

Bereaved family members march on Downing Street to demand UK COVID-19 inquiry

By Robert Stevens
13 July 2020

Families representing over 1,000 coronavirus victims marched to Downing Street Saturday to protest the Johnson government ignoring their demand for an independent public inquiry into the Tories handling of the pandemic.

Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice UK have set up a petition calling for an “immediate inquiry” that has been signed by over 154,000 people. It states, “The UK death toll has risen to over 40,000, and it is one of the highest in the world. We’re urgently calling for an inquiry to find out why—and to stop this happening again. Especially as we may be on the brink of a second wave.

“Each person who has died in this pandemic is a loved person, a life gone too soon and a family torn apart... it is clear that there were huge gaps in the country’s preparedness including delays to locking down, inadequate supplies of PPE, policies of discharging into care homes and more... Despite this, the government continues to refer to its ‘apparent success’ and being ‘proud’ of its record.”

According to the group’s lawyer, Elkan Abrahamson, an inquiry could be led by a High Court judge. If the government refuses to hold a public inquiry, lawyers representing the families say they are prepared to challenge the decision at the High Court via a judicial review.

One of those attending the protest was co-founder Jo Goodman, 32, who lost her father Stuart, 72, on April 2. Stuart had to attend a hospital appointment in person on March 18 and it is possible this is when he became infected. Speaking to the *Daily Mirror*, Jo, from Norwich, said, “It’s been a month since we sent our formal request calling for an inquiry and we’ve been blanked ever since. The Prime Minister [Boris Johnson] has not even given us the decency of a

personal acknowledgment, let alone responded to our requests for a meeting.

“So we thought if he won’t come to us, then we would go to him. We won’t let the deaths of our loved ones be in vain.”

Another member is Ken Sazuze, the husband of Elsie Sazuze, a nurse at a care home who died in Sutton Coldfield on April 8, aged 44. She left behind son Andrew, 22 and daughter Anna, 16. Leshie, also a member, is the daughter of a London bus driver, Ranjith Chandrapala, who drove the 92 bus route from Ealing hospital, where he died on May 3, aged 64. The father of member Fiona Kirton, Bernard, was transferred from a hospital to a care home without first being tested for the virus. He died in Warwick Hospital on Tuesday April 7, aged 84. Many other families have suffered the same fate. Around 22,000 of COVID-19 deaths in Britain have been in care homes.

Charlie Williams’ father, Rex, died of COVID-19 at the care home where he lived in April in Coventry. Speaking to *Channel 4 News* July 7, Charlie said Rex died within days of being diagnosed with coronavirus. “We were first notified on Thursday April 16 that his health had deteriorated and by Monday he’s passed away... My father was bed bound in a day care home, where he had lived for several years happily. We were told, that they had received patients from the hospital and before we knew it our dad had passed away...”

As part of the government’s policy to free up NHS beds, thousands of elderly people were sent to nursing homes. Many were not tested for COVID-19. Charlie was interviewed on the same day that Johnson blamed care homes for deaths as “too many care homes didn’t really follow the procedures in the way that they could.”

Charlie said that the bereaved families’ group “had

got a reply, quite late on [from Downing Street]” in response to their petition. This was “two lines, not even condolences, a measly two lines he gave us. We are quite disgusted with that reply... they basically acknowledged that they had received the letter and that’s it.”

While the petition correctly warns of the dangers of a second wave due to the reckless flinging open of the economy with all schools to reopen in September, the first wave of the pandemic continues. As the families protested at Downing Street, a further 148 deaths were announced and 820 cases. On Sunday, a further 21 people were reported dead.

The deaths recorded over the weekend brought the official death tally to 44,819, equating to 660 deaths per million—a higher rate than every major capitalist country in the world except Belgium (844 per million). However, the government’s figures do not include “excess deaths”—understood to be the most accurate measures of COVID-19 deaths.

Several newspapers, including the *Financial Times* and the *Times*, conclude that over 65,000 excess deaths have already occurred. The FT noted at the weekend, “The total number of people who died, directly or indirectly from coronavirus in the UK, during the phase when deaths were above average, stood at just over 65,200.” Jamie Jenkins, “an independent statistician who formerly worked at the ONS, estimates a figure of just over 69,000 for the entire pandemic.”

Numbers signing the petition have grown substantially in the last days, reflecting mounting anger at the horrifying human cost of the Conservative government’s “herd immunity” policy allowing the deaths of tens of thousands, including thousands of health and social care staff, education workers and teachers. Some of those signing the petition on Sunday commented:

- “We have been deceived and lied to by this Government.”
- “As a care worker, we are doing our absolute best to protect our most vulnerable. What a disgrace our PM is to imply the thousands of care home deaths are at the fault of care staff.”
- “This government has been reckless and incompetent and in my opinion their actions are criminal!”
- “The government have pushed for herd immunity

without following the facts, they were incompetent with PPE and continue to lie and deceive the public with death and test figures.”

- “The government has lied and put wealth over health.”

The preventable mass deaths from COVID-19 in the UK are an act of social murder. They took place because the government took none of the necessary measures to protect the population, particularly the most vulnerable. Its refusal to impose a timely lockdown, social distancing and mass testing allowed the untrammelled spread of a deadly disease for months.

Many have compared the neglect of the authorities for the health, safety and very lives of thousands of people to that of the deregulation, and profiteering that resulted in the social murder of 72 men, women and children in the Grenfell Tower inferno of 2017. Once again, the bereaved must have the answers to how their loved ones died of COVID-19, but all experience testifies that demanding that governments act to establish the truth through public inquiries after their policies have led to mass deaths is a dead-end.

After more than 30 years of fighting, including during 13 years of a Labour government, the families of the victims of the Hillsborough football disaster were denied justice, with *nobody* held to account. More than three years after the Grenfell fire, not a single person in political and corporate circles has been charged with a single offence in relation to the deaths. The public inquiry has no powers of prosecution and has extended to grant legal immunity to the parties responsible for turning Grenfell into a death trap.

What is needed to establish the truth is an independent political movement of the working class for socialism.

To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>