SquattingtheCrisis

Distributions of the Sensible from Grenfell Tower to the Home Front

LEVERHULME TRUST

The University Of Sheffield.

Outline

- One year, two days ago…
  - Grenfell Tower Fire (14 June 2017)
  - Calls to requisition empty properties
  - Dismissed as nonsense
- The distribution of the sensible –

la partage du sensible (Ranciere)

  - Property entitlement
  - Responsibility deficit
  - Aesthetics (voice and appearance)
- Precedent for requisitioning
  - Recognition of people over property
  - Squatting as a politics of force entry

14th June 2017, 12:45am

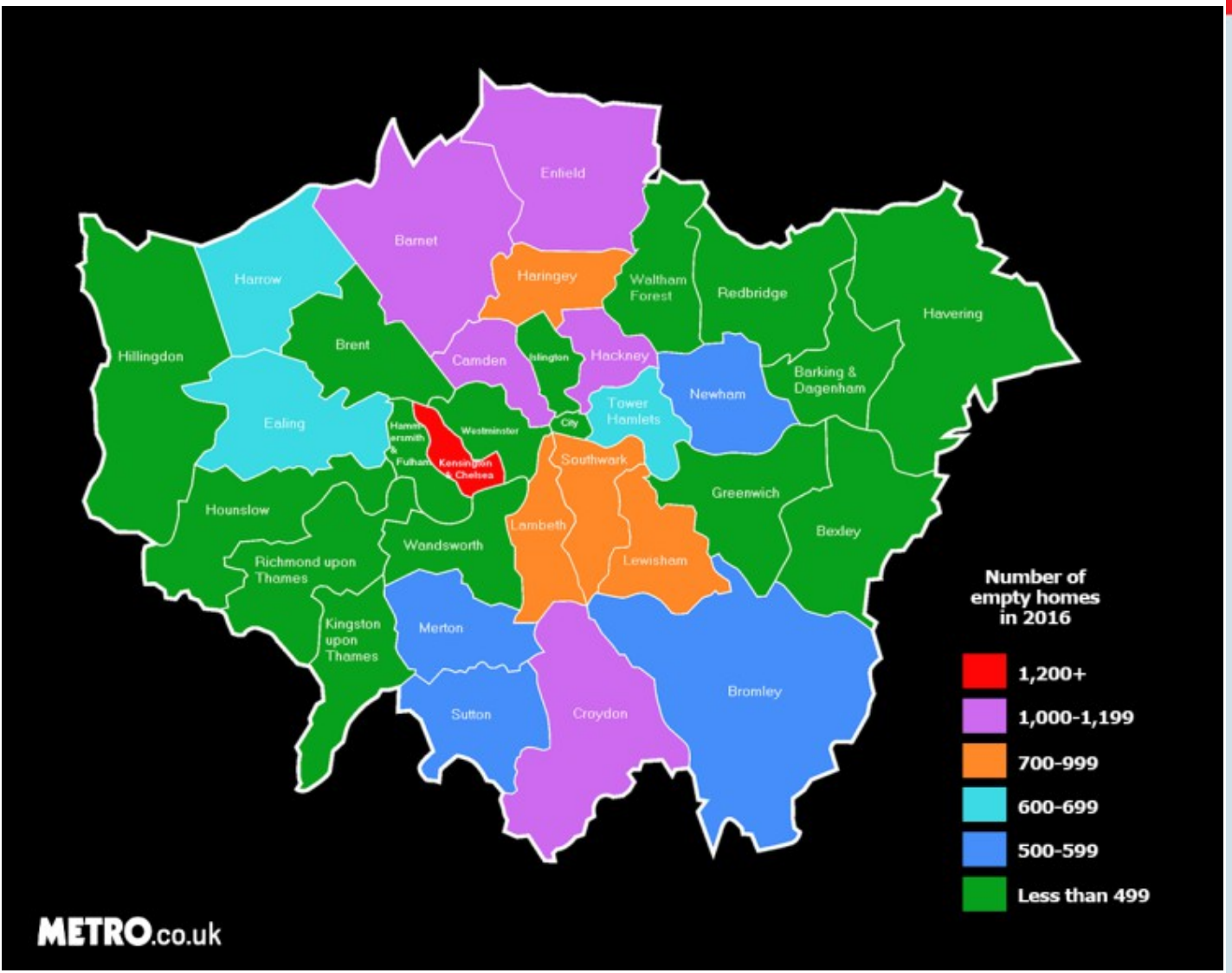
24-storey tower

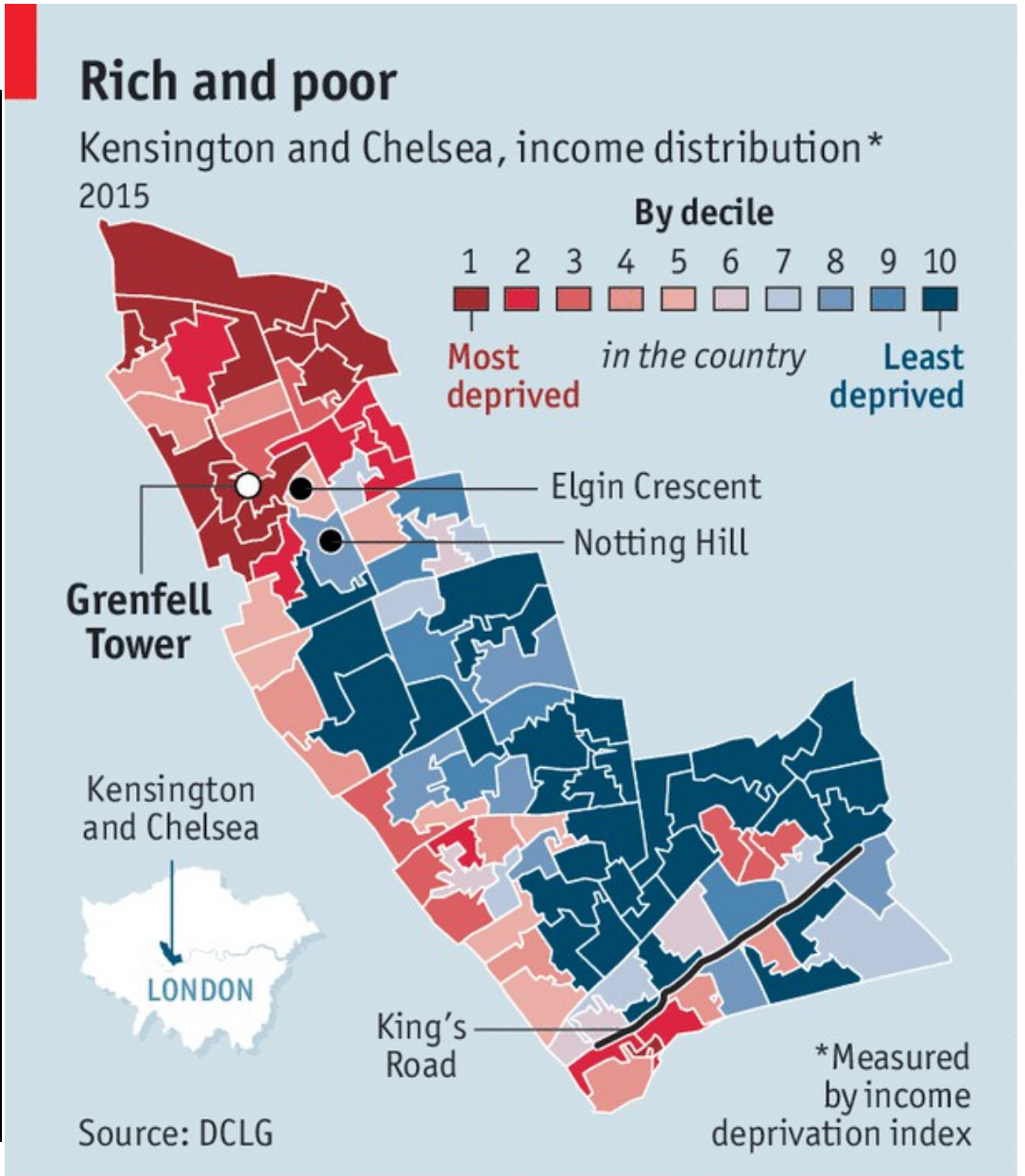
Latimer Rd, N. Kensington

250 f ire f ighters

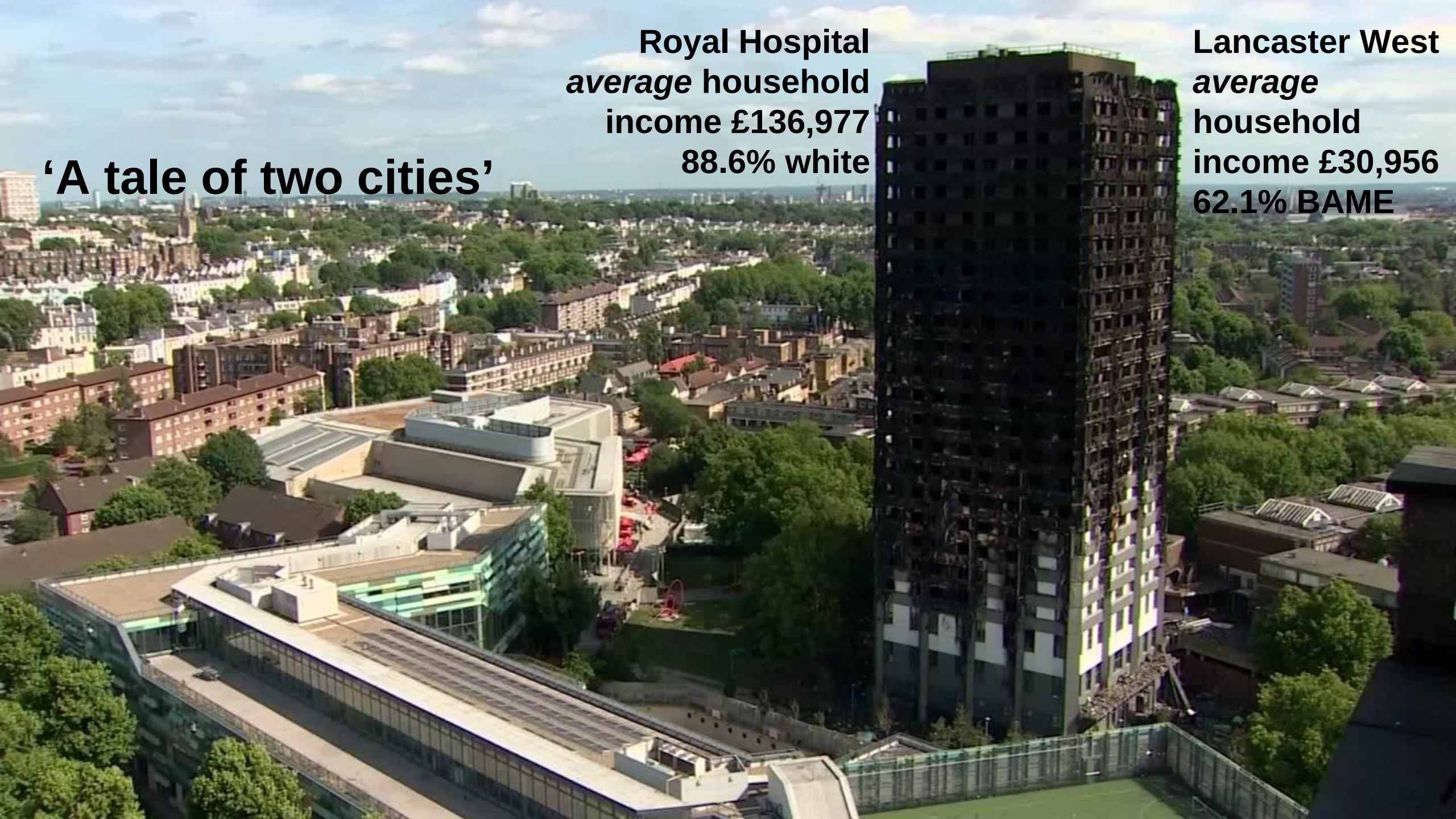
40 f ire engines

72 *conf irmed* deaths





Economist.com


‘A tale of two cities’
Royal Hospital
average household
income £136,977
88.6% white
Lancaster West
average
household
income £30,956
62.1% BAME

‘a fresher, modern look’ that would f t in with the ‘overall aesthetic’ of the area (Rydon, contractors)
Refurb £8.6m… £293k saved on cladding

a large number of deliberately kept vacant flats and properties all over London’

Government should ‘**compulsory purchase**’ or **‘requisition’** such properties

Survivors should **‘occupy’** them

‘**in an emergency you have to bring all assets to the table in order to deal with that crisis**’

(Jeremy Corbyn)

59% public support (YouGov 2017)

‘**We don’t support proposals to seize private property**, our focus is on rehousing people as quickly as possible, in the borough and the neighbouring borough, and that still stands’ (Downing Street)

‘f t in with [Corbyn’s] hard Marxist views’ (Andrew Bridgen MP)

March 2018
62 now in permanent homes
82 still in emergency accommodation
3,324 on borough waiting list are frozen

1. Calls to requisition or occupy empty local properties were dismissed because of ‘normal’ distributions of (a) property entitlement (b) responsibility and (c) aesthetics.

2. The post-war squatters (1945/6) demonstrate a precedent for overlooking such ‘accepted norms’ in times of crisis.

3. Squatting is a politics of ‘forced entry’ that can challenge self-evident distributions.

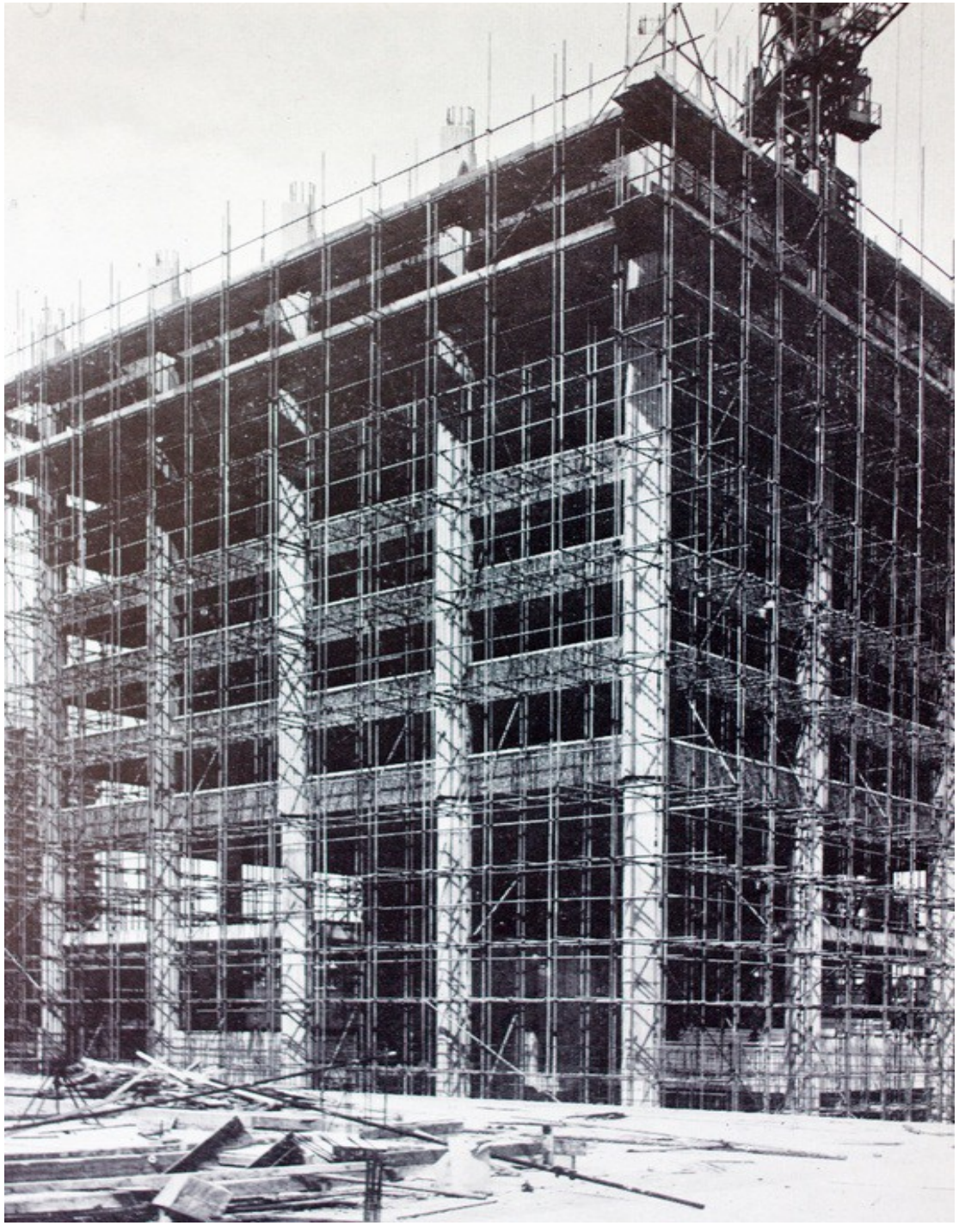
Approach
- Genealogical Politics

Nietzsche, Benjamin, Foucualt, Brown…

- By taking a genealogical approach…

1. Can reveal the historicity of the present (contingency) of what society believes, the norms society takes for granted (e.g. the distribution of the sensible around private property)

2. Can disrupt narratives of the past (e.g. that UK is a nation that respects private property… precedent for direct action).



‘Normal’ distributions of the crisis

Private Property Entitlement

134%
Rise in rough sleeping since 2010

24%
Rise in London rents

97%
Drop UK social housing

1857
Empty buildings in RBKC

696
Empty for more than 2 years

£53m
Brompton Tube in 2014 (Firtash)

£85m
Dukes Lodge in 2015 (Candy)

Reassurances from Berkeley

‘devolved governances and downloaded responsibility have long been hallmarks of neoliberal rule’ (Jamie Peck, 2012)
Responsibility

News › UK › Home News

Grenfell Tower fire: Kensington leader says council not responsible for residents' safety

Speaking exclusively to The Independent, Elizabeth Campbell says safety is 'under legal remit' of Kensington and Chelsea tenant management organisation

Lucy Pasha-Robinson | @lucypasha | Tuesday 7 November 2017 15:29 GMT | 94 comments

News › UK › UK Politics

David Cameron: I will kill off safety culture

'We need to realise, collectively, that we cannot eliminate risk and that some accidents are inevitable,' PM says

Andrew Woodcock, Dan Bentley, Ben Glaze | Thursday 5 January 2012 15:45 GMT | 13 comments

HOME » COMMENT » COLUMNISTS » BORIS JOHNSON

Health and safety fears are making Britain a safe place for extremely stupid people

Health and safety concerns are reducing life to mindless mayhem, complains Boris Johnson.

By Boris Johnson
6:21AM BST 06 Jul 2009

Boris Johnson
Comment »
Personal View »

All about the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005

What is the fire safety order (Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005)?

If you own, manage or operate a business, you need to comply with fire safety law. The main law is the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 or "the Fire Safety Order". It applies across England and Wales and came into force on 1 October 2006.

Who does it apply to?

The Order applies to almost all buildings, places and structures other than individual private homes – that's individual flats in a block or family homes.

Other places covered by the Order include shared areas in houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), blocks of flats and maisonettes.

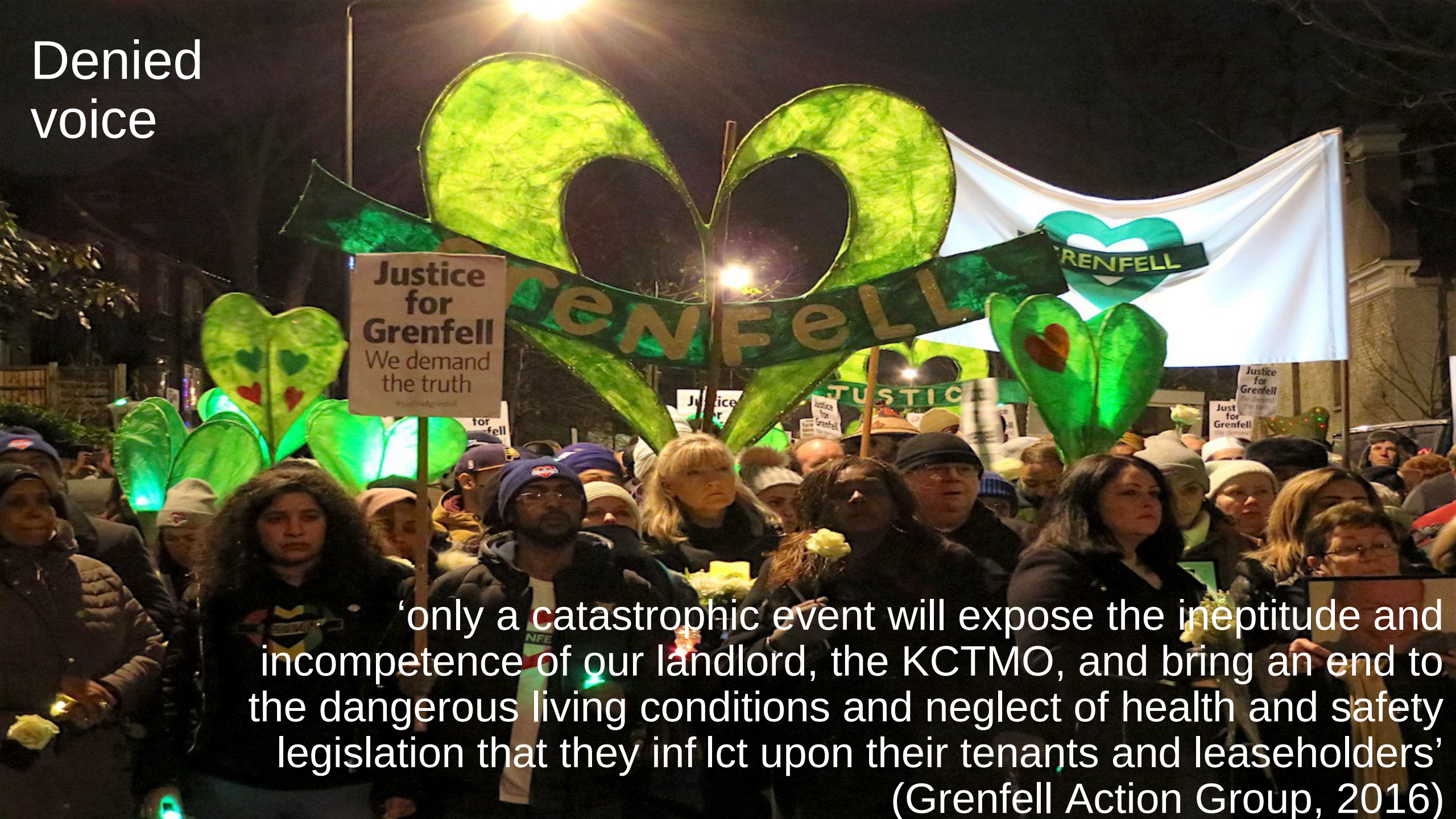
What are your responsibilities?

You need to make sure:

1. Your premises reach the required standards.
2. Employees are provided with adequate fire safety training.

Aesthetics and ‘the poor’

Denied voice

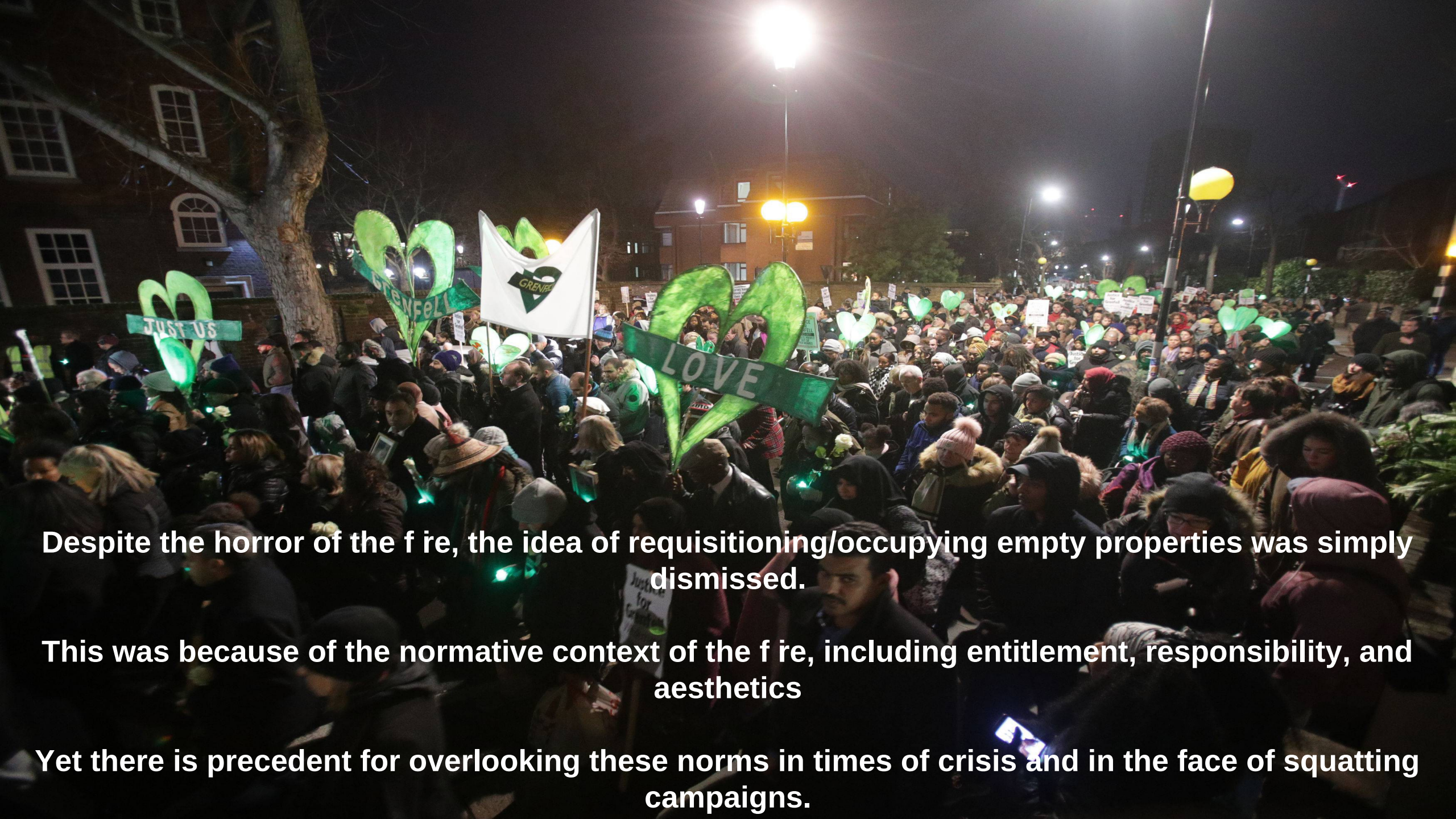


‘only a catastrophic event will expose the ineptitude and incompetence of our landlord, the KCTMO, and bring an end to the dangerous living conditions and neglect of health and safety legislation that they inf lct upon their tenants and leaseholders’ (Grenfell Action Group, 2016)

Denied appearance

They died ‘because they were poor’

‘It was an eyesore for the rich people living opposite. So they put panels, pretty panels, on the outside, so that the rich people opposite wouldn’t have to look at an horrendous block’
(Akala, activist-musician)



Despite the horror of the f ire, the idea of requisitioning/occupying empty properties was simply dismissed.

This was because of the normative context of the f ire, including entitlement, responsibility, and aesthetics

Yet there is precedent for overlooking these norms in times of crisis and in the face of squatting campaigns.

Requisitioning and squatting
1945-6

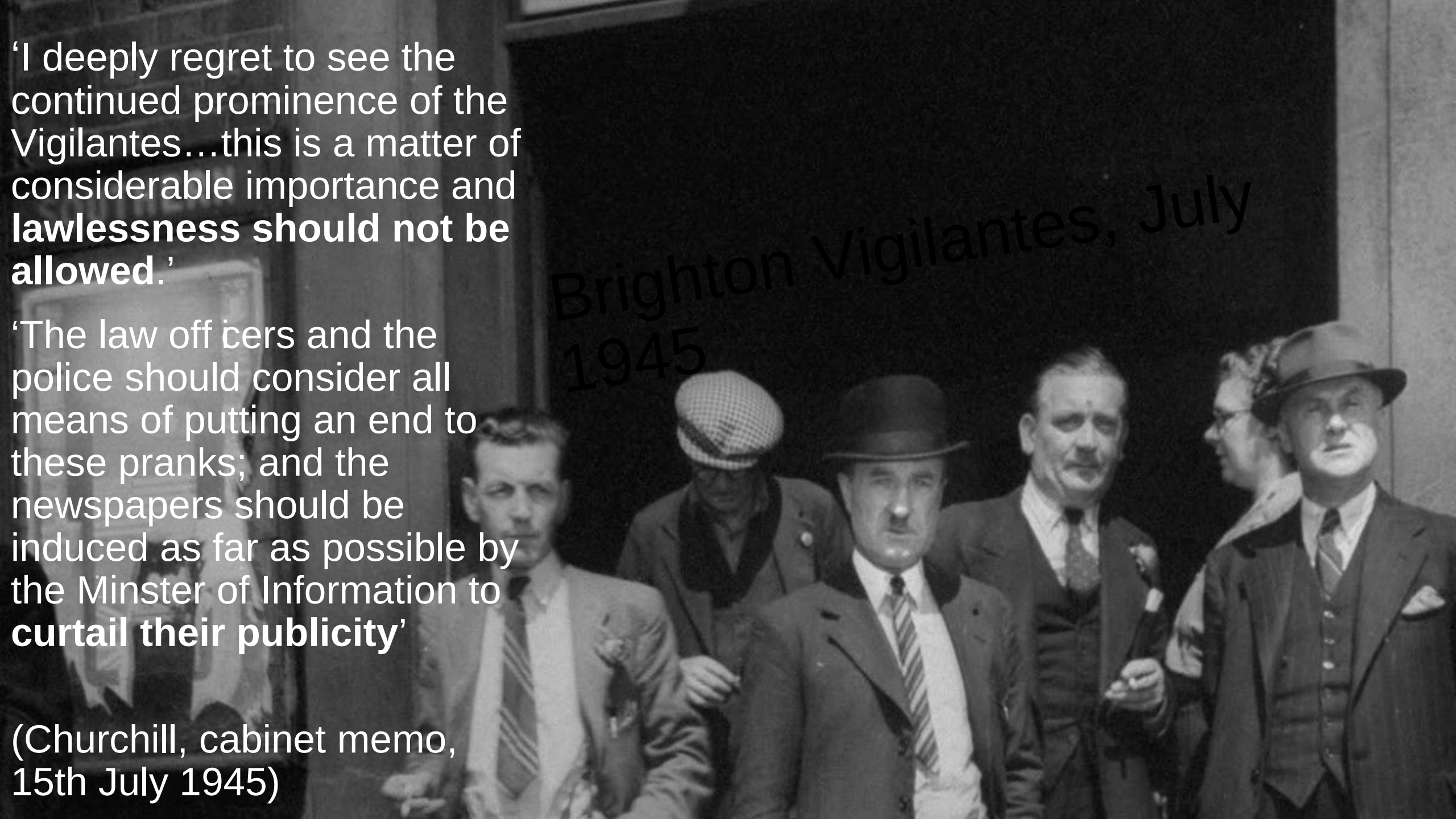
Housing Crisis & WW2

218,000 houses destroyed by blitz
(today, 205,000 houses empty for more than 6 months in England)

‘I deeply regret to see the continued prominence of the Vigilantes…this is a matter of considerable importance and **lawlessness should not be allowed**.’

‘The law officers and the police should consider all means of putting an end to these pranks; and the newspapers should be induced as far as possible by the Minster of Information to **curtail their publicity**’

(Churchill, cabinet memo, 15th July 1945)



Extending Requisitioning Powers

Part of Emergency Measures 1939

Extended to housing people 1943

After Vigilantes, f nal act of wartime coalition ‘in order to prevent further lawless action’ and to ‘bring into use for the accommodation of homeless families any available empty houses… by requisitioning is was possible to secure that available accommodation was used to the full’

DAILY HERALD
FRIDAY JULY 27 1945
ONE PENNY

Attlee Accepts Premiership: Now Forming Government

LABOUR IN POWER

Night Climax To The Great Landslide

PALACE DRAMA

By ERNEST JAY, Political Correspondent

IN a car driven by his wife, Mr. Clement Attlee went to Buckingham Palace last night and accepted the King's invitation to form a Labour Government.

Five minutes earlier, at 7.25, Mr. Churchill left the Palace after tendering his resignation which, in fact, meant the resignation of the Caretaker Government.

Attlee Tells The World

By HANNEN SWAFFER

NEW PREMIER AND HIS WIFE

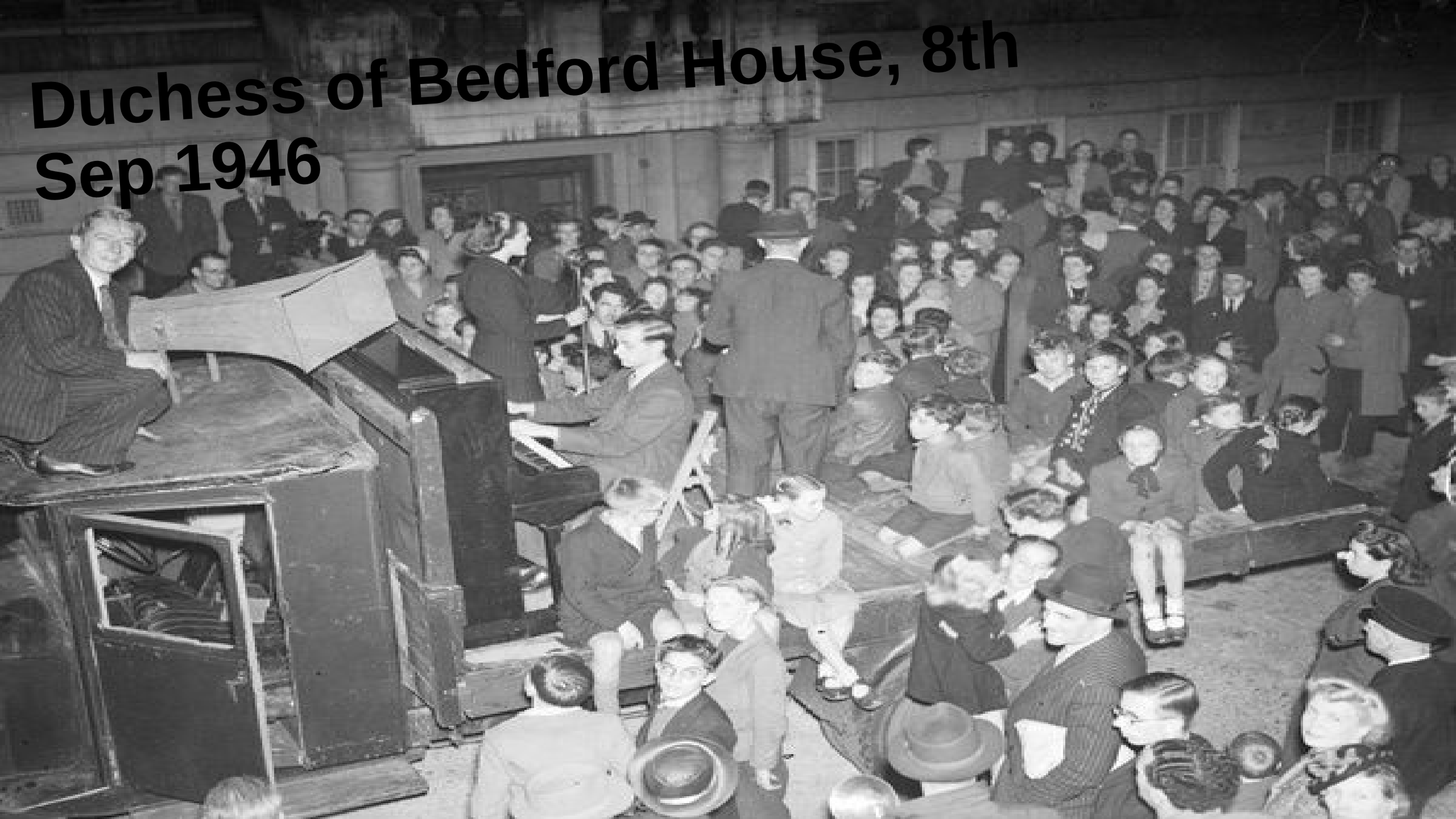
London's Bonfires, Dancing

By W. A. E. JONES, "Daily" Reporter

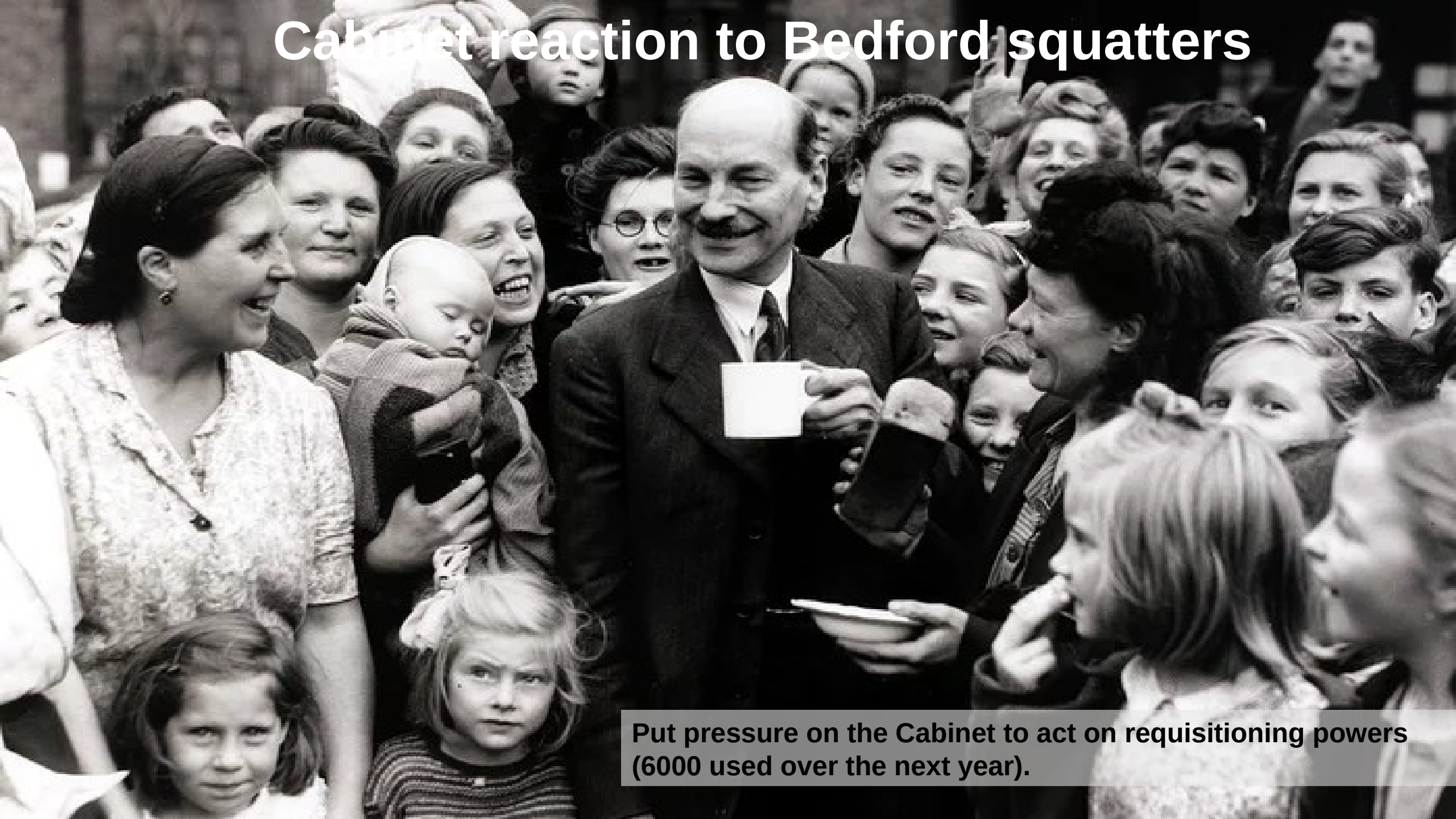
Home Front Squatters, Aug 1946
‘Requisitioning by the people’

‘**Empty houses constitute a provocation** to desperate, homeless workers, and we call on the Government to legalise the position by **requisitioning all properties taken over by the squatters** and thus fulfil their election pledge to house the people’ (Nottingham Post, 1946)

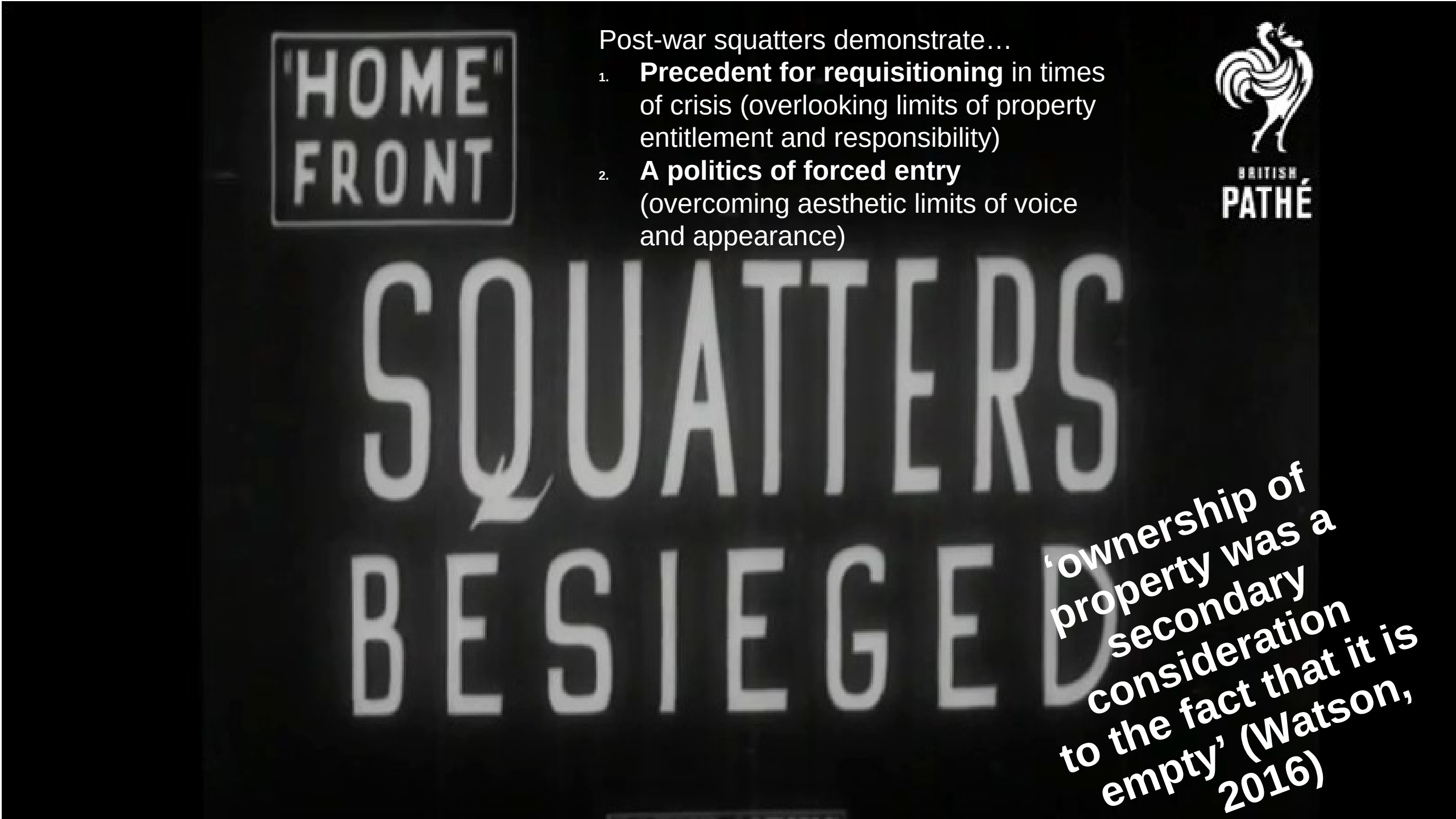
40,000 families (England & Wales)


Duchess of Bedford House, 8th
Sep 1946

Cabinet reaction to Bedford squatters



Put pressure on the Cabinet to act on requisitioning powers (6000 used over the next year).



Post-war squatters demonstrate…

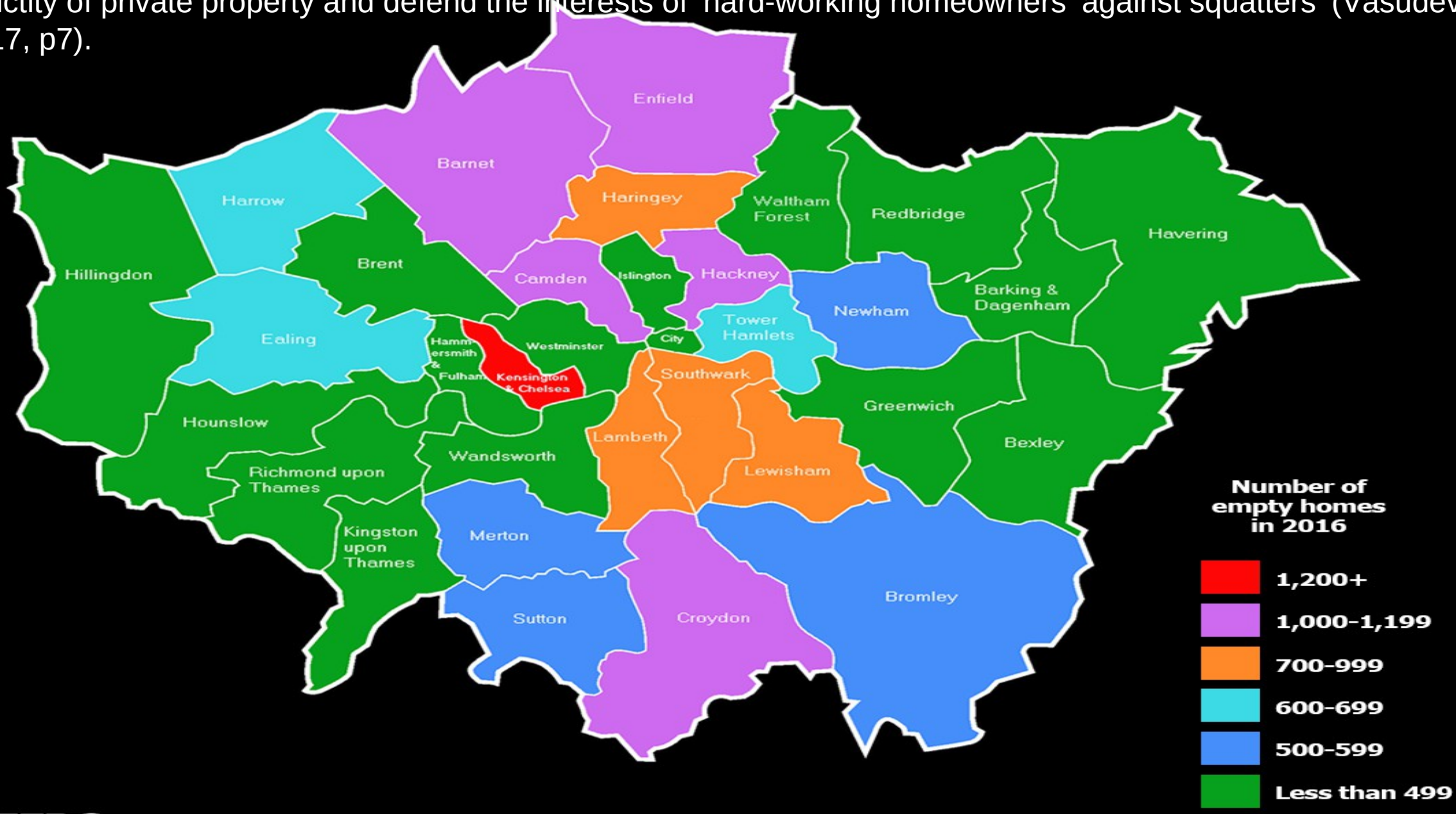
1. **Precedent for requisitioning** in times of crisis (overlooking limits of property entitlement and responsibility)
2. **A politics of forced entry** (overcoming aesthetic limits of voice and appearance)

'ownership of property was a secondary consideration to the fact that it is empty' (Watson, 2016)

Putting Grenfell and calls to requisition empty property in context allows us questions of property entitlement, responsibility, and unequal distribution of voice and appearance.

Unlike narrow, technical public inquiries; squatting (as a politics of forced entry) goes *beyond* 'accepted' norms and allows 'the poor' to intervene, 'making what was unseen visible; making what was audible as mere noise heard as speech' (Ranciere 2010, p38)

No coincidence that squatting has been further criminalised *now* and after the financial crisis*:* ‘seek to uphold the sanctity of private property and defend the interests of ‘hard-working homeowners’ against squatters’ (Vasudevan, 2017, p7).



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