

Letter from Bernie Monk, spokesperson for Pike River families in New Zealand, to the families of the Tennessee explosives plant disaster

Bernie Monk
14 October 2025

The *World Socialist Web Site* has received the following letter from Bernie Monk, whose son Michael was one of 29 workers killed in a series of explosions at the Pike River Coal mine in New Zealand, in November 2010. The letter is addressed to the families of the 16 victims of last week's explosion at the Accurate Energetic Systems (AES) explosives factory in Tennessee.

The Pike River tragedy has clear parallels with the October 10 Tennessee disaster—including the reports that the factory was allowed to operate despite known safety hazards, for which AES received minuscule fines.

The WSWWS has written extensively about Pike River, which was one of the worst industrial disasters in New Zealand's history, and about the ongoing fight to uncover the full truth about what caused the explosions. Despite overwhelming evidence that Pike River Coal's management violated health and safety laws and endangered the lives of its workers by placing profit and production ahead of safety, no one has been held to account.

Successive New Zealand governments, with the assistance of the judicial system and the trade union bureaucracy, have shielded the company leadership from prosecution. The Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union (EPMU, now called E t?) played a key role in covering up dangerous conditions at the mine prior to the explosion and then defending the company in the immediate aftermath.

In 2021, Jacinda Ardern's Labour Party government aborted an underground investigation of Pike River and

sealed the mine portal, leaving crucial forensic evidence buried underground along with the remains of those killed, which have never been recovered.

Letter to the Families in Tennessee

From Bernie Monk, Spokesperson for the Pike River Families, New Zealand

Dear Families,

My name is Bernie Monk. I speak for the Pike River Families in New Zealand, who lost 29 men in the Pike River Mine disaster in 2010. We have lived through what you are now facing, and my heart breaks for you.

We are praying for you all. We know the shock, the pain, and the disbelief that come with such a loss. We also know what happens after the cameras leave and the authorities take over. That is when the truth becomes hard to find.

I want to warn you from my experience. Do not put your trust in the government or company management. From the first day, demand honesty. Keep your own records. Ask questions. Do not let them control the story. We were told to be patient, to let the process work. Fifteen years later, we are still fighting for truth and justice.

You will hear promises of transparency and accountability. You will be told there will be inquiries and reviews. But without constant pressure, they will protect themselves before they protect you. Stay united. Stand together. The strength of your families will be your greatest power.

We wish someone had told us this at the start. You deserve the truth, not excuses. You deserve justice, not

delay.

Our thoughts and prayers are with you all. You are not alone.

With love, strength, and solidarity,

Bernie Monk

Spokesperson, Pike River Families

New Zealand



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact