

London Metropolitan Police cite Grenfell Inquiry to justify not pressing criminal charges

End collaboration with the inquiry now!

By Robert Stevens and Chris Marsden
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London's Metropolitan Police will not press any charges regarding the 72 deaths at Grenfell Tower until "the latter part of 2021." They justify this extraordinary admission by citing the need to wait for the government inquiry into Grenfell to complete its business.

The Met's criminal investigation and the inquiry are "inextricably linked," the brief statement declares. Therefore, "both the police senior investigating officer and the CPS [Crown Prosecution Service] agree that the police investigation must take into account any findings or reports produced by the [Grenfell Tower] Inquiry, *including its final report*" (emphasis added).

Only then and only if "the police investigation concludes there is sufficient evidence to consider criminal charges" will the Met submit a file "to the CPS for its consideration."

Phase two of the inquiry doesn't even begin until the end of this year, so it is "unlikely" that any action will be taken by the Met until late 2021. This would be almost five years after the fire and even this is an optimistic figure—based upon phase two being completed in less than two years and the presiding judge, Sir Martin Moore-Bick, delivering his verdict soon afterwards. It could be much longer.

Detective Superintendent Matt Bonner posed as someone anxious to respect the inquiry, adding that he was in contact with "bereaved families and survivors as well as the wider community" and that "I know this is longer than some might have anticipated, but the police must ensure all the available evidence is considered before any file is submitted to the CPS."

This is so much hogwash. What is confirmed by the Met's announcement is that the Grenfell Tower Inquiry is a filthy manoeuvre by the Conservative government, convened with the sole purpose of protecting the guilty from legal retribution.

From day one, every conceivable document was thrown at

the inquiry's "core participants" and their legal teams. In December 2017—six months after the fire, speaking to the inquiry on behalf of the Met, Jeremy Johnson QC said the police had acquired 31 million documents and had possession of 2,500 physical exhibits. It had taken 2,332 witness statements from 1,144 witnesses, and 383 companies had been identified as having some involvement in or connection to the construction or refurbishment of Grenfell Tower. There were 3,916 investigative tasks or lines of inquiry generated. Moreover, "interviews of further witnesses or of suspects" could not take place until the forensic analysis "of every room within the tower, as well as every inch of the communal areas and, of course, importantly, the outside of the tower" had taken place.

On this basis, the Met insisted that no one could even be questioned for another nine months. Now everyone is being told to wait for another three years at least.

At the end of the first stage of the inquiry, Moore-Bick announced that because there were still a "large number of documents which will need to be reviewed, redacted and digested" and studied by core participants, this "work won't be complete until autumn next year [2019]," making it necessary to delay the start of the second stage of the inquiry.

Even now, the *Guardian* reported Thursday that "Inquiry lawyers have been swamped with 476,000 separate documents." Swamping the lawyers involved is the intended outcome of this barrage of exhibits.

In phase one of the inquiry, bereaved family members and survivors were asked to recount their terrible experiences for days on end. This testimony alone provided damning evidence of the necessity to bring the guilty to justice. But none of this mattered from a legal standpoint. The inquiry has no legal powers to prosecute anyone. It is being held under the 2005 Inquiries Act which stipulates that "An

inquiry panel is not to rule on, and has no power to determine, any person's civil or criminal liability." This remit was further circumscribed by Moore-Bick and Prime Minister Theresa May, who decided the inquiry would be "limited to the cause, how it spread, and preventing a future blaze," and ruled out any examination of issues of a "social, economic and political nature."

Meanwhile nothing of any substance has been told to the inquiry by the leaders of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Council and its Tenant Management Organisation, or by the various heads of the corporations whose collective decisions turned Grenfell into a death trap by shrouding the tower block in highly flammable cladding.

It is high time to bring this rotten fraud to an end!

In the aftermath of Grenfell, the demands for justice from survivors and grieving relatives won the support of millions of workers and young people in the UK and throughout the world. This struck fear in the hearts of the ruling elite.

It was this which prompted May to convene the Moore-Bick inquiry. Her intention was to neuter social and political protests by forcing everything back into official channels—an inquiry they always intended to be a dead end.

The inquiry was boosted as a means of securing justice not only by May, but by the Labour Party, the trade unions and various pseudo-left groups. This time would not be like the inquiry into the 1989 Hillsborough stadium disaster, with an inquiry into the deaths of 96 Liverpool fans not producing any charges until June 2017. The lesson of Hillsborough should in fact have been heeded, not dismissed.

Last month, Fire Brigades Union (FBU) General Secretary Matt Wrack belatedly warned that the Moore-Bick inquiry was not only in danger of becoming a "whitewash," but that his own members risked being scapegoated for the deaths of Grenfell's residents over the standard "stay-put" advice on the night. However, this statement was made after months of collaborating with the inquiry and only because, as Wrack admitted, "The views I am expressing are being expressed more bluntly in fire stations, that this [inquiry] is in danger of turning into a stitch-up of firefighters ..."

It is no longer possible to view the Grenfell Inquiry as anything other than a stitch-up—just as the Socialist Equality Party warned. We stated on June 16, 2017, "As with every public inquiry called by the ruling elite it will end in a whitewash."

The Grenfell Fire Forum was established by the SEP for the express purpose of exposing the inquiry as a fraud, while making known all significant testimony given to as broad an audience as possible.

The evidence put forward before the inquiry should from the very beginning have been given before a judge and jury, with solicitors and relevant experts presenting the evidence

and those found guilty sent to prison. That must now take place without further delay.

The SEP and Grenfell Fire Forum call on survivors and relatives, the local community and all those seeking Justice for Grenfell to end all collaboration with the Moore-Bick inquiry and demand that criminal prosecutions begin immediately.

Many of the guilty are already known to the police. This week's Met statement did not provide an update on who it has questioned about the Grenfell fire since its previous update seven months ago. But the *Guardian* reported its understanding that the "police have so far interviewed 11 people under criminal caution for offences ranging from manslaughter to health and safety breaches. Some were interviewed as representatives of their organisation, others as individuals."

All those culpable in the crime of social murder at Grenfell Tower through their part in the decision to add flammable cladding must be arrested and charged, including former Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea council leader Nicholas Paget-Brown; his then-deputy, Rock Feilding-Mellen; the former head of the council's housing management organisation, Robert Black; and the relevant representatives of Rydon, Harley Facades and other companies involved. Charges should also be brought against former London Mayor Boris Johnson, who slashed fire service budgets, and May and her predecessors, David Cameron, Gordon Brown and Tony Blair, whose governments gutted public spending and slashed building regulations.

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