

Three years since the Grenfell fire: Collaboration with Grenfell Tower Inquiry must end!

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Sunday marked three years since 72 people—men, women and 18 children, including an unborn baby—died in Grenfell Tower in an act of social murder.

They died in a tower block that was turned into a death trap as part of “regeneration” plans hatched by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea council (RBKC) and its tenant management organisation (TMO).

The 24-storey tower was encased in cheap, flammable cladding. With the building also having myriad fire hazards on the inside, a small kitchen fire on the fourth floor engulfed the entire structure in minutes.

Millions in the UK and around the world were shocked and outraged that this could happen in the middle of London—one of the richest cities in one of the richest countries in the world.

What happened was a crime and yet today the guilty political and corporate parties are no nearer facing justice than they were on the morning after the fire.

Everything that has happened over the last three years points to a cover-up more grotesque than that perpetrated against the victims, bereaved and survivors of the 1989 Hillsborough disaster. Last November, after more than 30 years, the Hillsborough families were denied justice for 96 deaths with no-one held responsible.

Three years on from Grenfell:

- Not a single person at RBKC, the TMO or any of the leaders of the companies involved in covering Grenfell in highly flammable cladding have been arrested or charged with any crime.

- The inquiry set up by the government under Sir Martin Moore-Bick was convened under the Labour government’s 2005 Inquiries Act, and “has no power to determine, any person’s civil or criminal liability.” Protection of the guilty was guaranteed by Moore-Bick and then Prime Minister Theresa May agreeing that any issues of a “social, economic

and political nature” be barred from the inquiry.

- The Inquiry has granted all “natural persons”, or individuals, immunity from prosecution for any oral evidence they give. Earlier this month—after months of lobbying to secure immunity from prosecution based on their testimony by the corporations and other organisations involved in cladding the tower and refurbishment, they too were granted additional protection against criminal prosecution. Attorney General Suella Braverman announced any statements given to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry by “legal persons” cannot be used as evidence against them in a future prosecution. A legal person includes any “limited liability partnership or an incorporated company,” effectively granting immunity to all the corporations involved in Phase Two of the Inquiry.

- The first phase of the Inquiry did not begin until three months after the fire, on September 14, 2017. It finally issued a Phase One report more than two years later, on October 30, 2019. Its criticisms were focused on the failings, real and imagined, of the London Fire Brigade, not on the criminals responsible.

- The second phase of the Inquiry only began in January this year and was then delayed for months to grant legal immunity to the guilty and then by the coronavirus pandemic. It is due to restart next month. The *Guardian* reported Friday that due to the halting of the Inquiry, “Criminal charges are not now expected to be even considered until 2022” by the Metropolitan Police. It was reported in January that the police’s own study of the Inquiry’s final report may take until 2025—eight years after the fire. Given the glacial pace of the Inquiry and non-existent police “investigation,” it is possible that a decade will pass before the police make any decisions.

The governments of May and Boris Johnson have shed no end of crocodile tears over Grenfell. Yet again, Downing Street, other government buildings and the Houses of Parliament were bathed in green light last night—the colour adopted by the Grenfell community in their fight for justice. But everything else is business as usual. At least half a million people still go to bed every night in unsafe buildings. Over 23,000 households remain covered in flammable cladding. Thousands of households are deemed “high-risk” and could suffer the same fate as Grenfell as they are covered in the same type of aluminium composite material (ACM) cladding. Despite repeated statements that remedial work would be prioritised, *next to nothing* has been done to make safe even the most dangerously compromised buildings.

A report published last week by Parliament’s Housing, Communities and Local Government (HCLG) committee notes that Grenfell “was an entirely avoidable tragedy” and that those who died paid a “terrible price for a catastrophic failure of industry and Government.” This statement alone justifies arrests, charging and trials of the guilty.

Titled “Cladding: Progress of Remediation”, its introduction adds, “But Grenfell Tower was not a unique building. That night, there were more than 450 high-rise residential or other publicly owned buildings in England with the same, or similar, dangerous ACM cladding systems. There are still over 300. And this doesn’t include the many thousands of buildings of all heights with other forms of combustible cladding or those buildings with serious fire safety defects, including combustible insulation, timber balconies and walkways, missing fire breaks and faulty fire doors.”

After having “investigated the progress of remediation of high-rise and high-risk buildings,” the HCLG concedes, “It is deeply shocking and completely unacceptable that, three years after the Grenfell Tower fire, there are still 2,000 high-risk residential buildings with dangerous cladding.”

As of May 2020, “of the 457 high-rise residential or other publicly owned buildings over 18 metres initially with ACM cladding, 149 had completed remediation works and 307 were yet to be remediated.”

This is only the tip of a gigantic iceberg. “In addition to those 300 buildings with ACM cladding awaiting remediation, we now know there are likely to be a further 11,300 buildings with other forms of combustible cladding, of which approximately 1,700 are high-risk and likely to require urgent remediation.”

The government has committed just £1 billion to make buildings safe. The HCLG estimates that “The Building Safety Fund will need to be increased to address all fire safety defects in every high-risk residential

building—potentially costing up to £15 billion.”

Despite its damning findings, the HCLG, made up of Tory, Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs, offers nothing to remedy the crisis. It merely asks the government “to ensure that all buildings of any height with ACM cladding...be fully remediated of all fire safety defects by December 2021” and that buildings “with other fire safety defects, including non-ACM cladding, should be remediated before the fifth anniversary of the Grenfell Tower fire in June 2022.”

Put bluntly, this will not happen.

The Grenfell fire revealed the gruesome outcome of a decades-long and ongoing war against the working class, which saw the removal of all restraints on wealth accumulation for the super-rich, including building and fire safety regulations. The fire exposed the failure of capitalism, which is unable to provide the most basic requirement of safe, affordable homes.

As prime minister, Johnson, who told protesting firefighters to “get stuffed” when they opposed his cuts as Mayor of London, is implementing a Malthusian “herd immunity” policy that has led to the death of well over 60,000 people during the pandemic. At least two Grenfell survivors—one of them 63-year-old Virgilio Castro—have died of COVID-19.

Nothing good can come of the whitewash that is the Moore-Bick inquiry. Those such as Jeremy Corbyn and the Fire Brigades Union who continue to support it are facilitating a state cover-up.

The Socialist Equality Party reiterate our call for the Grenfell families and their legal teams to withdraw all cooperation from these fraudulent proceedings. We urge all those fighting for justice to demand that the guilty are immediately arrested, charged, and put on trial.

For further information visit the Grenfell Fire Forum Facebook [page](#) .



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