

Grenfell Tower to be dismantled: Why is there still no justice?

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Last week the UK Labour government informed bereaved family members and survivors of the Grenfell Tower inferno that the remnants of the burnt-out block are to be dismantled.

On June 14, 2017, a small fourth-floor fire rapidly spread to the exterior of the 24 storey building, fuelled by the newly installed flammable cladding and insulation. The fire took the lives of 72 people.

Since then the tower has remained in place, wrapped in protective cladding, pending a decision on what to do with it. Constructed in 1974, the structure is now over 50 years old and, following the devastating fire, supported by 6,000 metal props.

As the tower is a graveyard of the victims, the Grenfell Tower Memorial Commission was established in 2018 by the previous Conservative government with a remit of “consulting with those bereaved by the Grenfell tragedy, survivors of the tragedy, and North Kensington residents to agree a community-led proposal”.

Last week this process was concluded in the most insensitive manner possible by the Labour government—which replaced the Tories last July—announcing that, on safety grounds, Grenfell Tower would be brought “to the ground” over a two-year period. A memorial would be built in its place.

According to a report in the *Times* and confirmed by a statement from Grenfell United—a group of survivors and bereaved families—Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner went ahead with the decision after a four-week process described by the government as a “consultation” with the families and survivors.

Karim Mussilhy lost an uncle, Hesham Rahman, in the fire. The *Times* reported that at a meeting Rayner held with the bereaved families and survivors on February 6, “Mussilhy, sitting at the back, stood up and asked Rayner to tell the room how many families she had spoken to.

“She turned around and she said, ‘I can’t, I can’t give you that.’ Everyone got really upset and angry.”

He added: “We understand it’s inevitable that the tower

can’t remain the way it is indefinitely. But you need to have a meaningful consultation and conversation with the bereaved families. Our families’ remains are still embedded in that concrete.”

The newspaper reported, “At one point, attendees were asked to show their hands if they had been consulted directly about the demolition. Very few went up.”

Mussilhy said of Rayner, “You could see she was getting quite flustered and angry and then shortly after that she was escorted out of the room.”

Labour’s decision is callous but by no means the worst of the injustice overseen by successive governments since the fire. It draws attention again to the fact that, almost eight years on, and despite a seven-year inquiry and deliberately slow police “investigation”, no one in corporate or political circles has been held responsible.

The atrocity was caused by profiteering companies which turned the tower into a deathtrap, enabled by years of government attacks on “red tape” safety regulations. Local residents and workers across the country demanded the immediate arrests of those responsible for this act of social murder.

It was this sentiment that moved a panicked Conservative government to call a public inquiry on June 15—just 24 hours after the fire—invoking a tried-and-tested mechanism which has allowed the guilty to evade justice again and again.

This was to run parallel to a phony “criminal investigation” by London’s Metropolitan Police, which stated from the outset that there would be no possibility of charges, let alone convictions, until the inquiry had run its course, and its final report examined. All despite the masses of evidence indicating who was responsible available from the very first hours after the fire.

Anger escalated and, on June 16, two days after the fire—with the local Conservative-run council providing no services and leaving a devastated and traumatised local community to fend for itself—hundreds protested at Kensington Town Hall. There were no calls for a public inquiry. Protesters carried home-made placards denouncing

the criminals responsible and chanted “murderers!”, “We want justice!” and “Shame on you!”. (See video below)

The plan to deflect and contain workers’ demands for justice with a public inquiry could never have gotten off the ground had it not been for the Labour Party, particularly its then leader Jeremy Corbyn and prominent local Labour MP Emma Dent Coad, who insisted there was no alternative.

Corbyn held a commanding position, having won the party leadership two years prior with a huge mandate from his supporters to drive out his Blairite opponents and oppose austerity and war. Had he opposed the inquiry from the start as a diversion and instead demanded immediate arrests and prosecutions of the guilty, this would have met a mass response.

On August 15, 2017, May announced the terms of reference of the inquiry, to be held under the Labour government’s 2005 Inquiries Act and therefore with no power to lay criminal charges. May and the inquiry chair—establishment stooge Sir Martin Moore-Bick—agreed a stipulation that the proceedings would not investigate any issues of a “social, economic and political nature”.

Three days later, Corbyn gave his seal of approval, writing that it was “a relief that the inquiry is now up and running, and that survivors are one step closer to the answers they so desperately need.” His supposed caveat was a call on May to “immediately set out a clear, independent and thorough process for identifying and addressing the broader failings that led to the Grenfell fire,” a process which “should work closely with Sir Martin Moore-Bick’s inquiry”.

Corbyn was backed by Dent Coad. Formerly a councillor on Kensington and Chelsea London Borough Council (RBKC), she was the leader of the opposition and leader of the council’s Labour Group from 2014 to 2015. Just days before the fire, she was elected MP for Kensington, a traditional Tory stronghold. This was an indication of the widespread support for Corbyn. But, like the Labour leader, Dent Coad did nothing to galvanise mass popular opposition to those guilty for the fire—including those who ran the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea council, of which she had intimate knowledge.

Two years after the inquiry had been set up, Dent Coad questioned gently in Parliament “whether meaningful change will come from this detailed and forensic process.” But she maintained her support for the process, and the police investigation, while admitting, “The timeline for criminal charges is slipping and, along with it, the hope for justice.”

In September last year, the inquiry issued a 1,700-page whitewash, delivering as the WSWs reported nothing more than “a few slapped wrists to the companies involved,” with “governments going back to 1991 admonished for not

learning the lessons of previous fires, and for their ‘decades of failure’ over the issue of public buildings being clad in flammable material.”

By this time, two general elections had taken place, in 2019 and 2024, with the second placing the Labour Party in power. The abject refusal of Corbyn, Dent Coad and other “lefts” to wage any struggle against the Labour right—whose policies of deregulation under Blair played a major role in Grenfell—meant that the party was now under the leadership of Sir Keir Starmer, and neither Corbyn or Dent Coad were Labour MPs.

Corbyn was hounded out by a witch-hunt alleging “left antisemitism” which he did nothing to oppose, and barred from representing Labour in the 2024 election. Dent Coad lost her seat at the 2019 general election—and was blocked in 2022 by the right-wing leadership from Labour’s longlist of candidates to run in 2024 for the Kensington and Bayswater parliamentary seat—before resigning from the Labour Party in April 2023.

The only political organisation which opposed an inquiry into the Grenfell Fire was the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and our Grenfell Fire Forum initiative.

In one of its first statements on the fire, headlined “Corporate mass murder in London”, the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote that the public inquiry was “aimed at ensuring a cover-up and the protection of those responsible”, demanding that they be “arrested and face criminal proceedings”.

Two months after the inferno, the SEP hosted a public meeting in the area under the title, “Social Murder: A crime against the working class”, attended by around 100 people. SEP National Secretary Chris Marsden called on “all survivors, local residents and workers everywhere to place no confidence in May’s rotten whitewash of an inquiry, or in Labour’s attempt to make it more palatable. They must rely on themselves alone, on their social power.”

With today’s Labour government committed to austerity to fund its role as the junior military partner of Trump’s fascist administration in the United States, this message applies with redoubled force.



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