

Letter on the death of four miners at Gleision colliery, Wales

Malcolm Bray
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As a former miner in Yorkshire, I would like to express my sincere condolences to the families of the four men who tragically died at the Gleision mine in Wales on September 15. (See “The Welsh mining tragedy and the return to Dickensian-style exploitation”)

Just as I began writing this letter, I heard the news that a miner had been killed and another injured after a roof collapsed at Kellingley colliery in North Yorkshire.

These tragedies occur far too often in this country and around the world. Before the loss of the men at Gleision and Kellingley, seven miners had lost their lives in the UK since 2007. But this is only part of the picture. In the same period there were at least 750 serious injuries in mines notified to the Health and Safety Executive.

Men who work in these private mines gamble with life and limb on a daily basis, in an industry that has many dangers. Health and safety in many of the pits left today are virtually non-existent, especially those like Gleision, where coal was being mined in an old fashioned way that is very dangerous, but which is cheaper and more profitable to extract. If a miner dies as a result, then little compensation is paid out to their families.

When the news of the accident at Gleision first broke, it quickly became clear that there wasn't much chance that these men would get out of the mine alive. The surveyors of mines know the whereabouts of the old workings, and in all probability that they will be full of water. When these old workings burst, it suddenly releases thousands of litres of water that has built up over a long period, leaving little chance for any miners that get in the way.

With the surveying technology available today, it

should be possible to prevent working seams being mined too close to the old workings. The pit owners know about the old seams, yet they push the working seams closer and closer to them to try and get as much coal out as they can, and so make more money.

Cutting coal this close to old workings, placing men in such severe danger, can only be described as criminal. But in all probability the pit owners will not face any charges.

This is a sickening reality, which is a result of the greed of the pit owners and the failure of the trade unions to protect even the most minimum conditions for miners today.



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