

Australia: 6 months since the fatal Endeavor mine explosion in Cobar

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Six months have passed since the explosion at Polymetals Resources' Endeavor mine near Cobar, New South Wales (NSW), that killed workers Patrick "Ambrose" McMullen, 59, and Holly Clarke, 24, and left 24-year-old Mackenzie Stirling with serious injuries. But halfway to the first anniversary of the tragic incident, there is still no official explanation for what took place on October 28, 2025.

The New South Wales (NSW) Resources Regulator, the government agency in charge of mining safety, has not said a word since publishing a threadbare four-page interim report in November, nor given a timeframe for when it will produce a final report.

Based on previous fatal incident investigations, the workers' families and colleagues could well wait another year or more. Even then, the official investigation will likely be a whitewash, shielding the company from responsibility entirely or at most calling for a token fine and a slap on the wrist.

Most of what has been publicly stated about the cause of the fatal explosion was known within days of the blast: At approximately 3:30 a.m. on October 28, McMullen, Clarke, and Stirling were preparing a ballistic disc explosive device to clear a blockage of rocks when the device detonated prematurely.

The November report noted that the explosive charge had not been hooked up to the main firing line, suggesting that, as mining experts and workers had speculated, the blast was likely triggered by some form of "extraneous electricity."

The document also confirmed that the Endeavor mine was using older-style electric detonators, which are more susceptible to radio frequency and other electrical interference than more modern electronic detonators, although the regulator mentioned the detonators as only one of several lines of inquiry.

No recommendations were included in the November report for how a repeat of the October tragedy could be avoided, at Endeavor or any of the many other mines using similar equipment on a daily basis.

For the company, however, the death of two workers is fast becoming a distant memory; a minor blip on what Polymetals has described as a "milestone year."

The company's March quarter financial report, under the perfunctory heading, "28th October 2025 Incident,"

euphemistically notes that "Investigation into the incident where we lost two employees continues."

Polymetals says it has "concluded its own internal and independent investigations coordinated by senior management and legal counsel. There is no material information to report publicly at this stage, and the Company does not anticipate anything further in the near term."

In other words, Polymetals either does not know or is not saying what caused the death of two of its employees, and is confidently telling shareholders that the incident will have no further effect on profits.

That has been the company's attitude from the outset. With the blessing of the regulator, and without a peep of opposition from the mining unions, Polymetals began reopening the mine just eight days after the explosion, and fully resumed operations, including the use of explosives, within a month.

To suppress the development of opposition to workers being herded back into a potential deathtrap, the company instructed workers not to speak to anyone, including their own families, about the explosion or conditions at Endeavor.

The Australian Workers Union (AWU) and Mining and Energy Union (MEU) have maintained their own veil of silence. After vowing on the day of the explosion to "find out what happened and make sure that it never happens again," the union bureaucrats have barely uttered another word. This amounts to a tacit endorsement of Polymetals' rapid reopening with the explosion unexplained, leaving workers at Endeavor and throughout the mining industry at risk from another similar incident.

The corporate media, having descended on the town of 3,500 on October 28, had all but abandoned the story by the end of the month. The reopening of the mine was completely covered over by the major outlets, and reported only briefly in mining industry publications from the standpoint of celebrating Polymetals' rising share price.

Only the *World Socialist Web Site* has given voice to the concerns of mining workers and Cobar residents over the premature reopening and the broader implications of the explosion for the mining industry. The WSWs has consistently called for a full investigation, directed and overseen by workers, to conclusively determine and expose the cause of the

incident.

As part of this campaign, the WSWS and Mehring Books Australia published a pamphlet in March, titled, “Fatal Mine Explosion in Cobar: The Political Lessons,” available for purchase here.

The ongoing scourge of industrial deaths in Australia includes at least five workers killed on the job already this year in the mining industry alone. That is, in less than four months (as Safe Work Australia has only published preliminary fatality data up to April 23), the mining death toll has almost matched the total of six for all of 2025 and annual average of seven since 2020.

The recent mining industry deaths include:

Fifty-nine-year-old Jeff Palmer, who died after a roof collapse at the Mammoth Underground coal mine near Blackwater in Queensland on January 2. The same day, a 58-year-old gold prospector died after being hit by falling rocks at a private mine site at Mount Britton, also in Queensland.

On February 4, 47-year-old boilermaker Mathew Middlebrook, a father of three, fell to his death at Newmont’s Tanami gold mine in the Northern Territory. Initial investigations indicated failure of a winch as a possible cause of the fatality.

On March 14, another 47-year-old boilermaker, Simon Mukwarami, was killed in a fall at South32’s Worsley Alumina refinery near Collie, 200 kilometres south of Perth, Western Australia (WA).

While the state safety regulator has not issued a public statement on Mukwarami’s death, a notice to South32, leaked to the *West* newspaper, revealed that the WorkSafe WA inspector found serious hazards at the site.

He wrote: “I observed that sections of grid mesh had been removed from the floor and no controls were in place to prevent a fall, including the absence of fall-arrest equipment. I also observed scaffolding with what appeared to be temporary guardrails installed without post supports at the correct span intervals required.”

He continued: “Based on these observations, I have formed the reasonable belief that the person with management or control of the workplace has not provided adequate protection against the risk of workers falling.”

The fact that these damning claims have not come to light through official WorkSafe WA channels, but via a leak, underscores that workers cannot afford to entrust their lives to the official safety agencies.

Their modus operandi is to carry out protracted “investigations” into workplace deaths, often lasting several years, during which few if any restrictions are placed on the company’s operations (and therefore profits). This means that, by the time their findings are released, almost invariably covering over or minimising corporate responsibility, the initial anger of workers over the fatality has subsided, allowing the whitewash to proceed.

This would not be possible without the complicity of the

unions, which, together with the safety regulators, have presided for decades over countless worker deaths and serious injuries. These organisations work to hide corporations’ responsibility for industrial accidents and prevent any struggle by workers against the dangerous conditions they confront.

This poses the need for workers to take their safety into their own hands. This means building rank-and-file committees, led by workers themselves, not union bureaucrats, to enforce safety standards based on what is required to protect workers’ health and lives, in opposition to the demands of corporations and their shareholders for speed-ups and productivity increases.

Workplace deaths are not mere accidents, but the most brutal expression of the wholesale exploitation of the working class under capitalism, in which profit reigns supreme over all human needs, including the health and lives of workers.

In Australia, state and federal Labor governments, aided and abetted by the union apparatus, are carrying out a broad-based offensive against the wages, democratic rights, working and living conditions of the working class.

Inflation has surged to 4.6 percent over the 12 months to March, on top of an already years-long cost-of-living crisis, with further rises to come as a direct result of the US-Israeli war against Iran, to which Labor is fully committed. At the same time, the federal Labor government is set to impose sweeping cuts to social spending, including slashing \$35 billion from disability support funding over the next four years and axing thousands of public sector jobs. In stark contrast to these austerity measures, Labor recently vowed to increased military spending by \$53 billion over the next decade, on top of already record expenditure of close to \$60 billion this year.

The fight for safe working conditions and an end to industrial deaths must be connected to a struggle involving the broadest layers of the working class against this deepening assault. This will require a political fight against Labor and the capitalist system itself.



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