

Letters on the West Virginia mine disaster

7 January 2006

The following is a selection of letters received by the WSWs on the recent deaths of 12 coal miners at the Sago Mine in West Virginia.

My grandfather was crippled in a mine accident. He bore the scars for the remainder of his life, which was shortened by this incident. He said that no child of his or their children would ever go into a mine. None have, thanks be, though they have been involved in many other hazardous occupations. I cannot express the grief that I feel for the family and friends of the miners and the anger that I feel toward the callous and cold persons who have brought about this murder. Let us not pussyfoot about with words, these miners were murdered and the ruling elite is completely responsible. They and their lackeys in government and the unions, although Sago was not union, have bartered money for lives and profit for blood.

I did notice in one news report that the state police were present to protect the leaders and rulers from the workers. But would these same state police protect the workers from the leaders and rulers who use the “law” to murder workers and to rape the creation? A rhetorical question, I know, for the answer is a resounding NO!

My mother taught me to obey the law and follow the rules. But, she said, when those who make the rules and laws and those who are to protect the rules and laws no longer obey or follow the rules and laws then at every opportunity FOLD, SPINDLE AND MUTILATE.

All workers now have cause to cease work and to demand safety and dignity—to demand to be treated as human beings and not machines nor ciphers. But this will not happen and for that I cry. These miners have died in vain.

May they rest in peace.

RV

Upper Marlboro, Maryland

On the basis of this article, it is clear that no one is looking after the interests of the working class. The

government is clearly on the side of the financial elite, as demonstrated by their laxity in enforcing the rules to ensure mine safety. This should come as no surprise, as the government is clearly in the control by fascist oriented neo-conservatives, clearly hostile to the interests of the working class. What is really frightening is the indifference shown by the miners union, the UMWA. They’ve apparently made no response to the outrage of this disaster. As pointed out by the article, it was not even mentioned on their web page. The audacity of this organization to even hint they are on the side of the workers is such hypocrisy. The working class must wake up and respond to the attacks being made against their best interests by the evil forces of the neo-fascist capitalists and their minions.

CS

For two days Jerry Isaacs has presented us with a short but detailed history of coal mining in America and a damning indictment of all who have betrayed miners since 1970. Mr. Isaacs has written a socialist funeral sermon for the dead miners, no, murdered miners.

I think that is how workers go from mourning to organizing. I choose to hope that workers see or hear your words. The restrained, detailed facts presented can focus the righteous anger of survivors of the martyred miners and all workers to act after the funerals. Mine owners, mainstream media, politicians and the ruling elite have been given notice that they have “hell” to pay for what happened in West Virginia; workers should present and collect the bill from the bosses.

LL

Whitehall, Pennsylvania

Thanks for bringing the truth out in the open—even risking the wrath of your government.

Has the value of life dropped in the United States? Have war and countless dead bodies in Iraq, Afghanistan and the 9/11 tragedy eroded the values of

those in charge in America, and even the average man on the street?

Who will be held accountable for the lies of the company execs and the Bush government?

Can I suggest, looking at past performance, probably nobody?

These sort of corrupt watchdogs that only seem to exist to make sure production doesn't stop must be brought to task. Self-regulation might be okay for the video hire industry, or free to air television (for example), but not where men risk lives. Some 200 violations of safety? That's 200 divided by 12 = 16.6 breaches for each man that died. Just in 2005! One breach would be too many.

I'm a firefighter in Australia, and I'm grateful for the efforts of our Worksafe system, which runs independently from industry. They too try to work with employers to make their industries safer—but it's not just an "ideal" or a "goal," as it seems to be in the West Virginia. In Australia, a breach of safety of any serious kind can, and has shut complete companies down—even large ones, until the risk was eliminated.

Even fire brigades are not exempt from these safety audits. At the moment, a strange situation exists where we can climb onto a roof of a burning structure, but we can't climb onto the top of the cabins of our trucks to clean them. This might seem like bureaucratic red tape and snafu, but somebody fell off the roof of a truck, and so the resulting restrictions are currently in place. Meanwhile, Worksafe and fire brigades are working to overcome the problem, and make it safe to clean the top of the truck.

If this is what it takes so that I come home safe to my wife and kids each day, then I am grateful for Worksafe, with all its idiosyncrasies. But then, in my job, there are no guarantees. We realise it's dangerous and we make safety our number one priority. Mining is dangerous too, and that's why a culture of "safety first" should override all other operational matters.

Lt. BL

Victoria, Australia

This is the typical state of operations for mine owners in the US. The sad truth is that it works; huge profits for the absentee owners and poverty for the employees. In fact, this is the typical operation of big business today.

Take Iraq, for example. The purported dollars the

American people have loaned to the Iraqi people for rebuilding infrastructure really went to the infrastructure of the military. The infrastructure of the country, well, that's a different matter. The condition of the oil fields, publicly criticized as antiquated and improvised as the much-repaired parts failed again and again, have not been updated. The only thing that was updated was the contract under which the oil would be extracted. Sound familiar?

The infrastructure will be completely controlled by the companies who will deduct any cost associated with the processing of the oil from the profits. And since all this stuff is so antiquated it's going to take a huge investment to restore the fields.

Let's see: the oilfields are antiquated (but supposedly updated) so the costs assessed against the Iraqi government will be, shall we say, excessive? And everyone who has ever remodeled anything knows how expensive that is, and it's *so* much cheaper to build new isn't it?

KS

Duluth, Minnesota



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