

One year since the Grenfell inferno

14 June 2018

One year ago, the worst high-rise fire in British history in Grenfell Tower cost the lives of 72 people.

What took place in the early hours of June 14, 2017 was social murder. This was the term first coined by Frederick Engels in his famous study, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. Writing in 1845, at the beginning of industrial capitalism, he explained, “When society places hundreds of proletarians in such a position that they inevitably meet a too early and an unnatural death...” and “yet permits these conditions to remain, its deed is murder just as surely as the deed of the single individual.”

Engels’ indictment of an entire social system—capitalism—resonates more than 150 years later.

This is because it speaks to the common experience of working people the world over. From poisoned water in the American city of Flint, Michigan to collapsing garbage dumps and mudslides in Colombo and Sierra Leone that have killed many, to an entirely preventable tower block inferno in London—one of the richest cities in the world—the lives of working people are considered expendable by a parasitic financial oligarchy that subordinates every aspect of social and economic life to its enrichment.

Grenfell was the direct result of the deregulatory policies carried out by successive Labour and Conservative-led governments.

From Margaret Thatcher’s “There is no such thing as society,” through the Blair government’s insistence on being “intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich,” to David Cameron’s pledge to “kill off” the “excessive health and safety... albatross around the neck of British businesses,” workers’ living standards and conditions have been gutted to fill the bank accounts of the major corporations and the super-rich.

This offensive against the working class found malignant expression in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC), in London’s richest constituency.

To save money while gentrifying its external appearance, Grenfell Tower was wrapped in highly flammable insulation and cladding, turning it into a death trap. The inside of the building was no safer, with no central fire alarm system, no sprinklers and a single narrow stairwell the only means of escape. As a result, a small fire in a single flat on the fourth floor spread in a matter of minutes to engulf the entire 24-storey structure. Firefighters battled against the odds to contain the blaze.

The surviving residents of Grenfell Tower and its environs were abandoned by the authorities, with many only able to eat, sleep and clothe themselves thanks to the selfless efforts of the local community. The government admits that 69 households remain in temporary accommodation, while RBKC has reportedly threatened 74 households that they must now return to the estate they fled or face indefinite homelessness and a loss of their rights as council tenants.

In the fire’s aftermath, survivors, their relatives and others demanded the politicians and corporations responsible be brought to justice, forcing Prime Minister Theresa May to announce the holding of a “full, independent public inquiry” that would “produce an interim report by the end of this summer at the latest” and “ensure that this tragedy is fully investigated.”

As the SEP warned at the time, “Nothing of the sort will ever happen. As with every public inquiry called by the ruling elite it will end in a whitewash.”

Almost one year on, the public inquiry—led by a pillar of the establishment, Sir Martin Moore-Bick—has produced nothing. Its aim is not to reveal but to conceal the truth; not to hold the guilty to account but to protect the criminals in central and local government and the corporate entities who signed off on the “refurbishment” of Grenfell.

This is made clear by the 2005 Inquiries Act, which

states, “An inquiry panel is not to rule on, and has no power to determine, any person’s civil or criminal liability.” Moore-Bick himself has recommended, in agreement with May, that issues of a “social, economic and political nature” should not be addressed.

Along with social murder goes class injustice.

While no time has been lost in prosecuting a handful of people making fraudulent claims to do with the Grenfell fire, the Metropolitan Police’s criminal investigation into the inferno has seen not a single person arrested—let alone charged—in connection with the deaths of 72 people!

To add insult to injury, as the inquiry opened it was announced that the Metropolitan Police are to target the London Fire Brigade for possible crimes relating to the “stay put” advice given to tenants. Not a word about the fact that the advice proved so disastrous because of what the counsel for the Fire Brigades Union described as “multiple” safety failings that meant the building was a “highly combustible death trap”, with fire-fighters put in an “impossible situation.”

The refusal of the ruling elite to pursue the real criminals guilty of the Grenfell atrocity is also in stark contrast to their determination to silence anyone fighting to establish the truth about events.

Hysterical witch-hunts have been mounted by the right-wing media against Joe Delaney and Edward Daffarn, both part of the Grenfell Action Group that warned of the danger of a “catastrophic” fire resulting from the policies of RBKC and its tenant management organisation. Delaney, who lived adjacent to Grenfell Tower, has fought for years for the rights of tenants in the area to live in decent, secure housing. Daffarn escaped from his flat on Grenfell’s 16th floor.

Others denounced were filmmaker Daniel Renwick and local resident Ishmael, whose crime was to make a truthful film about Grenfell— *Failed by the State* .

Nothing is accidental. The high point of this campaign to suppress the truth is the ongoing and cruel attempt to silence Julian Assange. The WikiLeaks founder and editor has now been trapped for six years in the Ecuadorian Embassy, *less than four miles from Grenfell*, facing arrest and deportation to the US to face trial for espionage for revealing the war crimes of Washington and London.

Meanwhile things continue as before, with the rich getting richer and the workers milked for every penny.

Just as Moore-Bick’s inquiry opened, Prince Harry and Meghan Markle were returning to their “cottage” in the grounds of Kensington Palace—just a few miles from Grenfell. Some £30 million in public taxes were squandered on their nuptials, while the bride’s dress alone was reported to have cost as much as the £300,000 saved by using cheaper, flammable cladding on Grenfell Tower.

The money-mad and sociopathic ruling class in every country are incapable of addressing anything, except the further transfer of wealth to the super-rich and commissioning wars that threaten humanity with destruction.

The freeing up of social resources to meet the needs of working people requires breaking the stranglehold of the financial aristocracy and its political representatives, and reorganising society on socialist foundations. This is the perspective of the Socialist Equality Party.

Statement of the Socialist Equality Party (UK)

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