

Poor safety condemned by workers at San Jose mine

Rafael Azul
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The Chilean political establishment has sought to promote nationalist sentiment in the midst of popular celebration over the rescue of the 33 miners trapped underground for 69 days. The aim is to cover over the background to the disaster, and in particular the responsibility of the mine company and the government itself.

The miners themselves have long complained about poor safety at the mine. The Spanish daily *El País* reported on the concerns that a few of the Chilean miners have expressed including in interviews while the miners were underground.

Osman Anaya, who had only worked four months at the San Jose mine, had repeatedly complained to management about the unsafe conditions. “If you want to fire me,” he said during one of these complaints, “give me my severance.” According to Osman’s wife, “They would not fire him, so as not to pay the severance.”

Carlos Bugueño had decided to work at the mine as a means of saving to buy a house and car. However, he was also very concerned about the mine’s safety. He often referred to the San Jose mine as “slaughterhouse San Esteban,” a reference to the corporation that owned the mine.

“This mine weeps a lot,” Darío Segovia used to complain to his wife, by which he meant that rocks were constantly raining water down on the miners. Darío had 40 years seniority in the mine. In the weeks running up to the disaster he was increasingly concerned about safety. His work schedule at the mine was one week on, one week off, 12 hours per day. On August 5, he was working overtime at double the daily pay, 140 Euros, approximately US \$210. On his week off, Darío sold vegetables off of his pickup truck.

Pedro Cortés lost a finger last year when management

ordered him to operate a machine that he had not been trained for. He is not the only miner who has been a victim of mining accidents and unsafe conditions.

Mario Gomez is a twelve-year veteran of the mines. Seven years ago he lost three fingers in his left hand in a mining accident. He suffers from silicosis. His wife describes him as a generous person, who sometimes goes without food so that others may eat.

Jorge Galleguillos was injured twice at the mine in 2009. In the first accident, Galleguillos broke several ribs falling from a machine. In the second accident, a stone fell from above and wounded his back. He had to spend four months in the hospital and in therapy recovering from both accidents. At the hospital ward, the beds on both sides of his were also occupied by injured San Jose miners.

“They could have baptized that ward with the name of the mine,” commented Galleguillos’s daughter. “My father was very aware that one day he may not have returned from the mine, but in Chile it is difficult for older men to find work.”

Mario Sepulveda commented on the so-called shelter where the miners found refuge: “I am taking the opportunity to comment on the famous refuge. The company was supposed to provide conditions for our safety. However, once the mine explosion took place, the energy was cut. We had no lights.” Sepulveda was known to stand up to management and had no confidence in the safety of the mine.

Jimmy Sanchez, 21, was equally concerned about the safety of the mine, the same mine that had employed his father and grandfather before him. “This mine has always been unsafe,” declared Jimmy’s father.



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