

Sri Lankan workers call for full investigation into New Zealand's Pike River disaster

Our reporters
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World Socialist Web Site readers in Sri Lanka have made statements supporting the campaign of Socialist Equality Group (SEG) in New Zealand for a full investigation into the Pike River mine disaster in 2010, which killed 29 workers.

The WSWS calls on workers throughout the world to send statements of support for the Pike River Families Group, which represents 22 of the 29 families of those who died. It is demanding that the Labour Party-led government reverse its decision to end an underground investigation of the mine and permanently seal it, leaving vital evidence unexamined. This is aimed at protecting the company managers from prosecution.

To read previously published statements, click [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). Former miners in the UK have contributed statements [here](#).

Dhammika, doctor:

I am deeply saddened that after a 10-year struggle, New Zealand's largest industrial disaster is being silently pushed under the surface.

National Party and Labour Party-led governments have repeatedly issued empty promises to deeply investigate the mine. But Jacinda Ardern's Labour Party has decided that they will no longer fund any underground investigation to go deeper into the mine—a ploy to hide crucial evidence that could be used in future prosecutions. Pike River Coal, aided by the government regulators, gambled with human lives for profit by sending workers into a mine, despite warnings that it was explosive and extremely dangerous.

Trade union leader Andrew Little remarked after the explosion that nothing unusual had happened at the mine. Today he is a Minister in the Arden government. He has made it his task to halt investigations. I see this treacherous dedication of unions to protecting companies as an international phenomenon. Just like

London's Grenfell Tower fire and the Virginia Upper Big Branch mine disaster, it seems that the Pike River mine victims will not be given justice.

As a reader of the WSWS and as a Sri Lankan working class citizen, I take this time to express my well-wishes and congratulations to those fighting for justice as well as to show my deepest and sincere sorrow for the families that were affected by this cruel incident.

Nuwan, construction worker in Colombo city:

The dangerous circumstances in which the workers died in the Pike River accident are clear. Workers all over the world have been forced into such dangerous conditions in order to make a living. We ourselves have been pushed to work under difficult conditions, as the COVID-19 pandemic has been utilised to destroy jobs. Despite the pandemic, companies continue their contracts without delay. However, workloads are unbearable as the number of workers has been cut.

Work-related accidents are on the rise due to the cutting of costs for our physical security, as in the Pike River mine. Here, employers have stopped providing safety boots. Instead, only giving low-cost canvas boots.

For months, I have not been with my wife and son. None of the workers here gets an opportunity to spend time with their children and wives. In the name of protecting us from the pandemic, the company has confined us. These experiences make clear that the same capitalist policy of placing profits ahead of human lives is in operation, like at Pike River.

The *World Socialist Web Site*, compared to other media, is totally different. Other media does not inform us of news relevant to the working class, such as the Pike River accident. The WSWS always speaks from the workers' side. It is only the WSWS and the SEP

which oppose the government's "essential service orders" in Sri Lanka that forces us to work in unsafe conditions. Even though we thought that the trade unions would oppose these orders, they capitulated without saying a single word. Through the WSWS, I learned that they did so because they have been transformed into the instruments of the capitalists.

It is clear why the trade unions do not come forward to defend the rights of the Pike River workers: they are on the side of the company. So, I express my support to the committee and campaign that has been formed by the Pike River families independently of the trade unions. Building such committees, and discussing the political issues they face, is crucial.

Sajaith Bandara, newspaper cartoonist:

I extend my support to the fight by WSWS to do justice to the 29 workers who perished at the Pike River mine in New Zealand.

I oppose the suppression of the inquiries into their deaths and say straightaway that the causes for the deaths should be reviewed and those responsible held accountable. I denounce all the organisations, including the trade unions and the pseudo-lefts, who support ending the investigation.

The deaths of these workers that happened ten years ago were not an accident but a crime. It was a result of conscious decisions that place profit above human lives.

Despite highly-advanced technology, this disaster in 2010 shows the dire situation facing humanity. This tragedy is only one example of the negligence towards human lives under the capitalist system. As the WSWS has explained, the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the crisis of capitalism. I think that the situation in Sri Lanka is no different. Although there are thousands of deaths, the rulers demand that workers go to work—decisions that place profit ahead of human lives.

Hemal, teacher at a Bandarawela school:

I was so shocked to hear that 29 mine workers in New Zealand had died in the Pike River mine. The New Zealand government and the mining company are responsible for this tragedy. The fact that even 10 years later, neither the courts, nor the company, nor the government has done any justice to the families of those workers demonstrates that New Zealand, like other countries in the world, criminally neglects workers' lives.

This makes clear that the media campaign claiming New Zealand is ahead of the other countries in terms of suppressing the coronavirus pandemic is a hollow thing. I express my support for the campaign by the families of dead workers against the suppression of the investigation into the deaths and think that the workers in other countries should support it.

Mahesh Bandara, teacher from Polonnaruwa:

I oppose the step taken by the New Zealand government to stop the investigation into the tragic deaths of 29 workers, including a 17-year-old worker at the Pike River mine.

First, the fundamental right of the family members of those workers to know what caused their loved ones' deaths has been violated. Secondly, that decision prevents knowledge being gained that could prevent such tragedies in the future. Thirdly, it would free the company from its accountability, if the disaster occurred as a result of the criminal negligence of the company.

In this sense, I consider such an investigation is a right, not only of the family members but also of the working class in New Zealand and internationally. It is clear that the inquiry is being suppressed to protect the mining company.

All over the world, the policy of the capitalist governments is to place profit ahead of human lives. This is clear from the response to the coronavirus pandemic by the rulers in every country. Behind the ugly conspiracy to suppress this investigation in New Zealand is this same policy. In opposition to it, we should rise up as workers.

Members of the dead workers' families in the Pike River mine, I stand with you in your struggle against stopping the inquiry.



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