

Seven years after Grenfell Tower Fire, justice for victims is further away than ever

Ioan Petrescu, Robert Stevens
31 May 2024

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry into the fire that killed 72 people has announced its final report will be published on September 4. That is seven years almost to the day since the inquiry was begun by Theresa May's Conservative government.

Since the inquiry was announced seven years ago, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) has warned it was nothing more than a cover-up orchestrated to deflect blame from those responsible in government and the private sector for 72 preventable deaths.

The inquiry was set up under the 2005 Inquiries Act introduced by the Blair Labour government, which has "no power to determine, any person's civil or criminal liability." The act also gives the government wide powers over the inquiry process, which it uses to deflect any scrutiny of its actions. Amnesty International urged all members of the British judiciary not to serve on any inquiry held under the Act's auspices because it would "be controlled by the executive which is empowered to block public scrutiny of state actions."

This has been confirmed in the years since, as the inquiry ponderously made its way through two phases, while bearing witness to endless self-justifications by corporate and government bodies, shamelessly passing the buck over their use of dangerous and illegal materials on the tower's refurbishment even as documents confirmed that residents' concerns about safety were treated with contempt.

Shortly after the disaster, the Metropolitan Police (Met) launched a criminal investigation into the fire. However, in 2019, the Met announced that they would not press criminal charges until the public inquiry releases its final report, even though there is nothing in law that would compel them to wait.

Now, following the announcement that the inquiry will release its finding later this year, the Metropolitan Police has said it will likely take until the end of 2025 before

their investigation into the fire is finalized and that any potential criminal charges cannot be expected until the end of 2026. This is part and parcel of the government's strategy, protecting the guilty from legal retribution by endlessly delaying criminal proceedings.

Firstly every conceivable document that could be found was thrown in to the investigation. The Met had, "Retrieved more than 152 million documents and files"; "Spent more than a year forensically examining Grenfell Tower, and painstakingly removing its exterior piece by piece"; "Collated more than 27,000 exhibits, which are held in a 635m2 warehouse big enough to park 25 double decker buses inside. The exhibits include cladding, insulation, doors, windows and other parts of the building, down to screws, nuts and bolts."; "Followed up more than 27,000 separate lines of enquiry; "Taken more than 12,000 witness statements." An accompanying infographic boasts that the Met have also taken 75,000 photos as part of their forensic evidence.

In order to further convince everyone how hard the job is to get through this mass of material the Met needs to investigate, it notes that a number of "early investigative advice files have been submitted to the CPS with 12 other files in advanced stages of preparation."

"To illustrate the scale and complexity of the investigation, the covering report alone for just one of those advice files is 535 pages long and references more than 1,200 supporting evidential documents. Printed out, that file, in relation to just one company and its employees, stands at almost 7ft high."

Deputy Assistant Commissioner Stuart Cundy sought to justify the Met's stonewalling, claiming that "a worst-case scenario would be if we rushed the investigation."

At this rate, no defendants will appear in court until 2027, if ever.

Since the immediate aftermath of the fire, those culpable for the mass deaths at Grenfell have been known

by all. They include the owners and decision makers at major building contractor Rydon, cladding manufacturer Arconic, insulation provider Kingspan, manufacturer of foam insulation, Celotex, the Conservative Party-run Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC), and its Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation which managed the tower. The fact that the Met would need to analyse millions of documents to assemble a legal case beggars belief.

Additionally, in phase two of the inquiry, all witnesses from those corporations and organisations involved in Grenfell Tower's refurbishment and who testified at the inquiry were granted immunity from prosecution. This means the investigation by police is awaiting results from an inquiry that has already absolved those criminally responsible.

The police know exactly who these people are. Indeed their briefing boasts, "Since the fire detectives have: Identified and are investigating 19 companies or organisations and 58 individuals, as suspects," and "Interviewed under caution over 50 suspects for a total of more than 300 hours."

Yet no-one charged out of all this!

To rub salt into the wounds, Deputy Assistant Commissioner Cundy stated of the now-decade long time span, that it is a "long time" to wait, while claiming, "10 years to get justice isn't 'justice denied'".

This is in answer to those Grenfell survivors and bereaved, and their supporters who have lost any faith in the police "investigation" and anyone ever being brought to justice.

Grenfell United, which represents many of the bereaved families and survivors, said the wait for accountability is "unbearable." "Ten years until we see justice," a spokesperson for the group said. "Ten years until we see prosecutions. Ten years until those responsible for the murders of 72 people are held to account for their crimes. This should be shocking for everyone, but for us, we live our lives on hold while those responsible walk free."

Responding to the Met update, the *Guardian* cited Nabil Choucair, who lost six members of his family in the fire. He said, "I have given up on the police. I got fed up with them not doing something when they should have done something a long time ago."

"Everyone that commits a crime in this country is dealt with apart from Grenfell, where the people are all part of the system and their rights are protected by the government. And because the government has blame attached to it, they are slow to put the blame on others."

The Grenfell inquiry joins a long tradition of the British state using such inquiries to whitewash its crimes and deny justice to its victims, including at Aberfan (1966), Hillsborough football stadium (1989), and more recently in the contaminated blood cover-up and Horizon Post Office scandal for which no-one has been held to account.

While the bereaved families and survivors continue their fight for justice, the corporations responsible for mass murder at Grenfell are piling up profits, their CEOs continuing to rake in millions in salaries, bonuses, and shares.

None of the conditions which produced the Grenfell fire have been resolved. Thousands of buildings in the UK are clad in the same flammable materials that led to Grenfell Tower "burning like paper", endangering hundreds of thousands of lives. The government has no plan to refurbish Grenfell, or to implement any of the limited housing safety measures recommended by inquiry at the end of its first phase, years ago.

A Labour government would do nothing to reverse this. In 2017, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn promised his party's support for a "full and independent public inquiry", with the sole proviso that it be held "under the provisions of the 2005 Inquiries Act" i.e., the very provisions that have ensured a cover-up. He was backed by the trade unions and pseudo-left groups who promoted the inquiry and its associated cover-up wholesale.

Since he became party leader, Keir Starmer has ritualistically tweeted his condolences on each anniversary of the fire, while expressing hope that the inquiry will help the Grenfell community in "their pursuit of justice and their drive for change". The Fire Brigades Union also collaborated with the inquiry, even though its own members were being scapegoated for the deaths of Grenfell residents.

That's why, on the second anniversary of the fire, the SEP urged "Grenfell families and their legal teams to withdraw all co-operation from the government's rotten inquiry." All working people should join the growing numbers in the Grenfell community in demanding immediate prosecutions of those responsible for this heinous crime.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact