

On-the-spot report from Cobar, New South Wales

Australia: Cobar miners and visitors speak out over the death of Endeavor Mine workers

Our reporters
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Several miners and their families spoke with *World Socialist Web Site* reporters about the underground explosion that killed Holly Clarke, 24, and Ambrose Patrick McMullen, 59, early Tuesday at Endeavor Mine just outside Cobar in far west New South Wales (NSW). Another young woman, Mackenzie Stirling, was injured and transported to hospital in Orange.

The small community of Cobar has about 3,500 people, most of them employed directly or indirectly in mining, who are still attempting to deal with the tragedy. After initial news reportage, the mainstream media has largely dropped the story, showing little interest in how this tragedy will impact psychologically and economically on the immediate families or the community.

Dash has been a miner for almost 30 years and worked closely with McMullen in the same mine for about 10 years, and six years doing the same job. McMullen, originally from Cootehill in County Cavan, Ireland, is survived by his wife and family.

Dash spoke passionately about McMullen as a miner, and about the respect he and his family had in the community.

“I can’t speculate on what happened on Tuesday morning. At this stage nobody knows, but he was a great man, a hard worker and very safety conscious,” he said.

“If he thought something was unsafe or dangerous he’d refuse to do it, at the same time he always did the best work possible. If a job had to be done, he’d work all day to make sure it was finished, and by the end of his shift.

“Ambrose was fit and active and well-known in the community. His three boys played in the local football

team, and he was always involved. Whenever he had any days off, he’d be up there at training. The thing I’m going to miss about him was his smile. Every time you saw him, he’d shake your hand and give you a smile that was 10-mile wide.”

Dash said that work safety practices in the mining industry were much stricter than when he began and explained that they had been told to do things that wouldn’t be allowed today. “If we did this now,” he said, “we’d be sacked, so I don’t know what really happened in the mine on Tuesday.”

The veteran miner went on to discuss the death of 36-year-old Mark Brilley, who was killed at Peak Gold Mine after being exposed to extreme heat and diesel exhaust while operating an open cabin drill rig around one kilometre underground in 2017.

Brilley, who Dash knew well, was the last miner to die in Cobar before this week’s fatalities. Peak Gold was found fully responsible for Brilley’s death but only fined \$480,000. “This is nothing for a mining company. They’d make that amount of money in about an hour,” he said.

A fly-in-fly-out miner, who regularly worked 12-hour shifts, told the WSWS that the technology used in detonation and blasting was very safe today, with all manner of precautions in place to prevent the sort of disaster that occurred this week at the Endeavor Mine. However, despite these fail-safes, the premature blast had occurred, meaning something must have gone seriously wrong and needed to be quickly investigated.

A retired miner from the CSA pit, who wanted to remain anonymous, said the community was traumatised by Tuesday’s explosion and the deaths of Holly Clarke and Ambrose Patrick McMullen at

Endeavor Mine. He didn't want to speak about what may have caused this week's fatal explosion but told the WSWS that he had been trapped underground with other miners for 13 hours more than 20 years ago.

"It was the beginning of our shift, we couldn't get out, and we had no communication. Our families didn't find out until we were rescued. No individual or community would want to go through that again," he explained.

Another worker said she and her husband both worked in the mines in Cobar. Her husband had previously worked at Endeavor, but decided to leave for another local mine, because he was very concerned about unsafe work practices at the recently reopened mine.

"Maybe we expect the sort of accident that happened at Endeavor to occur in places like Africa but not in a developed country like Australia. We all know it's a very dangerous industry, but peoples' lives should always come first," she said.

"There cannot be any compromise on this. It must be at the top of everything. Accidents happen, but losing two people like this is wrong. The young girl—Holly Clarke—could have been my sister. She had her whole life ahead of her. The industry should go ahead and make money, but it shouldn't be at the cost of workers' lives.

"Workers need to find out what really happened. If they don't, it will happen again. The company can probably replace those who were killed by tomorrow, but their lives are gone forever and can't be brought back. That young lady had a whole lot of things she could have and would have wanted to do in her life. Her life cannot be replaced," she said.

Alex, a plumber from Sydney visiting Cobar on business, told the WSWS he was deeply shocked by the miners' deaths. "I feel heartbroken about the people killed, but especially the 24-year-old woman. These people had responsibilities and lives to live but they've lost all this now," he said.

"There needs to be serious thought about safety in this job. People should not be forced to work more than eight, or at the most ten hours a day. If you work more than that you get tired and so accidents can happen.

"These problems exist everywhere, not only in Cobar. Every worker is under pressure. We need to think about the human beings involved and not just the money," he

said.



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