

Letters on the West Virginia mine disaster

13 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.

The WSWS coverage of the Sago Mine disaster, and the ongoing coverage of the gutting of health and safety, in the midst of the disaster in Iraq, has been key to understanding the present period and to charting a course out of this mess. WSWS has cut through the media propaganda, distortion and blackout that have been close to Sago. Thank you for bringing this fine and noble coverage to readers and to the masses. The politicians, with their limited investigation, will spend big money learning what we already know: that someone either made a mistake with the communication or deliberately kept the families waiting. Disgustingly and outrageously, they then may cynically endeavor to “improve” a communications system that will bring the news of dead miners more quickly to loved ones in the future, a fact that is sure to come if they fail to address basic safety issues in the worst mines. It appears as though they are planning for more victims.

This “communications” investigation is an insult to the workers and their families. What should happen is a proper and thorough safety and accident investigation, and an investigation into the gutting and improper manipulation of health and safety rules, or better yet, a murder investigation.

In a similar vein, it is equally disgusting and outrageous how “God” has been used in this tragedy. The concept and name of the “supreme being,” the “prime mover,” is used as a fall guy and excuse for the greedy ones on top that have made money from the gutting of safety and the death of the miners. “God” has had the rap pinned on him in order to shield the criminals. No matter how we feel about “God,” this is obviously what is happening. We see the prayers and condolences in every industrial accident, with very little offer of prompt action toward correction of safety

violations. What we need to see is the necessary taking of responsibility and action to improve the safety and security that workers need from government and unions. The events are instead to be seen, if you watch and believe the media as they cover statements of state and local officials and clergy, as an “act of god,” mining to be understood categorically as “dangerous work.” We are supposed to believe that in a mine with over 200 safety violations, with many violations of an extreme nature, this accident could hardly have been prevented. In fact, everyone with any knowledge of mining knows that if the company had put a percentage of last year’s \$110 million profit into safety systems in the mine, this accident would never have happened.

This disaster makes today’s situation clear. Workers today and tomorrow need to take action, with or without unions, government or companies, as circles of neighbors, friends and co-workers, to improve safety on the job. Where assistance in these acts of survival is not forthcoming, the need to refuse to work in dangerous and life-threatening situations within the course of a workday, until proper safety conditions are met. It appears though, very unfortunately and tragically, that the extreme pressure of today’s economic system and the worst individuals and layers of government beholden to it and profiting from it, will take more of our workers, neighbors and comrades to their deaths before there is change to prevent such deaths that are readily preventable technologically, and indeed were preventable even 40 years ago. Even so, even though the task will be great, and will require great sacrifices and constant vigilance, we must do our utmost to vigorously organize, support, agitate, investigate and struggle to bring about justice, safety, security and health to miners and all workers! This is part of the great task that lies ahead for politics and labor.

JB

11 January 2006

On “US media sheds crocodile tears for West

Virginia miners”

You write, “Any sincere concern [in the media] for the plight of the miners and their families—and there is no reason to believe that even this affluent crowd was not moved by the tragedy—found expression in a patronizing attitude that depicted the miners as simply oppressed and downtrodden.”

Oppressed and downtrodden ...by whom? By the very people toward whom the advertisements for Rolex watches and million-dollar apartments are directed. These talking heads have no conception of where their wealth and their luxuries come from. Where does the power to run the light, the microwave or the TV come from, and where does the power plant derive its power? From the blood and sweat and death of the downtrodden and the oppressed. Miners and workers in uranium mines and coal mines. Where does the steel come from that is in their buildings and their Hummers? From the blood and sweat and death of the downtrodden and the oppressed. Who is it that truly holds the levers of power in this country and that the wealthy fear most of all? The downtrodden and the oppressed. Who is the most lied to and fractured group in this country and in the world overall today? The downtrodden and the oppressed.

But beware, my fine elites, for below your filthy fine leather boot is a human throat and that throat is attached to a human body and that body has a hand and that hand will one day grab your ankle and remove your boot from the throat.

RAV

Upper Marlboro, Maryland

10 January 2006

The rest of the country forgets that West Virginia exists until there is such a tragedy. The rest of the country knows nothing of West Virginians. They only hear about stereotypical myths of brothers marrying sisters and toothless people. I had thought of writing a book on West Virginian culture, because I have very deep roots here, but am discouraged that it would not pay me back because nobody would be interested in buying it.

So much more tragedy goes on here, including the eroding of the environment that is used, abused and violated as a weekend playground for the urban (still middle class) looking for some space to run their oil-driven vehicles, make noise and see green trees. And by

big money’s exploitation. It is so frustrating that I can’t live here much longer. Good article.

CW

Aurora, West Virginia

On “Mine safety cuts hindered West Virginia rescue”

You write, “In a similar fashion, the Sago mine disaster—and the lack of adequate resources to protect miners’ lives—reveals how every aspect of life in America is subordinated to the drive for profit.” It could as truthfully read: “reveals how the life of every American is subordinated to the drive for profit.”

I have been thinking about safety measures in light of this tragedy and know that, were the miners in charge of their mine, the nearest rescue squad would not be hours away, nor would the issues of collapse be unaddressed by action.

Rather than leaving their lives in the hands of those who have never set foot in the shafts, and who view safety as something to which lip-service and an occasional small check must be paid, the miners of the world would be far better served by seizing control of operations. Not only would their lives be lengthened, but the quality of their lives, given direct control of the profits of the mines, would improve.

CMS

Portland, Oregon

9 January 2006



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