

British ex-miners support call for full investigation of New Zealand's Pike River disaster

Our reporters
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The World Socialist Web Site is publishing statements from former coal miners in the UK in support of the Pike River Families Committee, which represents 23 of the 29 families of the men who died in the 2010 Pike River coal mine disaster in New Zealand. The families are fighting to overturn the Labour Party-led government's decision to end an underground forensic investigation of the mine. The government aims to prevent the recovery and examination of evidence that could be used in criminal prosecutions of those responsible for the disaster.

More than a decade after the explosions at Pike River, no one has been brought to justice. Successive governments, union bureaucrats, and state agencies have protected the company's executives and managers, whose negligence turned the mine into a death trap. The WSWS urges readers around the world to read and share our statement, Justice for the 29 miners killed at New Zealand's Pike River!, and send messages of support for this crucial fight.

To read previously published statements of support, click [here](#) and [here](#).

Malcolm Bray:

Firstly, I would like to express my heartfelt condolences to the families who lost their loved ones at the Pike River mine in New Zealand on that terrible day.

As a former coalminer I fully understand the dangers of working underground. Where I live in Barnsley, South Yorkshire, was the heart of the former mining industry in Britain.

The disaster at the Pike River mine was an absolute disgrace, considering the developments in mining technology, from advanced gas detectors and even

miners' safety lamps that have been a reliable gas detector for many years in the mining industry, to the massive fans that are used to circulate fresh air around the mine. These types of disasters are entirely preventable if the mine owners utilised this technology properly rather than prioritising profits. That is why the Labour-Green government is keen to seal off the mine denying these workers the dignity of a funeral and burying the evidence which would show the culpability of the company.

I fully support a full investigation into the deaths of the 29 miners at Pike River. However, this must not be left to the powers that be. We know the outcome would only lead at most to a slapped wrist fine and coverup. The families need answers, which would and should lead to the rightful prosecution of the company and all those responsible.

I went through the Miners Strike of 1984-5. We were savagely attacked by the Tory government led by Margaret Thatcher and the state. What we experienced was the full brutality of the British ruling class. The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) under the left leadership of Stalinist Arthur Scargill was incapable of standing up for the rights of miners and their families – he claimed it was not a political struggle against the government, allowed the miners to be isolated and put forward economic protectionism, pitting miners here against their class brothers internationally.

What I came to realise is workers cannot find justice within a system which only cares about profits over the lives and safety of workers. This has clearly been shown and highlighted during the pandemic.

Workers have been treated with indifference and contempt, everything is to suit the profit aspirations of

the rich. The working class throughout the world is one class and must be united as one class. When the working class realise that, there will be no holding them back. Together, we can win everything. Nothing for the working class can be won through a national perspective and that's why the miners' strike in 1984-85 failed despite its militancy. Many workers around the world have suffered the same fate since.

The struggles of workers are linked by the world crisis of capitalism. All the struggles must be joined, whether it's workers on strike, opposition to war and social inequality and defence of basic rights against the attempts to divide along national and racial lines. If workers are isolated, then it can only lead to one conclusion: injustice and defeat.

The bereaved families of the Pike River mine in New Zealand must seek international support. The campaign by the WSWs is doing this, in the process of building international rank and file committees. I believe this is the only way forward for all workers the world over. I fully support your campaign for justice and to hold those criminally responsible to account.

The Miners Strike 1984-85 Facebook page is promoting your heroic stand and sharing coverage from the WSWs to bring news of your struggle to as wide an audience as we can.

Best wishes,

Malcolm B, ex-coal miner, UK

Raymond Purcell:

Yet again the mining community has been let down by a government that was formed originally on the backs of many miners to protect workers' rights. This government should hang its head in shame for not carrying out a full and sensitive inquiry into the deaths of hard-working miners in this terrible disaster. Just why a full forensic investigation is not going ahead is beyond me as this would give peace to the families and real closure to a Labour government and not a cover up as this seems in my opinion to be.

I worked as coal miner for 23 years at Wearmouth colliery Sunderland UK. Our mine was worked for many miles under the North Sea, which took the lives of many people. As with all mining this is an extremely dangerous occupation which we all knew. But this is what makes coal miners a remarkable group of men—we all know the dangers but we still want and deserve a safe environment to do our job. When this safety stops

and a tragedy happens then a full and honest inquiry is needed to prevent another man's life being taken in a similar way.

So please do the right thing.

Raymond Purcell (ex-miner)

Andrew:

As an ex-coal miner from the United Kingdom, this would be an accident waiting to happen as the ventilation system that was in place was inadequate.

Mick Hutchinson:

It stinks to think they could be so close to their loved ones and again it all comes down to money. Let me say this: money should never come into this. We all know that their loved ones have died. So get on with the recovery and bring their loved ones home so they can say their last goodbyes, for god's sake.

Retired Miner from Yorkshire coalfield x



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