

Grenfell Fire Forum: Wide-ranging discussion and resolution passed opposing Google censorship

By Paul Mitchell
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Over 20 people, half of whom were local residents, attended the first meeting of the Grenfell Fire Forum last Saturday at the Maxilla Social Club in North Kensington, London.

Those in attendance agreed to work together to investigate the issues raised by residents during the discussion, including how to oppose the government's inquiry, publish their findings on the *World Socialist Web Site* and to increase participation in the forum and its future meetings. The meeting voted unanimously for a resolution opposing Google's censorship of the WSWS and other left-wing web sites.

WSWS journalist Robert Stevens welcomed everyone to the meeting, held just a short distance from the burnt-out remains of the tower, and said the day's meeting was a democratic forum, inviting everyone to freely discuss.

In a brief opening report, Stevens explained that the Socialist Equality Party had campaigned from the beginning in the Grenfell Tower area and internationally to explain the significance of the "social murder" that had occurred. The goal was not just "justice for the survivors" but "a better society based on human need and not for private profit."

Stevens described how the inquiry under the government appointed judge, Sir Martin Moore-Bick, was not independent but part of a state orchestrated cover-up. The charges of corporate manslaughter being investigated by the police meant that no person will be held responsible and that no serious prosecution will result. Stevens explained that Moore-Bick had refused to appoint any local residents to his advisory panel because he claimed it "risked undermining impartiality." What he meant was that he was beholden to the very people who were responsible for the tragedy.

Moore-Bick, Stevens said, also made it clear that he "had no power to punish or compensate people," that he was only interested in the technical issues that had caused the fire and that "matters of a social, economic or political nature were excluded." It was exactly the social, economic and political background to the fire that the SEP had "promised to dissect in order to counter the propaganda" at its well-attended public meeting held on August 19.

"It is not so much about bad individuals or a corrupt TMO [Tenants Management Organisation] but about a wider capitalist system against which we are advancing a socialist perspective," Stevens concluded before opening the floor up for discussion.

In the discussion that followed, J. said, "We have to list all those MPs, who in five seconds have voted against health and safety laws. It's not hard for them to make these decisions, but they have consequences for all of us. In my own housing block, the gas engineers, who used to be Corgi accredited, have been replaced by less qualified, cheaper ones. The government wants to wrap up the protests and for people to go away."

A number of speakers described how the Ladbroke Grove area of west London has been socially cleansed over recent years. L. explained the way that council house tenants under the Blair Labour government were told to get more involved in the running of TMOs—in effect, providing a "democratic" cover for council houses to be handed over to housing associations based on the bogus concept of "affordable housing."

L. said, "In the 1990s the tenants were encouraged to train and be part of the TMO. Then they got taken over by business interests and things were choreographed for a different outcome."

She said it would be important to talk to council staff

who had opposed the transformation of TMOs into business concerns: “What happened to those housing officers, like mine, who had expressed concerns to the TMO and then disappeared from their jobs? We should contact them.”

L. explained how the Poor Clares Monastery was redeveloped by Kensington and Chelsea Council, ignoring the former owner’s covenants about new flats being for “those in genuine need of housing and not being built for profit making.” Instead developers have built new flats, half of which are privately owned. She described how the Youth Service headquarters in Lancaster Road was sold off to become a private school, as was Ladbroke nursery.

M. told of his involvement in one of London’s largest redevelopment schemes, that around the Earls Court exhibition centre—in the neighbouring borough to Kensington and Chelsea, Labour-controlled Hammersmith and Fulham—where he has lived for the last 55 years. It has led to the demolition of 760 social homes on two estates owned by the council and their replacement by 7,500 expensive flats selling for £1.5 million. Some 740 were built as “affordable,” but these were out of the reach to anyone except those on middle class incomes.

M. said, “At a stroke of pen, these decisions are made. Ordinary people suffer. Grenfell is the most important example of this. We have to seize on this. There has been one cover-up after another. We have to expose them. That is what they are really nervous about.”

E. spoke about the campaign to save the Wornington Road campus of Kensington and Chelsea College, which was sold for £25 million to Kensington and Chelsea Council last year under a lease-back arrangement. She said the council wants to demolish the building, reducing the teaching facilities for local working class residents and replace it with luxury flats.

Wornington Road college was a “lifeline” for local residents and many of the courses, such as drama, music and fine arts, had already been closed down. If the redevelopment went ahead “only a small learning facility in the basement” would be left, E. explained.

“All the estates locally are being knocked down. Older properties are being allowed to deteriorate. The new flats that replace them are not fit for purpose—cheap and dangerous. The council has also covered up the asbestos content in flats. They have refused to answer our questions about it, but after the Grenfell fire they admitted every ceiling and cupboard had it. There has been a big

cover-up over these issues.

“It’s not even a party-political thing. We’ve got a Conservative majority on Kensington and Chelsea council, but when we had a Labour government we saw the same things happening. What affects the Grenfell fire survivors—the allocation system, the bidding for accommodation—was set up under a Labour government.

“We have had to fight against all of them. They have impunity but we get the book thrown at us, we get evicted, for the slightest complaint. This is our life and, as Grenfell shows, our death.

“This is not the end of the fight. This is the beginning. Those in power keep breaking the law. These people are gangsters.

“The press is no different. They crawl all over the place. They interview us, the people who are telling the truth, but by the time it appears on the TV, you don’t get any of that interview at all. They censor it.”

At the meeting’s conclusion there was a unanimous vote for the following resolution:

The Grenfell Fire Forum opposes the censorship of the Internet being carried out by Google and the blacklisting of the World Socialist Web Site.

Since changes made by Google in April, under the guise of combating fake news, search traffic from Google to the WSWS has fallen by more than two thirds.

The WSWS has a long and well-established record of reporting the truth. It has produced more than one hundred articles on the Grenfell Tower Fire, explaining how it happened and fighting for those responsible to be brought to justice.

The WSWS has interviewed many survivors and local residents about the fire and given them a voice. The censorship of the WSWS denies people and all those concerned with establishing the truth a voice, and can only assist central and local government in perpetuating their attempts at a cover-up. We add our support to the thousands of people who have already signed a petition to Google demanding they immediately stop their censorship of the internet and the WSWS.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>