

Do we need any more public inquiries?

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The Grenfell Inquiry has now reported seven years after the fire, the causes of which it investigated.

With the greatest of respect to the judge who led it, and to all those who worked on it, the report that the inquiry produced stated almost exactly what we already knew, all of which was concluded in the media in the immediate aftermath of the fire.

Within days of that event it was obvious that there were massive problems with the cladding put on this building in 2014. It also seemed clear at that time that all the companies involved were aware of this fact. I talked to journalists about this at the time.

It was also known at that time that the materials in question had got regulatory clearance, even though this suggested that there must have been a massive failure within the largely privatised regulatory system that had given rise to their wholly inappropriate certification as safe.

It was also abundantly clear at that time that Tory ministers, from Prime Minister Theresa May downwards, were deeply embarrassed by this fire and wished to keep the greatest possible distance from it and its consequences. I cannot be the only person who can recall May's extraordinary confusion in its aftermath and reluctance to engage on the issue.

It can also be no news to anyone that political attitudes towards regulation, whether at ministerial, parliamentary, local authority or think-tank level, had massive consequences that contributed to the failings resulting in the Grenfell disaster.

In fairness, as I recall, the London Fire Brigade accepted that they had made mistakes with regard to the management of this fire very soon after the event. They were the exception: almost no one else did.

In that case, the question has to be asked as to why it took seven years and an enormous cost to confirm what we already knew. And, consequently, why was the

process of bringing anyone to justice delayed by seven years as a result, meaning that up to a decade might elapse before anyone might come to trial if they ever do?

Could it be that this delay, along with that in the tainted blood scandal, the Post Office scandal, the Covid inquiry, and in the forthcoming Lucy Letby inquiry, which now looks as if it should be replaced by an investigation into what increasingly appears to be a gross miscarriage of justice, are all entirely deliberate?

Are all these inquiries simply delay mechanisms so that those who should at the time that these events took place have accepted full and unconditional responsibility could defer judgement on their actions to fulfil their hope that when conclusions were finally reached, the passage of time might be sufficient that their failings might be forgotten?

I am very strongly inclined to think that these enquiries only take place for that reason. As a consequence, I am losing faith in them. I cannot be alone.

Nor can I be alone in my anger about ministers who claim they cannot make appropriate decisions in the aftermath of any event of this sort when it is apparent that, as happened yesterday, an apology for the actions of the state will, inevitably, eventually be required in such cases.

I very strongly suspect that Theresa May did know this when she set up this inquiry, just as Boris Johnson did when he set up the Covid inquiry, which is another long-running fiasco of this sort. Both, however, chose to duck their responsibilities in reprehensible fashion.

If people seek political office, then I think that they should accept the consequences of doing so, which includes confessing to the mistakes they have made, those made by those who report to them, and their predecessors of whatever party they might be. Nothing less will do if we are to have democratic accountability. However, acceptance of this responsibility now appears to be vanishingly rare. As a consequence, I ask the question, yet again, which is, do we really now live in anything approximating to a democracy?