

london hazards



**FRIDAY 9TH FEBRUARY 2018,
THE HAZARDS CAMPAIGN AND GREENER JOBS
ALLIANCE ARE RUNNING A SHORT COURSE**

AIR POLLUTION A TRADE UNION ISSUE

**1.00 – 4.30pm at the GMB's Euston office.
22 Stephenson Way Euston London NW1 2HD**

**You can enrol (free) by emailing,
janet@gmhazards.org.uk or calling
Janet Newsham on 0161 6367558.**

Inside

International Workers Memorial Day	2
Asbestos- High Court Victory	3
Carillion bosses have more to answer	4
Carillion Blacklist support statement	5
Grenfell and human rights	6
Grenfell - They don't listen	7
Asbestos in schools	8

AFFILIATE AND HELP KEEP US GOING

We are asking you to affiliate to the London Hazards Centre so that we can continue the work we were set up to do in 1985 – provide advice, information and training to make London a safer place in which to live and work.

Arguably the work of the London Hazards Centre is more important than ever as a result of cuts to the HSE budget and scrapping of key pieces of health and safety legislation.

The London Hazards Centre is also a campaigning organisation that takes a lead on issues like safety reps rights, as well as working closely with trade unions and other organisations, for example, to fight against blacklisting.

We need your support. We are asking individuals, trade union branches and regions, along with community organisations – to affiliate to us. The annual affiliation fees set out below remain the lifeblood of the London Hazards Centre.

Affiliation rates

Community groups, tenants and residents associations	£20
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Trades Councils, law centres	£30
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and advice/resource centres,	
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Tenants federations	
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Trade union branches	£40
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(up to 300 members)	
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Trade union branches	£75
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(more than 300 members)	
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Regional trade union or	£120
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voluntary organisations	
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National trade union or	£240
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voluntary organisations	
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Subscription rates	
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Unwaged individuals	£10
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Employed individuals	£20
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Commercial organisations	£300
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Finsbury Park, London, N4 2DA.

Telephone: 0207 527 5107.

Website: www.lhc.org.uk

Registered Charity No: 293677

Registered Company No: 01981088



Trust for London
Tackling poverty and inequality

Why not volunteer?

The London Hazards Centre, is looking for volunteers to help run and organise some of our activities. Perhaps you have skills and knowledge that could help organise events, produce promotional material, train others or assist in our campaigning work?

If you are interested in volunteering at the London Hazards Centre why not call 0207 527 5107 or email mail@lhc.org.uk

We'd like to hear from you.



International Workers Memorial Day, London, Saturday 28 April 2018

'Remember the dead; fight for the living' is the watchword of International Workers Memorial Day (IWMD). Workers and their trade union organisations gather each year on the 28 April to commemorate all those who have been killed at work.

The theme for this years IWMD being held in London is 'Unionised workplaces are safer workplaces'. We will also be celebrating 40-years of trade union health and safety representatives

IWMD events are held throughout the world and since 2010 has been officially recognised by the UK Government.

Building stronger trade union organisation to fight for safer workplaces is the best way to stop people being killed and seriously injured at work.

The London IWMD event will be held at Tower Hill (opposite Tower Hill tube station and on the same side as the Tower of London). There will be a rally and vigil around the statue of the building worker. Find out more once details of the final arrangements are available in March.

Check the London Hazards Website www.lhc.org.uk and TUC websites

www.tuc.org.uk/workers-memorial-day-0

The London Hazards Centre remembers Ken O'Shea

Ken O'Shea died on the 26 December 2017 aged 88.

Ken was one of the 24 Shrewsbury pickets prosecuted for picketing during the national building workers' strike in 1972. Ken was a staunch trade unionist who fought for better pay and safer working conditions on building sites.

Ken stood trial twice in 1973, along with his long-time friend Des Warren, Ricky Tomlinson, John Carpenter, John Llywarch, and John

McKinsie Jones (The Shrewsbury six). He was given a nine months prison sentence that was suspended for 2-years.

Ken continued to fight for justice and to overturn the convictions of all the Shrewsbury 24 pickets. He will be missed by many, but the fight for justice goes on, thanks in no small part to Ken O'Shea's steadfast support for the Shrewsbury Campaign.

The London Hazards Centre salutes the inspirational legacy of Ken O'Shea.

HEALTH AND SAFETY TRAINING FROM THE LONDON HAZARDS CENTRE

Do you want to know your rights when it comes to health and safety? Working in a safe environment is a basic human right. Learn about your rights and how to enforce them. If you are interested please call 0208 527 5107 or email: mail@lhc.org.uk The London Hazards Centre is funded to provide health and safety training.

You will learn about:

- The main UK health and safety laws
- Who is responsible for health and safety at work
- Who enforces health and safety
- Basic risk assessment
- Sources of information and support

The course is ideal for:

- People new to health and safety or those wanting to refresh their knowledge.
- In particular, migrant workers or recent arrivals in the UK will gain important knowledge about their rights.

ASBESTOS

Landmark victory in High Court

A landmark victory in the High Court on the 5th December 2017 means historic documents revealing how much more Industry and Government agencies knew about the dangers of asbestos will now not be destroyed.

Insurance companies that have previously paid compensation to mesothelioma victims argued in the Royal Courts of Justice in February 2017 that Cape Distribution Ltd should share the costs of compensation as it was their products that caused the disease, and that Cape knew more about the dangers than they had disclosed. Cape were ordered to disclose thousands of documents that showed how much they really knew about the dangers of exposure to asbestos. At the end of the case both parties entered into a confidential agreement to destroy the documents.

Once the decision concerning the agreement to destroy the documents was known,

The Asbestos Victims Support Groups Forum UK (the Forum) instructed solicitors to make an application to the Court to preserve the documents. They argued that it was in the public interest that the Forum be given the documents on grounds that it would help mesothelioma victims pursuing compensation claims, that it would assist the public's understanding of how Cape contributed to the UK's biggest industrial disaster, and how political lobbying by the company influenced Government safety measures to protect workers.

In her judgement of the 5th December 2017, Master McCloud agreed the Forum had a legitimate interest in obtaining the documents and ruled in the Forum's favour. Master McCloud stated that the Forum was "a group which provides help and support to asbestos victims. In some respects, it is also a pressure group and is involved in lobbying and promoting asbestos knowledge and safety.



Woman, unaware of the hazards, taking a lunch break in the 1960s at Cape Asbestos' mill in Hebden Bridge, surrounded by asbestos yarn

Those are legitimate activities and provide legitimate interest". Graham Dring, Chair of the Forum said "This decision is fantastic news. Cape, along with Turner & Newall were the two biggest asbestos companies in this country. Their activities and products exposed thousands of workers and their families to asbestos and caused many deaths from mesothelioma and other asbestos-related diseases. It is essential we now find out exactly how much they knew about the dangers of their products and when they knew this. These documents have been hidden for far too long. Cape owe us all an explanation of their role in the biggest industrial scandal to hit this country, a scandal that has not yet run its course with tens of thousands more men and women expected to die from mesothelioma".

Lawyers Harminder Bains of Leigh Day, Rob Weir and

Jonathan Butters of Devereux Chambers, acted on behalf of the Forum.

The Asbestos Victims Support Groups Forum UK is an umbrella organisation representing asbestos support groups. The Forum's main purpose is to work collectively to provide one voice for asbestos victims. <http://www.asbestosforum.org.uk/>

Thanks for help with magazine distribution

The London Hazards Centre thanks the RMT, GMB and London and Eastern Region of Unite for their assistance in circulating the magazine.

Want free and confidential advice on health and safety

Are you worried about a health and safety issue at work or at home? If you are, give the London Hazards Centre a call on our confidential telephone advice line for up-to-date information to help you sort out your problem.

Call 0207 527 5107 on a Monday or Tuesday between 10.30 am – 3.30 pm. If the advisers are busy, please leave a message and they will call you back.

Carillion bosses have more to answer for than people suppose!

Not surprisingly, the recent collapse of Carillion and the ensuing scandal about its nefarious activities have received wall-to-wall coverage in the mainstream media.

Also, not surprisingly, the silence from the mainstream media on Carillion's deep involvement in the scandalous blacklisting of trade union appointed Health and Safety Representatives has been deafening.

I worked as a carpenter in and around London in the construction industry from the late 1960s until the early 1980s. At the beginning of that period construction had an appalling health and safety record with 350 workers losing their lives in site accidents every year, a rate of almost one a day. Today, less than 50 workers are killed on building sites each year. This is still unacceptable, but a vast

improvement since the 1970s.

A major reason for this has been the 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act's regulations – in particular, 'The Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977' – that enabled trade unions to appoint an army of dedicated Health and Safety Representatives with legal rights. They forced companies to put the welfare of their workers before profit and, to some degree, helped change the health and safety culture. I witnessed the beginnings of this change on several sites until, like thousands of other Health and Safety Representatives, I was blacklisted in the late 1970s.

The blacklisting of construction workers who fought for improved safety – first by the Economic League and then the Consulting Association – is well documented. In 2009 The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) raided the Consulting Association's office and seized illegally held files on 3,213 workers. Carillion were up to their necks in this scandal in London and other major cities. One worker, Dave Smith took his case against Carillion to an industrial tribunal. Despite admitting in court that they had blacklisted him for being a trade union member who had raised

concerns about health and safety on a Carillion site, Dave lost his case because he was employed through an agency. The company even provided the name of the senior manager who had supplied the information to the Consulting Association. The case eventually ended up in the European Court of Human Rights, where Dave lost his case once again for the same reason.

In 2016, Carillion, along with seven other companies, were finally forced to admit blacklisting Health and Safety Representatives and workers who complained over safety on their sites in a High Court Group Litigation case in London. The case was settled out of court on behalf of hundreds of workers. Carillion admitted having to pay out £10.5 million in compensation and associated costs. Lawyers on behalf of the eight companies were also forced to give a grovelling, but woefully inadequate, public apology. The apology ended by stating that the litigants accepted that this was the end of the matter. A statement that was far from the truth.

Besides anything else, there is compelling evidence that Carillion and other construction companies continue with their blacklisting of Health and Safety reps. None of the senior managers at Carillion

responsible for blacklisting workers were ever disciplined. They simply carried on their shameful behaviour, especially on London sites. On London's Crossrail, for example, activists Terry Wilson and Frank Morris have been subjected to blacklisting, bullying, intimidation, and surveillance. In December 2017, Unite announced that it had issued High Court proceedings against 12 major contractors including Carillion on behalf of 70 workers.

Following the collapse, the Cabinet Office asked on Twitter if anyone had been affected by Carillion. Dave Smith replied: "Yes, I was #blacklisted by #Carillion for raising safety concerns on their building sites. Can the government help me by setting up a public inquiry to bring those responsible to justice?" Don't hold your breath Dave!

Dr. Jack Fawbert
Blacklist Support Group.

Blacklist Support Group statement on Carillion

Carillion admitted in the High Court that they blacklisted workers who complained about safety on their building sites, while at the same time milking public sector contracts for millions. Workers on projects run by Carillion need to be paid and are entitled to their pensions but no more public money should be given to the bosses of the disgraced company. In any civilised society, these people would be facing criminal charges.

When you invite blacklisting-human rights abusers to run the NHS and school meals, don't be surprised when vampire capitalism attempts to suck the taxpayer dry. The government should bail out the NHS, not Carillion or their bankers. The government should nationalise Carillion at the current market value of their shares (nothing) – and go further by banning all the construction companies involved in the blacklisting-human rights conspiracy from any publicly funded contracts.

GET RYDON OUT OF OUR HOSPITAL

The huge outpouring of anger and dismay over the Whittington Hospital Board's decision to award 'Ryhurst' the contract to oversee building work at the hospital shows no sign of subsiding. Ryhurst is part of the 'Rydon' Group' that led the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower. Since the announcement in October 2017, the Defend Whittington Hospital Coalition (DWHC) has held a series of meetings to rally opposition to the programme of building work being outsourced to a 'Carillion-type' multi-service company linked to the Grenfell disaster.

We want a state of the art hospital, but we object to Rydon making money out of the hospital. The company is tainted. Rydon, along with the other companies involved in refurbishing Grenfell Tower are under investigation by the Metropolitan Police. We are also concerned over the total lack of consultation.

The public meeting organised by the DWHC at Islington Town Hall on the 11 January 2018 gave people the opportunity to question Siobhan Harrington, CEO, Whittington Hospital. Understandably there was a lot of anger and frustration expressed at the Whittington Hospital Board's decision to press-ahead with entering into a so

called 'Strategic Estates Partnership' (SEP) with Ryhurst. Ms Harrington had previously stated in the press that "Ryhurst had the most national experience and understood the local area and importance of our clinical strategy ... they ticked all the boxes". The DWHC says, what about the ethical box!

Older Hospitals, like the Whittington need modernisation. Indeed, Whittington Health, which is an integrated care organisation, including the Hospitals and 48 other buildings which cater for a variety of GP and outpatient services in Haringey and Islington, has been instructed by the Government to upgrade their buildings, and that failure to do could result in closure. At the same time the Government, under the Naylor Report, is refusing to finance such developments, telling hospitals to sell-off their (our NHS) land.

We plan to hold a demonstration outside the local Rydon HQ. The DWHC meets regularly to organise next steps in the campaign to get Rydon out of our Hospital. The campaign continues.

Shirley Franklin, Chair, Defend Whittington Hospital Coalition. <http://dwhc.org.uk/>



London's toxic air

London's toxic air is responsible for an estimated 9,500 premature deaths every year.

Globally, air pollution is the fifth leading killer, with exposure to tiny atmospheric particle matter known as PM2.5 contributing to nearly 8% of all deaths worldwide, according to the 2015 Global Burden of Disease Study (PM2.5 refers to particle mass with aerodynamic diameter less than 2.5 micrometres - which is about 3% the diameter of a human hair). Sources of PM2.5 include motor vehicles, power stations, residential wood burning and airplanes. Exposure to these tiny particles killed

4.2 million people worldwide in 2015, dwarfing the 38,422 killed by terrorism (source: Global Terrorism Index). People in London are dying because of its air.

PM2.5 is the worst air pollution hazard, but there are others, such as nitrogen oxides (NO and NO₂, together called NO_x), Ozone (O₃) and PM10. Research by the Campaign for Clean Air found that 1,148 schools in London are within 150 metres of roads carrying 10,000 or more vehicles per day. Air pollution is harming the health of children attending these schools and the parents waiting to collect them. Concerned groups campaigning

for cleaner air in London are calling for the government to fully comply with World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines for air quality throughout London and elsewhere. People have a right to breathe healthy air.

Air pollution has been linked to respiratory infections, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, stroke, heart attack, lung cancer and dementia. Children and adolescents exposed to long-term air pollution have been observed to have poorer lung development and poorer cognitive development. There is evidence that there may be a stronger adverse effect on the cognitive development of males and people from lower income social classes.

In the UK, air quality has improved in recent decades, yet some of our cities are still among the world's worst polluted and the number of local authorities missing their air pollution targets has risen. The Royal College of Physicians (RCP) found that 44 UK towns and cities, including London, fail the World Health Organisation's test for levels of PM2.5. The RCP estimates that air pollution in the UK causes 40,000 premature deaths, more than six million sick days and an estimated social cost of £22.6bn per year. In 2015 researchers at Kings College London reported the results of a study conducted on behalf of the Greater London Authority and Transport for London. They estimated that about 9,500 Londoners die prematurely every year because of air pollution.

To address the problem of diesel vehicles, the Mayor of London has introduced the T-charge, which must be paid by drivers of older vehicles that fail to meet European emissions standards. The T-Charge operates in the existing Congestion Zone and from 8th April 2019 will operate within a new Ultra Low Emission Zone. Information about the scheme can be found on the Transport for London website. Of course, it goes without saying that the T-Charge will come as a blow to those motorists who purchased diesel vehicles because they believed them to be more

environmentally-friendly due to the car industry's misleading information about NO_x emissions. The fact is that transport is one of the few areas where the Mayor of London has real authority. In most other areas he can lobby but not regulate.

In 2017 the Mayor consulted on his draft London Environment Strategy, which included a section on Air Quality. The consultation ended in November, but the draft strategy is still on the London Government website. A revised version of the strategy will be published in 2018. Meanwhile, the London government website lists some of the positive measures being implemented in some London boroughs. These include expanding electric vehicle infrastructure, low emission car clubs, incorporating air quality into local authority planning, promoting travel / walking and cycling schemes, and the implementation of traffic and road restrictions on the busiest and most polluting routes.

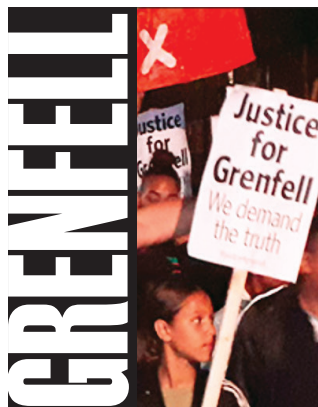
People can lobby their own MPs and councillors to implement such measures if they think their local authority isn't doing enough. Trade unionists might consider pressing their own employers on the issue of air quality in the workplace. If you want to find out more on what London's air is doing to us, and what we can do about it, why not enrol on the short course below.

David Hardman

**Friday 9th February 2018,
The Hazards Campaign
and Greener Jobs
Alliance are running a
short course –**

Air pollution a trade union issue

**1.00 – 4.30pm at the
GMB's Euston office.
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or calling Janet Newsham
on 0161 6367558.**



The human rights and equality aspect

The Grenfell disaster rightly continues to be the focus of attention for people interested in obtaining justice for the dead and the families affected by the catastrophic blaze.

Seven months on, Grenfell remains firmly fixed in the public's eye. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) announced on the 11 December 2017 that it is to investigate human rights and equality aspects of the tragedy to determine whether the state is fulfilling its duties under human rights and equality law.

A statement issued by the Justice4Grenfell (J4G) campaign "welcomed the intervention of the Equality and Human Rights Commission to run an Independent Inquiry into the Grenfell Fire. J4G has consistently raised concerns that the State and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) have failed in their duties to protect life and provide safe housing". Amongst the matters of central importance to be examined by the EHRC are:

- The states duty to investigate
- Right to life
- Access to justice

- Support for people who've suffered inhuman and degrading treatment
- The State's duty to provide adequate and safe housing
- The laws that should have protected the safety of Grenfell Tower residents

Building regulations 'not fit for purpose'

On the 18 December 2017, the 'Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety' set up after the Grenfell disaster released its interim report. In it Dame Judith Hackitt, who leads the review, said the system is "not fit for purpose" and open to abuse by those trying to save money. She said she was shocked by some of the practices she had uncovered. "The mindset of doing things as cheaply as possible and passing on responsibility for problems and shortcomings to others must stop."

The terrible loss of life and suf-

fering caused by the Grenfell Tower fire and the nationwide concern over the safety of tower blocks has triggered a plethora of reviews and reports that already point to serious failings in housing law. A report commissioned by Shelter was released on the 14 November 2017. In it researchers at the Universities of Bristol and Kent found existing housing laws to be 'out-dated, complex and patchily enforced' and called for a new Housing Act to be introduced. One of the key findings was the fact that '85 per cent of professionals believe housing health and safety law is not fit for purpose, after years of neglect and deregulation.'

The next procedural hearing of the Public Inquiry Chaired by Sir Martin Moore-Bick will be held towards the end of February 2018. Both J4G and the EHRC had their applications to be core participants in the Public Inquiry rejected.

Crossrail prosecutions

On 7th March 2014, René Tkacik, then aged 44, was crushed to death by a fall of freshly applied shotcrete at the Crossrail Fisher Street site, London.

At the time René was working for BFK Joint Venture (BAM Nuttal Limited; Ferrovial Agroman (UK) Limited and Kier Infrastructure and Overseas Limited).

On 23 February 2015 - An Inquest into his death took place at St. Pancras Coroner's Court. The jury made a narrative determination that raised concerns about health and safety practices on site. The Coroner had refused to allow a whistleblower to give evidence, but even in the absence of that evidence the jury still raised concerns about BFK's failure to enforce the exclusion zone under the freshly sprayed shotcrete. Following the Inquest René's family and their solicitor considered the entirety of the evidence disclosed and made lengthy

representations to the HSE, urging it to prosecute BFK.

On 7 December 2016 - The HSE confirmed its decision to prosecute BAM Nuttal Limited; Ferrovial Agroman (UK) Limited and Kier Infrastructure and Overseas Limited individually, rather than as a joint venture. A decision was also made to prosecute the three companies in relation to two further incidents which had occurred in January 2015 in tunnels being constructed by BFK.

The charges were:

- One charge under section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- One charge under section 3 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Two Charges under Regulation 22 (1)(a) of the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2007

In July 2017 - BAM, Ferrovial and Kier approached the HSE

and suggested that they would enter guilty pleas in respect of all charges, but that those pleas would be entered by the Joint Venture. The HSE accepted those pleas.

On 19 July 2017 - BFK pleaded guilty to all charges at a hearing. On 27 July 2017 - BFK sentenced at a hearing at Southwark Crown Court. The submissions made by BFK were that Rene was the author of his own misfortune. This is something strongly disputed by his family who described him as a conscientious worker.

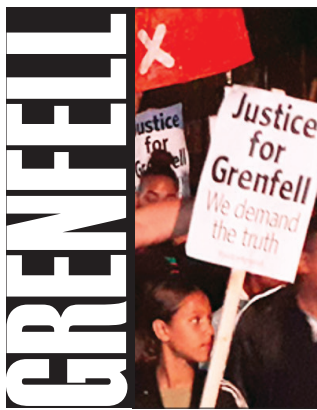
BFK paid René's family's expenses in attending the court hearings and they donated the sum of £6,000 to the Construction Safety Campaign in René's memory to assist the CSC in their campaign to prevent future deaths. Outside the court, René's mother, Marta, said that René was the heart and soul of her family and losing him had has a disastrous impact on their everyday lives. She described



the money that BFK had paid in expenses as "blood money". She went on to say that she was very disappointed by the fines of £300,000 for René's death and a total of £765,000 in relation to the other two incidents. "In the year that BFK killed René, their turnover was £317m". Marta considers that there are a number of unanswered questions in relation to René's death.

The Crossrail project has a long history of health and safety issues. Concerns have been raised about the lack of union presence on site and about men being sacked and blacklisted for raising health and safety concerns. Further scrutiny of the project appears to be required.

Helen Clifford



They didn't listen

Phil Whelan has lived in a seventh floor flat in a neighbouring block to Grenfell for 20-years. London Hazards asked him what it has been like in that time, and how the disastrous fire on the 14 June 2017 has affected the community.

There is very little good I can say relating to the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) and the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (TMO). Failure to handle problems has been a highly consistent trait. From gangs of youths to broken lifts, problem neighbours to falling standards of estate upkeep. If it can be mishandled, that's what will generally happen - and problems often persist for years. Critically, the RBKC didn't listen to the residents' fire safety concerns or hold the TMO to account.

It took until 1st December 2017 for the RBKC and TMO to circulate an effective leaflet detailing how affected people might access the most appropriate local NHS mental health services. There was a photocopied and sparse list that arrived with our TMO newsletter in October, but it felt wholly inadequate. 'Support services' still comprised of local residents looking after each other at that point. I know my GP service has had a spiralling number of mental health issues since the fire. I remember writing an article a couple of days after Grenfell for an online media outlet, saying there would be thousands of people needing counselling

around here, and that the social impact would not be fully understood for a decade. It seemed obvious to me, having watched like a mesmerised moth drawn to the flames for hours and hours. And I'm not ashamed to say that I'm one of those affected. Anguished cries filled the air in the moments when the whup-whup of helicopter blades and emergency services sirens faded. Scores of neighbours were trapped, and thousands of people watched the unfolding disaster helplessly. So of course, there are a great many traumatised people, not just those who escaped or have been displaced by the fire. Failures in dealing with the hundreds of newly homeless people has only deepened their trauma, and many still can't prepare food for themselves or their families, as they're still stuck in hotel rooms.

As brave as the fire fighters were, they never stood a chance against such a blaze. Water is not the right stuff to extinguish melting aluminium and oil based fuel (the insulation), and since the whole building had a convecting chimney lined with these products (the cladding), it would have needed a completely different approach to extinguish the flames - including the type of foam used to fight the fire of a crash-landed aeroplane at Heathrow or Gatwick. Now, we've known this since the problems of combustible insulation became clear in the 1980s (there's a Panorama programme from 1984 on this available on YouTube). Since then, we've done away with the safety factors of responsibility and accountability, at the altar of profit. Fewer 'Clerk of Works' are employed by local authorities, and few if any architects, who in the past would have had overall responsibility for a development, and would have been regular site visitors too. Senior fire authorities used to have responsibility for signing off the safety of public buildings, yet this became a priced and

contracted service, completed by another layer of outside agents.

After nearly 40 years of neoliberalism, we now live in environments that are less safe than the post war era. If you don't believe this, look at the facts. Everything is outsourced, risks are overlooked or skirted around by bluster where possible. For Grenfell, a school was built on the main access road; the council's 'emergency plan' for major incidents hadn't been updated in decades, and wasn't really put into action anyway. New buildings of all kinds are today still routinely lined inside and out with toxic and flammable 'insulation', while emergency services budgets and staffing levels are cut back year after year. When it comes to finding out what went wrong, we discover that the National Forensic Service was privatised

in 2012 and budgets cut. The same applies to much of the criminal justice system. Our politicians have sold off everything they can, and undermined or hollowed out everything else. Schools, the NHS, there is nothing sacred, and the well-being and safety of the public are not priorities, nor have they been for decades.

In the light of these facts, I am sceptical about the outcome of the Public Inquiry. There needs to be a radical change to who wields political power if we are to secure justice and return to proper accountability of both the public and private sector. Grenfell has been a wake-up call for a lot of people. Perhaps it will also help to turn the tide against the drift towards a US model of social inequality and exploitation.

Phil Whelan



Asbestos in schools

Since its formation in 2009, the Joint Union Asbestos Committee (JUAC) has been campaigning for the removal of all asbestos from schools, and in the short term better management.

Successive governments have failed to ensure that asbestos in schools is dealt with in a proactive manner, so it is welcome news that JUAC pressure has led to a commitment from a future Labour government to remove asbestos from all school buildings.

Apart from the NEU (formerly the NUT and ATL), JUAC members include the other teacher/head teacher unions (NAHT, ASCL and NASUWT) and the support staff unions with members in schools (GMB, Unison and Unite). Recently we were delighted to welcome UCU. We have a strong focus on the health of children as they are more vulnerable, with more years ahead of them in which to develop asbestos-related disease.

The DfE and HSE mantra is that it is generally safer to manage asbestos in schools rather than remove it, but there is abundant evidence that this simply isn't true. For this reason, the Joint Union Asbestos Committee campaigns for the removal of asbestos from all our schools. Asbestos management is a task with which many schools understandably struggle. In the long term, the answer is a programme of phased removal, starting with the schools in the worst condition, but in the short and medium-term support with safe management is vital.

A March 2017 survey undertaken by the then NUT, to which nearly 2000 members responded, found that nearly 50 per cent of all respondents had not even been told whether their school contained asbestos, very worrying given that we know that the vast majority (nearly 90 per cent) do. There were many examples of dangerous practice highlighted by respondents. One described that:

"Contractors came in to work in an area known to have asbes-

tos, they were masked and suited and started work while children were in the same room unprotected waiting for a bus. It was reported and they were sacked". Another reported that: "Asbestos has been found twice next to and in my teaching room. I have raised concerns about it but do not feel my concerns have been taken seriously and have not been fully informed of the risks. The first time I was left teaching in my room with only a blue sheet protecting me and my class from exposure. I raised concerns at the time, especially because I was pregnant, but I was told there was no risk to mine or the children's health".

These disturbing findings reflect those from a series of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests from asbestos in schools campaigner Lucie Stephens to all local authorities (LAs) in England and Wales in late 2016, enquiring about asbestos management, to which 135 local authorities responded.

These revealed:

- 105 significant incidents of asbestos exposure within five

years were recorded

- 230 claims by current or former staff and pupils were bought. 108 claims have been settled and 122 are still outstanding.

- Of the claims that have been settled, over £10 million has been paid out in compensation.

- 12,500 schools are known to contain asbestos. This figure does not include academies, free schools or those outside LA control.

All this information is likely to be a massive underestimate as some LAs did not respond to the FOI request or refused to provide the information. Some even asked for payment in order to collate the information. Other LAs provided inaccurate information because particular known incidents were not mentioned.

Despite being the duty holder, some LAs said that responsibility rested totally with the individual schools, and the information would have to be requested from the schools themselves. Other LAs provided ambiguous and unclear responses and appeared not

to hold information about asbestos in their schools.

The following response from Kensington and Chelsea borough inspires no confidence that the Council has a grip on what is going on in its schools:

"The Council has a Total Facilities Management framework in place with Amey plc. Amey do not manage asbestos on behalf of the schools in RBKC. There have been ad hoc requests made for asbestos management plans and Amey have facilitated these requests where possible. No schools have been identified that are under their scope to contain asbestos. The Council's Corporate Health & Safety Team may hold further information on schools that contain asbestos – we are waiting for their response and will forward this to you as soon as we receive this".

Both Hounslow and Southwark said they did not hold the data about which schools contained asbestos. Southwark stated: "The Council does not directly manage asbestos containing materials within schools. Schools are their own data controllers and therefore enquires should be directed to them".

Across London there were 25 reported incidents of exposure between 2011 and 2016 in the following boroughs: Barking and Dagenham, Bexley, Brent, Bromley, Camden, Enfield, Haringey, Islington, Southwark, Sutton, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest. A number of Boroughs did not answer this question, including Harrow, Newham and Merton.

Across London, 32 claims from former employees and pupils had been made during that period, with 12 being settled. Over £1m had been paid out in compensation.

A similar exercise is being undertaken in respect of academy trusts and we hope to be publishing these findings early in 2018. Looking ahead to 2018, we will continue to seize every opportunity to hold the Government to account, educate and inform the school community and work towards our ultimate

