Conservative MP Jacob Rees-Mogg speaks for British ruling elite in his attack on Grenfell fire victims

Robert Stevens
7 November 2019

The derogatory comments of Conservative MP Jacob Rees-Mogg about the 72 people who died in the Grenfell fire on June 14, 2017, have provoked widespread popular outrage.

Rees-Mogg is Leader of the House of Commons and the former chair of the Tories hard-Brexit European Research Group. Interviewed Monday on the LBC radio show, Rees-Mogg said, “The more one reads over the weekend about the report [the Grenfell Tower Inquiry phase one report] and about the chances of people surviving, if you just ignore what you’re told and leave [the burning tower block] you are so much safer.”

Addressing presenter Nick Ferrari, he added, “And I think if either of us were in a fire, whatever the fire brigade said, we would leave the burning building. It just seems the common-sense thing to do.”

Based on the long-standing “stay-put” policy on dealing with high-rise fires, the London Fire Brigade advised Grenfell residents to remain in their flat and await rescue.

Rees-Mogg’s comments were condemned by Grenfell families. After the MP issued a pro forma apology, Karim Mussilhy, who lost his 57-year-old uncle, Hesham Rehman, in the fire, told the *Guardian*, “The apology is too late … Sorry means nothing. It’s such an easy word to say.”

Grime artist Stormzy tweeted that so many “politicians are evil and wicked and this is why we hate you.” He continued, “72 people died in a tragedy that you are to blame for.”

Rees-Mogg is Britain’s richest MP. Estimates put his personal wealth, combined with the money his wife inherited, at between £100 million and £150 million. This vile individual is a totemic figure for the far right due to his views on Brexit, immigration, law and order, abortion and other issues. On several occasions the fascist Britain First group have mobilised in his defence.

Rees-Mogg is widely known as the “Honourable Member for the 18th century” because of his reactionary views. However, what he says about Grenfell reveals the 21st century attitude of the powers-that-be toward the working class.

The ruling elite were always indifferent to the terrible deaths of so many people at Grenfell, the suffering of their family members and friends and the trauma experienced by the survivors of what was a social crime produced by cost-cutting and deregulation. But faced with public outrage in Britain and internationally at the gruesome deaths in the capital city of the fifth-richest country on the planet, they went into full damage control mode.

Britain was awash with crocodile tears. The Queen, and then Prime Minister Theresa May, visited the area. The younger royals—William, Kate, Meghan and Harry—were mobilised and a national televised memorial service for the victims was held at St Paul’s Cathedral. The prime minister’s residence in Downing Street and other government institutions were bathed in green—the colour adopted by the Grenfell families and survivors.

None of this hides the reality that everything done by the Tory government from the morning after the fire has been aimed at shielding the guilty and preventing justice from being done.

This week, the arrogant buffoon Rees-Mogg decided to ditch the handwringing and to declare on air that those who died were too stupid to get out of a burning building. Confirming that his views were far from unique, Tory Andrew Bridgen MP backed him to the hilt. Asked by BBC Radio 4 presenter, Evan Davis, if Rees-Mogg was “in effect, saying: ‘I wouldn’t have died because I would have been cleverer than the people who took the fire

© World Socialist Web Site

brigade's advice,'" Bridgen responded, "But we want very clever people running the country, don't we Evan? That's a by-product of what Jacob is and that's why he is in a position of authority."

Bridgen also apologised, followed by Tory chairman James Cleverl—and Rees-Mogg went into hiding. But the Tory party, reared on Margaret Thatcher's nostrum that "there is no such thing as society" and representing the interests of a corrupt financial oligarchy, is stuffed with such sociopaths. It emerged this week that a prospective Tory candidate in Wales, Francesca O'Brien, previously tweeted, after watching the reality television show *Benefits Street*, about people living on social security, "My blood is boiling, these people need putting down."

As London's mayor in 2013, Tory Prime Minister Boris Johnson articulated similar positions about the superiority and intelligence of Britain's sated rich in a *Telegraph* article. Paid £250,000 a year for his column—an amount he described as "chicken-feed"—Johnson wrote that all should be "humbly thanking the super-rich, not bashing them."

The "super-rich" belong to "three fairly exclusive categories of human being." They "tend to be well above average" in "mathematical, scientific or at least logical reasoning," possess "a desire to make money" and "have had the good fortune—by luck or birth—to be able to exploit these talents."

Rees-Mogg's comments provided an additional valuable service in highlighting the underlying thought-process of the well-paid media figures who slavishly defend their "betters" from popular hostility. Senior BBC journalist Laura Kuenssberg described Rees-Mogg's comments as a "terrible gaffe"—that is, he violated the unwritten code that such comments must only be made, for example, behind closed doors, at the gentleman's club or a dinner party.

Rees-Mogg's fellow party members in the Conservative-run Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea signed off on the deadly flammable cladding wrapped around Grenfell Tower to make it look less of an eyesore to nearby wealthy neighbours, while saving a few pounds when compared with fire-safe materials. This week, just before Rees-Mogg opened his mouth, it was announced that Rydon, the main contractor on the Grenfell Tower refurbishment, had been appointed one of 12 approved contractors to build high-rise buildings in the public sector in a £30-billion, seven-year construction framework agreement.

In the year after Grenfell, Rydon doubled its post-tax profits to £16.6 million. It was awarded approved contractor status, even though the Grenfell inquiry said in last week's report that there was "compelling evidence" that regulations were flouted during the refurbishment.

The Labour Party naturally moved to make capital out of Rees-Mogg's comments in their election campaign. Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn said, "I'll tell you what's common sense: Don't put flammable cladding on people's homes. That's common sense. Don't close fire stations and don't cut fire fighters. That's common sense."

But Corbyn's comments conceal the fact that Labour councils have loyally carried out savage Tory cuts, as demanded by Corbyn and his Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, as well as brutal social cleansing policies in the towns and cities they run. Moreover, Corbyn maintains support for an inquiry that has no powers to prosecute anyone and will not discuss any "questions of a social, economic and political nature." Meanwhile a police "investigation" continues month after month that has not arrested, let alone charged, anyone in political or corporate circles for turning Grenfell into a death trap.

Amid the extensive reportage of Rees-Mogg's comments on using "common sense," virtually nothing has been said about his remark in the same interview that he didn't think the Grenfell fire had "anything to do with race or class."

In fact, Grenfell had everything to do with social class. Rees-Mogg's comments confirm that no amount of moral pressure will compel Britain's rulers to implement meaningful social reforms. Parliament is an institution of the capitalist state and all its parties serve the interests of a tiny clique of parasites who will allow nothing to get in the way of their accumulation of vast wealth at the expense of society. They represent a failed and rotting capitalist system that offers nothing to working people but misery.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site