tower blocks in England still have dangerous highly flammable cladding similar to that used on Grenfell, and that work has not yet begun to remove it on 221 of these.

Attending the Silent March were Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and Labour MP for Kensington and Chelsea Emma Dent-Coad. But despite issuing a few tweets over the weekend, Corbyn and Dent-Coad have

played a critical role in legitimising a government-convened inquiry that has ruled out any examination of the social and economic factors behind the fire and has no powers under Labour's 2005 Inquiries Act to prosecute anyone.

The inquiry was supposed to produce initial findings within weeks of the fire but is yet to publish a single word and is not set to even release its first phase report until the end of this year.

A critical role in lending legitimacy to this cover-up has also been played by the pseudo-left groups, primarily the Socialist Party (SP) and Socialist Workers Party (SWP).

The response to the second anniversary by the SP is to insist that the only vehicle through which justice can be achieved is the Labour Party and the trade unions. The *Socialist* describes a fantasy scenario in which Corbyn is leading a charge, along with shadow chancellor John McDonnell, not just against the Tory government but what they describe as the “pro-capitalist wing of Labour.”

Breathlessly, the SP writes, “Labour councils must refuse to pass on any further cuts. Stop all privatisation of housing, repairs and renovation! London mayor Sadiq Khan must reverse all cuts to the London Fire Brigade and other Labour authorities must do the same.

“Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell must call for this immediately and pledge a Labour government to reimburse any council which uses reserves and borrowing powers to make homes safe and reverse council cuts now.

“A sense of being ignored and abandoned is prevalent among tenants. Jeremy Corbyn and the trade unions should respond by acting as their voice... But this will mean being prepared for a decisive break with the pro-capitalist wing of Labour.”

This is politics according to the Man in the Moon. The call by Justice for Grenfell and the pseudo-left for a Labour government as the way forward in the fight for justice cannot conceal the fact that it is Labour-controlled councils in the forefront of social cleansing policies as they impose draconian cuts in vital social services.

Labour does not have a pro-capitalist *wing*. It is a pro-capitalist *party* and had it been in power in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, would have carried out the same anti-social housing policies as the Tories.

The SWP has nothing political to say on the fire, beyond a description of how the Tories are protecting the guilty, because to say more would cut across their relations with the Labour and trade union bureaucracy.

A piece in *Socialist Worker* on two years since the fire concludes that thousands of people are still living in unsafe tower blocks and “Tory inaction risks another Grenfell happening. Unless, that is, campaigners fighting for justice can push back the campaign of delay and passing the buck.”

How this is to happen is never explained.

The SWP played a central role within Justice for Grenfell in organising the Solidarity March for Grenfell on Saturday. It was backed by the Trades Union Congress London East and South East region, the Fire Brigades Union and the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union. But what was billed as a national rally was even smaller than last year’s event, with only a few hundred people turning out.

To make it appear a more substantial affair, Justice for Grenfell had called for union branches to attend with their banners. This allowed the SWP, seeking at all times to bolster the sagging authority of the trade unions, to boast in their report of the rally, “FBU banners were prominent from all across Britain, alongside ones from Hackney NUT, London Met Unison, Dundee TUC, London Magazine NUJ, London and Eastern Unite and Greenwich and Bexley TUC.”

The march centred on appeals to keep the campaign for justice tied to calls for the Tory government to act. Speaking at the rally before the march, Justice for Grenfell spokeswoman and SWP supporter Moyra Samuels began by pointing to Downing Street and declaring, “It’s time to call out that government to give the bereaved survivors and the community of Grenfell

justice... we expect to see accountability, we expect to see responsibility and we cannot keep waiting with empty promises.”

Corbyn, in a now familiar ritual since he became Labour leader, sent a message to the rally stating, “I am sorry that I cannot be with you on your march today.”

The day after the Grenfell fire he had asked, “[H]ow could this happen in the richest borough in one of the richest cities on earth?” The question has “still not been answered and those responsible have still not been held to account.”

Corbyn knows full well there are no answers because everyone has been diverted into backing a government inquiry, with the police saying there is no possibility of any charges being levelled against anyone until the inquiry has finished, if ever.

Speaking on behalf of the FBU, President Ian Murray was obliged to make certain criticisms of the discredited inquiry even as his union is still endorsing it. He declared, “This [inquiry] cannot be allowed to turn into another Hillsborough [football disaster investigation and inquiry] that takes 30 years to get the truth and answers.”

But while stating that another Hillsborough outcome would be opposed, he added, “No matter *how long they drag the Grenfell tower inquiry out*, we won’t let it be a whitewash and until we do get answers and we do get the truth we will be back here *year after year* on the anniversary of Grenfell ...” [emphasis added]

Labour councillor for the Delgarno ward of Kensington and Chelsea, Kasim Ali, was given a prominent place on the platform. Ali was previously a Presidential Adviser on National Development Programme to the President of Somalia. He related that he was a resident who had witnessed the Grenfell fire and had decided that the only way to respond was to join the Labour Party. What everyone had to do now, he advised, was wait for an incoming Labour government.



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