"They killed people—the building department, the state, the city, all of them": Calls for justice for victims of Brooklyn building collapse grow louder

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In the two weeks since the building collapse in Flatbush, Brooklyn killed eight people, no official cause has been determined, no formal finding of fault has been issued, and no arrests or criminal charges have been filed.

As official silence drags on, grieving families and neighbors have gathered across the city to demand accountability. Speaking at a Saturday vigil outside the collapse site, Brenda Vásquez, whose 26-year-old husband, Edgar Sapón, was killed working on the site, addressed the crowd. “We are here today demanding justice. I know that demanding justice won’t bring my husband back. Sadly, there was someone who failed to do their job,” she said, according to the New York Post. “My husband left behind a child, and I know his coworkers also left children behind, children who do not deserve to grow up without a father. I demand justice. I truly hope the authorities take action.”

The disaster has left a profound impact across the community. “One of the construction workers who died in the collapse stayed with me,” a construction worker living nearby told the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS). “It is very difficult because he was a friend of my father and myself for a long time. A lot of people are coming to look at this. I feel very bad.”

Last week, another vigil was held in Queens to honor Gabriel Siguencia Yupa, a 22-year-old construction worker killed in the collapse who had been saving money to bring his wife and three-year-old son to the United States from Ecuador. “I ask for justice with all my heart, as a mother who is broken, who won’t be able to hug her son again,” his mother, María Leonor Yupa, said at the vigil, according to a report by Documented. Gabriel’s father, Luis Ariolfo Siguencia Loja, pointed directly to those responsible: “I would blame the city and the [construction] companies for the death of my son. The only thing I ask is justice for myself and for every person that was working in that construction.”

Several official inquiries are ongoing. On November 12, the Brooklyn District Attorney opened a criminal investigation alongside the NYPD focusing on whether criminal negligence or reckless conduct contributed to the collapse. The Department of Buildings (DOB) is bringing in an independent forensic engineering consultant to determine the technical causes of the collapse and is inspecting more than 160 active New York City job sites tied to the companies involved. While the full results have not been released, public records show at least 25 sites have been inspected, five of which have been issued new stop-work orders. Simultaneously, the City Department of Investigation is conducting a review alongside the Brooklyn DA.

Yet despite all these official investigations, there are few signs that they will lead to anything other than a whitewash. Given the developer’s history of violating stop-work orders and disregarding the known structural weaknesses of the building that collapsed, along with the landlord’s refusal to provide basic maintenance, there is already more than enough evidence for arrests and prosecutions.

More crucially, who will investigate the investigators? The government organizing these inquiries is itself culpable. Last year, 10 construction workers died, and 320 were injured requiring immediate emergency care at sites overseen by the New York City DOB. Rather than reversing this deadly record, the Democratic administration of Mayor Zohran Mamdani, the post prominent elected official from the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), has not only continued business as usual, but has also based its housing strategy on leaning on developers’ profit interests to speed up construction.

On the day of the collapse, Mayor Mamdani claimed at a press conference, “If there is anyone or any entity operating in this city who is responsible for this, we will hold them accountable.” Yet exactly one week later, Mamdani stood before New York City’s business community pledging to cut red tape for housing developers and vowing to make New York “a city where it is easiest to build.”

This profit-driven rush to build underlies disasters like the building collapse. Moussa, a resident of the partially collapsed building at 1323 Flatbush Avenue, spoke to the WSWS about his experience. He was on his way to work when the collapse sheared off his building’s entire north wall. “My wife called me, and after a while she said to come to emergency, and she told me the building collapsed. I said, ‘How?’”

Asked who was to blame for the disaster, Moussa’s replied, “To

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me, I condemn the engineering people, the architecture people, the New York City people, and New York State people, all of that. They say New York City has the best engineering in the world. Where are those engineers before that happened? Where was the housing department? Where was the building department? Where was New York State? Where was New York City? Where were the inspectors? They're there now, but why weren't they there before?"

He continued, "They killed people—the building department, the state, the city, all of them. You give them impunity to kill people." Pointing to the token fine assessed against the developer for ignoring a stop-work order, he added, "Why did you take $10,000 for someone's life? $10,000 is nothing for the millionaire people. They're rich."

Long before the collapse, Moussa and his family endured deplorable conditions in his building, living for years without a working shower, hot water, or a landlord-provided refrigerator, forcing him to buy a small fridge and an electric stove to cook for his child. Meanwhile, the apartment's broken sink, lead paint, and leaking ceiling were never addressed. Like the neighboring building that fully collapsed, 1323 Flatbush had accumulated nearly 200 violations with the city's Department of Housing Preservation and Development.

Referring to reports that the landlord had previously spent time in jail for refusing to make repairs, Moussa asked, "How is someone who goes to jail and comes out still allowed to continue to do that? I'm blaming New York City, all those people. They can never pay those lives back. Their mothers are crying for them."

The disaster is inseparable from the broader housing crisis squeezing working class New Yorkers. "Mamdani needs to go to all these buildings, check all of them, and bring the rent down for all the people," Moussa said. "The people who work—say you make $500, $600 every week—how are you gonna pay rent? The rent is $2,000 a month for a one-bedroom apartment; a two-bedroom apartment is going to be $3,000 a month. All of New York State and New York City too needs to be building affordable apartment housing for the people."

Mamdani will not confront the real estate and other corporate oligarchs that have long dominated New York City. On the contrary, the mayor recently praised Trump—whose father was a racist slumlord—as the "most famous developer the city has ever seen." The DSA mayor also said he does not "begrudge" the success of billionaires in New York, claiming the success of these "business leaders" was "also the success of our city."

Expressing widespread disillusionment with the political establishment, Moussa added, "I'm telling you, I really hate politics because what they tell us today, then tomorrow when they're in power, they'll never do that."

Other residents outside the site last week echoed the same sentiment. "It's just crazy," one neighbor told the WSWS. "This didn't have to happen. It's a big example of what's already been happening in the world with corruption and violations and policies being overlooked."

While city officials investigate themselves and promise developers faster timelines, ordinary residents have responded with an outpouring of support for the victims. After the collapse, a steady stream of residents carried packages and unloaded boxes of toiletries, winter clothing, and other essentials to the Flatbush YMCA, which became the main reception center. The response was so overwhelming that the YMCA reached full capacity and stopped accepting physical donations on November 17. Bethesda Church of God, other local churches, Kings Theatre, Community Board 17, and Brooklyn Borough Hall have also collected gift cards, clothing, and unopened essentials, while local organizations established direct financial assistance and online GoFundMe campaigns for affected families.

Outside of the YMCA, a worker for a non-profit told the WSWS, "This is a tragedy. I rallied people to donate money. My sister lived in a Bushwick building that burnt down in August. She was not hurt, but she lost her belongings. You can extrapolate a pattern of negligence. Obviously, the people who are paying the consequences are not responsible."

As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote on November 12:

> Workers and tenants cannot entrust the investigation of this disaster to the agencies and officials whose policies produced it. What is required is an independent investigation by workers and residents, with full access to the permit files, inspection reports and communications of the developer and the city. Rank-and-file committees must be built on job sites and in apartment buildings, with the power to stop dangerous work and to demand repairs.
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> Decent and safe housing for all is a social right, not a commodity. Securing it requires a massive public program to build and repair housing under the democratic control of the working class, financed by expropriating the fortunes of the real estate and financial oligarchy and redirecting the resources now consumed by war. That is the socialist program for which the Socialist Equality Party is fighting.

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