

Grenfell Tower demonstrates the need for real political...

Published: January 14, 2026, 9:48 pm

We know Theresa May is bad at her job. Arrogant. Distant. Inflexible. Possessed of poor judgement. Unempathic to the point where it is embarrassing to witness her inability. But let's, please, not make this personal. She may have tried to make the general election a vote of confidence in her. But it wasn't. It wasn't even about party politics, which have for far too long in England and Wales denied people real political choice by putting only variations on a theme before them to choose between. Instead let's realise that what Theresa May represents so well is a political philosophy and it is not chance that it arrives with someone like her as Prime Minister.

Thatcher put it in a nutshell, of course. She said there was no such thing as society. And she meant it. Neoliberalism says there are only markets. And contractual relationships. But no obligations. No duty. No care. Just mercenary relationships.

And so we get to Grenfell Tower where mercenary considerations mattered more than lives.

And we get to a prime minister incapable of showing that she does care.

At the same time Jeremy Corbyn did what May's philosophy could never tolerate: he (quite literally) embraced people. He, to quote Louis Armstrong, shook their hands saying "How do you do" when what he actually meant was "I love you".

Again, I am not going to be personal. Corbyn was far from alone: across London and beyond (because we saw it in Manchester and it could happen anywhere) people have reached out to say the same thing. The Manchester concert a couple of weeks ago (and I watched it, with surprising pleasure) had love for the other person you could not know but who still mattered to you at its very core.

And this difference, or rather the indifference of neoliberalism as opposed to the care of genuine social democracy / socialism is back on the political agenda now. We saw it on June 8. People did not embrace May because they knew she that did not embrace them.

And this might also explain the choice of voters across age groups. My generation has

learned to do emotion. My male friends and I openly hug each other now with real joy and affection, unashamed to do so in ways our fathers could never have contemplated. And when I observe younger people I see that they did not have to learn to do this: it is in their DNA, as it was on ours, except we were told to repress it.

Neoliberalism reflected a ghastly selfishness and an emotional isolation that crushed, structured and divided post war society but not its politics until Thatcher appeared on the scene. Now there is a chance to reject that reproach. Now there is the option of putting society first.

Many people are angry about Grenfell Tower. I think that will continue for time to come. This is not something that will be easily forgotten. The mounting death toll over months to come will be an unfortunate and saddening reminder of how devastating this failure to care has been.

But I hope people realise that they have a choice on this. I hope Labour realises that too. I hope it is now completely unambiguous in its rejection of all that has to do with neoliberalism. And I hope it puts real political choice - and the option to care - very firmly and proudly before the people of England and Wales again. Because people need to have that choice. It's been denied for too long. The callous indifference that led to Grenfell Tower is the evidence of that, where a sprinkler was too much to pay for a life. We cannot go there again.