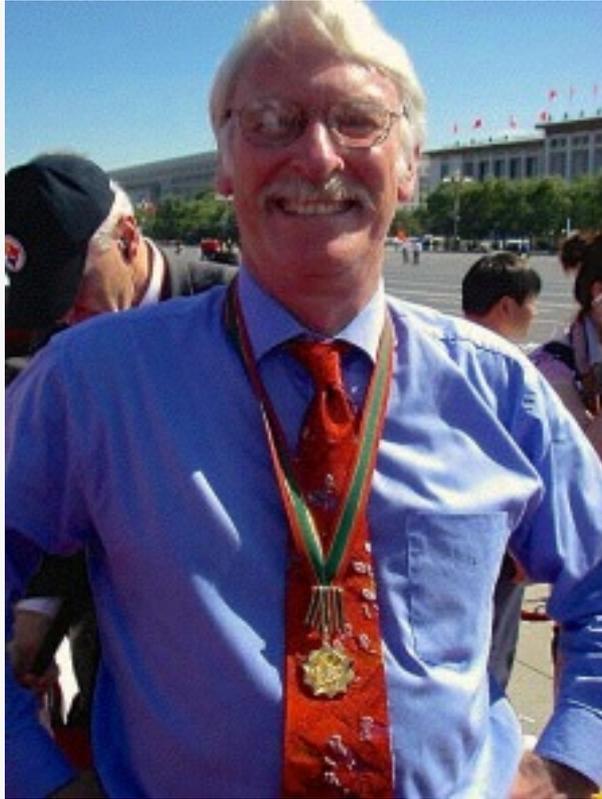


Dave Feickert – Champion for Workers’ Safety – a Short Biography

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Dave Feickert with his ‘Friend of China’ medal, in front of the Great Hall of the People, Tiananmen Square, Beijing, October 2009

Whilst writing the [obituary](#) of our friend, Dave Feickert, I was astonished to read literally hundreds of letters of condolence flowing in to Jing, Dave’s wife, who kindly let me read them. These messages came from all over the world and every single one had some powerful things to say on the life and work of Dave Feickert. Not a single negative word was written – an amazing feat for a human being’s entire life story. The following is a short biography of Dave, far from complete because it would be impossible to table all the amazing contributions he made to the welfare and safety of all the people he was responsible for and with whom he came into contact.

Dave was a long-time member of the New Zealand China Friendship Society. As **President of the Whanganui branch**, Dave was on NZCFS National Executive and at Executive meetings Dave’s objective judgement on issues and his clear statements and contributions to discussion are very much missed. Members of the Society knew him best as an advocate for coal mining safety standards, in particular in China and here in New Zealand, following the Pike River Mine disaster. Indeed, he gave talks on those topics to all the branches. Dave was known to fight ardently for the underdog, but it is only since he passed away, that we have become aware of the many times during his life when he laid his reputation on the line for those who were unable to do so for themselves.

For comments made by NZCFS members on hearing of Dave’s passing, click [HERE](#).

Dave Feickert was born on 13th December 1946 in Devonport, Auckland, New Zealand, and was the 2nd son of Audrey Eva (née) Watts and Harold John Feickert.

His mother was born in Bow, in London’s East End, and during the war was nearly killed when a V1 flying bomb (doodle bug) hit the house she was living in. She became a [Wren](#) during the war and spent her time at [Bletchley Park](#) feeding tape into the machines (the ‘[Bombes](#)’) used to crack the [Enigma codes](#).

As was typical of people in that kind of work, she remained silent about it until the Official Secrets Act was lifted in the 1970s. She did not even tell her husband of the type of work she did. Two of her brothers were in the army and one barely survived a Japanese prisoner of war camp.

His father, Harold, was born in Johnsonville, and then grew up in [Karori](#), both in Wellington, New Zealand. He worked for [William Cable and Co.](#) as a marine engineer and boiler maker/fitter and turner. When he completed his education he went to work at sea as a marine engineer on merchant ships.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, he was drafted into the British Merchant Navy, sailing on ships supplying the war effort in Europe.

He was the Chief Engineer on a ship running convoys in the Atlantic and later transporting troops from Normandy. On 8th June 1944, during the Normandy landings, his ship, the [MV Derrycunihy](#), was struck by a mine, and there was great loss of life.

Because Harold was in the engine room of the ship, he was able to seek shelter behind the bulkhead, and the rear half of the ship floated for some hours before it sank. Harold managed to rescue two souvenirs from the engine room that he crammed in his bag. These were a mechanical clock with roman numerals, in brass with a 24-hour wind, and a kerosene lantern, which was used in emergencies should there be a power failure on the ship. Both these items were mounted on gimbals and the clock became standard furniture on the mantelpiece of Dave's childhood. His brother, Peter, still has the lamp in his house to this day. His father, grandmother, older uncles and aunts were all in the services and yet they had German Christian names as well as a German surname. The reason for this was his German-born grandfather, Jacob Feickert, who had immigrated to New Zealand from Britain as a toolmaker around 1900 and who had married a New Zealand woman of Danish/English descent, Myrtle Annie Weichern.

None of Dave's uncles or aunts was killed during the war but quite a few German more-distant relatives were: their names are written on a small war memorial in their village in [Rheinland-Pfalz](#). The people in this part of the world had seen ravaging wars for centuries as they lived close to the Franco-German border. Tired of continual strife, many left, never to return except to visit, as Dave eventually did. Walking down the main street of this village, Dave saw men and women who resembled his aunts and uncles in New Zealand.

Dave wrote much of this background of his life in a paper on why he believed in the European Constitutional Treaty. He was a determined advocate for world peace, particularly as he was a [Quaker](#), people renowned for their beliefs in that direction. He often quoted Einstein, who said, "*Peace cannot be kept by force. It can only be achieved by understanding*", a tenet Dave held to all his life and which many of us would do well to take on board especially in difficult times.

Schooling

David started his schooling at Royal Oak, Auckland – then the family shifted to Westmere, Wanganui [or [Whanganui](#)] – where he continued his primary schooling at Westmere School, and then to Wanganui Intermediate.



Dave is front-row, 2nd from left, with his fellow students at Wanganui Technical College

Dave attended Wanganui Technical College where he excelled at many sports such as rowing, sailing, athletics, sprint and distance running, football/soccer & rugby.

He was a high achiever in the classroom, academically and regularly topped his class in many subjects. He also belonged to the Westmere Scout troop and thoroughly enjoyed his time with a lot of school friends and inspirational leaders.

He gained a BA in Asian Studies and English in 1967 from Victoria University in Wellington, and played Rugby Senior Grade there. He gained an MSc degree from Birmingham University in England in 1979, specialising in Ergonomics in Engineering Production and later, in 2007, an MA (with Distinction) in Coal Mine Safety in China, at the Asian Studies Institute, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. Prior to that (1980-1983), he had worked for a PhD in Human Reliability and Automation in coal mining, at University of Bradford, but did not complete it. *[It appears that his getting a job as Industrial Relations officer with the National Union of Mineworkers, UK, intervened].*

David was always up for a challenge and was fiercely competitive, especially with his older brother, Peter.

Peter says, "When David was growing up and in his formative years there was no difference between hard work at school, hard work at home and having fun and enjoying ourselves. It all blended together.

"This was the time when we didn't have incident reports and health and safety issues.

"We grew up having accidents, sharpening our judgment and looking out and caring for one another. David grew up with people we called the best in the business.

"We were encouraged by our mother to be risk takers; we played hard and worked hard. School and University holidays meant hard work; scrub cutting, shearing sheep and working in the wool shed, working on many demolition sites for Britton's Demolition Company, working at the Patea freezing works and the Ocean Beach freezing works in Invercargill, processing and storing meat. We often hitched rides on the midnight freight train from Westmere to Patea with a friendly guard. We also worked for NZ Post as postmen in Wellington.

"All this hard work eventually paid off and financed his education and studies."

Peter also remembers the two of them going hunting for pigs and deer to supplement their diet at home and fishing on the Castlecliff wharf. "We'd bring home fish for our mother who didn't want to cook them."

Although the two Feickert brothers' interests couldn't have been further apart, they both shared a belief in positive thought and a "Can do" attitude – that problems can always be resolved no matter how long it takes. Their early childhood was influenced greatly by their mother, Audrey who was inspirational to her children and extremely positive and an eternal optimist. She used to tell the children to dream very big dreams/ concepts ideas. Peter says, "She always reminded us that if your dream doesn't frighten you it's not big enough."

This influenced Dave's attitude to life as did his Quaker affiliations which he embraced whilst in England.

1980s – N.U.M

Dave left New Zealand in 1968 and travelled to Canada, where he studied at Toronto University. However, he felt that he needed more of a challenge, so he got a job as a long haul truck driver driving big rigs and this was when he became interested in and joined the union movement.

Whilst truck driving he had an accident and was injured and so began his interest in Ergonomics and how truck seats are designed etc. As a result, he went to England to study ergonomics at Birmingham University.

Dave never intended to stay in the UK, but he met [Marina Lewycka](#) at a demonstration. Marina was born in a refugee camp in [Kiel](#), Germany after [World War II](#). Dave wrote about her family and millions like them from the former Soviet Union who had suffered during the turmoil of the most dreadful part of the European century but who survived the post war period. She was born in a German camp at the end of the war, her parents having been slave labourers in Germany. She was, however, the lucky one, the 'peace baby' who grew up in Britain. Her family subsequently moved to England and she graduated from [Keele University](#) in 1968 with a BA in English and Philosophy and from the [University of York](#) with a B.Phil in English Literature in 1969. Her published works include a best-selling novel, *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian*, a wry tale of a Russian/ Ukrainian family conflict. And since their divorce, in 2009 she has written another book called *We are All made of Glue*, the title taken from the fact that the Nazis made glue from human bones. This had made an impression on Marina who wrote of the impact on people who have been harmed and have a strong desire to inflict harm in return. Marina was a lecturer in media studies at [Sheffield Hallam University](#) until her retirement in March 2012.

Dave, aged 41, married Marina in Tauranga at Dave's parents' home in 1987. They had a daughter, Sonia, who went to a Sheffield comprehensive school and then had a Cambridge education. She has since worked as an epidemiologist in Malawi (and helped at the Pneumoconiosis seminar in China, with her dad, see below).

A colleague of Dave's, Professor Jonathon Winterton, has written to explain how Dave came to join the NUM:

"Dave was working for the [Trade Union Resource and Information Centre](#) in Leeds when I met him in 1980/81 and he had come across miners talking about new technology in the pits. I had heard some similar stories from the miners I taught on the MDR at Leeds University. (*Miners' Day Release programme was an initiative of the Extramural Departments of 4 Universities: Leeds and Sheffield in Yorkshire along with Durham and Nottingham (all adjacent to English coalfields), in collaboration with NUM Unions. A three-year programme was run once a week in term time, hopefully to provide new union leaders but many completed degrees and became lawyers and, inevitably, MPs.*)

When we compared notes we decided to attack the question of what impact new technology might have in the coal industry as a serious piece of research. We set up the Work Organisation Research Group at Bradford University, bringing in Martin Newby, for his statistical expertise, and Alan Burns as a computer scientist. The research group operated like [Alan Turing's](#) team

working to crack the Enigma code since we had to obtain all the hard scientific information from outside the [NCB](#) who were developing the technology.

“We presented findings to the NUM Executive Committee in London in 1983 that predicted 75% of the miners’ jobs would be lost. Subsequently Dave was interviewed for the research officer post at the NUM in Sheffield and moved there (having started a PhD with me at Bradford). The overtime ban was organized in October of that year and the importance of the new technology in the restructuring of the industry became increasingly evident. We published the report in June 1984 during the miners’ strike, which generated support for the miners from unusual quarters, and continued working with the NUM as part of the so-called “economists group” providing the research-underpinning for the campaign to keep individual pits open after the strike.

“Dave’s qualities have already been well described in the obituary but one could add to that list his capacity as a natural researcher and above that his ability to mobilise the necessary expertise from around him to get the job done. I was the convenor of the research group, but Dave was its leader.”

Another friend of Dave’s during the time of the National Coal Board’s intentions to upgrade coal mining technology, Phil Wright, explains below the process of the decisions made by Thatcher’s government, as well as the strike and the final consequences of that eventful time.

“The titanic year-long miners’ strike began in March 1984 with [Arthur Scargill](#) and the NUM pitted against [Margaret Thatcher](#)’s government and her intention to close a large number of the country’s coal mines. Initially Dave had been an admirer of Scargill but began to question his methods and strategy during the strike and he was depressed by its outcome. Nevertheless, and buoyed by his eternal optimism of spirit, he continued to work for the Union for almost a decade after the strike, pioneering a new strategy for defending the British coal industry in a context in which the Union could no longer rely on the mass mobilisation of its members in support of its goals. The keys to this strategy were threefold:

1. An understanding that while the miners might have been defeated in the strike, there was still considerable public sympathy towards the miners’ cause which translated into a sentiment that the miners should not be unreasonably persecuted and that their industry should not be completely wiped out;
2. The development of a media strategy and of strong ties with influential journalists, notably Gerard McCloskey of [McCloskey Coal](#);
3. The briefing and organisation of MPs (including Prime Minister-to-be [Tony Blair](#)), prominent lawyers and academics, to exploit parliamentary and legal opportunities for defending the industry.

“One of the high profile examples of this strategy in action was the attempt to delay and defeat the passing of the Ports Bill in the late nineteen-eighties – parliamentary consent was required for the construction of new coal importation infrastructure. Evidence of Dave’s briefings abounds in [Hansard](#), as MPs spoke lines that he had penned.”

Editor: [One such ‘quote’ was](#) by Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe (MP for Leigh, at 7:30pm, November 8th, 1988): “In talking about the importation of 30 million tonnes of coal, we are talking also of the livelihoods of 47,000 miners and 7,000 or 8,000 employees in complementary industries. It costs £24,700 to make a Yorkshire miner redundant, and the bill would be about £1.16 billion if 30 million tonnes of coal were imported. That would be a waste of human resources. Valuable manpower would be thrown on the scrap heap at great expense to the nation.”

[Editor’s note: Dave calculated (in 2004) that the miners’ strike and related pit closures cost the UK about £30bn. Click [HERE](#) for a breakdown.]

“Also, Dave’s determination and enthusiasm even elicited the goodwill of the Tory Chairman of the Committee hearings, [Michael Clarke](#).

“However, the apogee of this strategy and the culmination of Dave’s efforts came in October 1992 when the miners looked on in amazement as a quarter of a million people descended on London to show their solidarity in a massive demonstration against the closure of 31 pits which the government had just announced. And behind the scenes there was also evidence of other aspects of Dave’s strategy as industrial action was combined with legal action and smart media campaigns. There was even a rebellion of backbench Tory MPs! Sadly, on the day of the great demonstration, Dave himself could not participate because he was paying the price for his total commitment to the NUM and the defence of the British coal industry. He was in a London hospital after suffering a heart problem. But friends and well-wishers tracked him down and buoyed his spirits with tales of the hugely successful demonstration – such that the nurses treated him like the celebrity he really was.

“Although Dave’s service to the NUM was all-consuming, he still found time to attend Sunday morning Quakers’ meetings and to enjoy his favourite pastimes – cycling and walking in the [Peak District](#). And such excursions in winter were often followed by a

very New Zealand ritual, the preparation of '[Tasty Pies](#)' over an open fire – toasted sandwiches with every conceivable ingredient, but never lacking in baked beans.

"When the [Trades Union Congress](#) (TUC) decided to open a Brussels office, Dave served as European Officer between 1993-2003, and worked as the British TUC's official representative to the European Union (EU) at its headquarters in Brussels."



Dave Feickert with Arthur Scargill meeting Mandela in South Africa, as part of an TUC delegation

About this time, Dave also was a member of a study delegation to South Africa to discuss mine safety and markets for coal with the South African NUM, Chamber of Mines and the [ANC](#). Accompanied by Arthur Scargill of the NUM, it was at this time that he met Nelson Mandela, one of his heroes.

Dave was considered a great catch for the Brussels team. He was well regarded, intelligent and quick to learn the complexities of the European Union. He was committed to a strong social dimension to the EU single market and played a leading role in the negotiation of many major European agreements on work-place rights and health and safety regulations, and his work on the sustainable development agenda was highly valued. As such, he was a considerable asset to the TUC, the [European Trade Union Confederation](#) (ETUC) and the socialist group in the European Parliament.



Dave and Jing at a conference 'A Vision for Social Europe' organised by 'Socialists & Democrats EU'. Stephen Hughes is seated above the 'S&D' sign, to his right: Michael Wolters (former Sec Gen of EMCEF – European Mine, Chemical and Energy Workers' Federation), L is Tongui Liu, from China. Next to Jing is Laurie Kazan-Allen (Coordinator of the International Ban Asbestos Secretariat)

He had charm and diplomacy and gradually overcame his disappointment with Scargill, becoming more interested in the new projects that presented in Brussels. He was tenacious when negotiating for basic human rights and safety, and commanded respect, never losing his loyalty to the NUM.

[Lord Monks](#), General Secretary of TUC from 1993-2003, respected him enormously and, in a long email to the NZCFS, wrote of his friendship with Dave, saying that when he (then John Monks) was a candidate for general secretary of the ETUC, he was helped by Dave to get elected in 2003. Lord Monks said Dave would be remembered with great fondness by many of those who worked with him at the TUC and also with enormous respect by colleagues both in Brussels and across the British Trade Union movement for his dedication to improving conditions for working people in the UK and internationally.

Another long-time friend of Dave's from the TUC era was [Stephen Skipsey Hughes](#), born in Sunderland in 1952, who was a member of the European Parliament from June 1984 to July 2014. Stephen says that Dave was concerned about the lead-up to and conduct of the miners' strike and comments on the fact that Dave wrote a book about the episode but was forbidden to publish it! He says that wherever there was strife and conflict, Dave was there to offer help and guidance during that difficult time. Both Stephen and Dave were involved in campaigns to stop the closure of coal mines during the Thatcher years – attempting to stop an act which destroyed the way of life of thousands of men and their families, who were then left without jobs and without a future, creating huge areas of unemployment where close-knit mining communities had been before.

China

While Dave was still at college, [James Bertram](#), the Chinese-speaking journalist and son of missionaries, sparked his interest in China, as did other people who had lived and worked there. Early in his career, Dave was also influenced by his brother Peter to take an even greater interest in China and its problems, in particular about the safety aspect of coalminers in China.



Chinese coal workers. Note the inappropriate footwear.

From cover of '*The Political Economy of the Chinese Coal Industry: Black Gold and Blood-stained Coal*' (London: Routledge, 2012). re. Copyright, we have tried as far as possible to track the owners of this image. We invite anyone with other information or concerns to contact us: dsftt123@gmail.com

In 2002, the annual mortality rate of Chinese coal miners had hit a new peak – 7000 deaths. At the time, Dave was still an official in coal mine safety for the European Union based in Brussels. Reading a report, Dave was struck by this high figure. “As a coal safety expert, I know that if the mortality rate is 7000 then people who are seriously injured, sent into hospital and thrown out of the industry must be around 30,000, normally four or five times more”.

He felt he had to do something to help, and his brother's long-standing involvement with China gave him an entry. Peter has worked for 20 years in the mountainous region of the [Liangshan Prefecture, Sichuan Province, a Yi minority area](#). Peter helped to introduce modern methods of animal husbandry specific to high altitudes to help in poverty reduction amongst the local Yi. This was a Government-initiated programme ([Poverty Alleviation in Western China](#)) and, as a result, Peter was awarded the Chinese Friendship Award for Foreign Experts on 1 October, 1998. Peter's reputation and influence in China gave Dave an opening to talk to the Chinese Ambassador to New Zealand (at the time), Chen Mingming, and to introduce him to the possibilities of providing safety procedures for the miners.

Dave then became deeply involved in writing various articles to highlight and hopefully to change the appalling statistics of injury and death in Chinese mines.

Dave's friend and colleague at the non-Ministerial State Authority for Work Safety ([SAWS](#)), Portia Zhou, says, "In April 2007, a group of Chinese mine managers went to New Zealand to meet with NZ coal mine safety experts for a seminar. In June, NZ experts went to [Yitai Group in Inner Mongolia](#) to share with the employees the NZ mine safety management and workers' compensation experiences. Dave not only worked as the programme co-ordinator between [NZCTU](#) and SAWS, but also presented his knowledge to the Chinese trainees. This programme was well received by all parties involved".

This was the time when Dave and his friend Stephen Hughes worked with the [EU's Delegation for Relations with China's National People's Congress](#) and Dave said they needed to work together to develop and win funding for a programme to reduce deaths and accidents in Chinese coal mines. Stephen recounts: "We had just ended the 50 year life of the [European Coal and Steel Community](#) which had pumped billions of euros into research on safe mining techniques. We felt we had a duty to find a way to get that research to China and bring European experts, former miners, in contact with Chinese mining engineers to pass on safe techniques. The difficulty was getting it to happen. There was and still is a financial envelope attached to the [Association Agreement](#) between the EU and China but that meant we had to convince the European Commission in Brussels that this was a good idea that deserved funding and that the Chinese State Administration for Work Safety, SAWS, should be partners.

"That we managed to do all this is mainly because of Dave who made the pitch to the EU commissioners in Brussels. One big road-block early on was that for a programme to get funding from the EU, the partner organisation in China had to be part of the government. SAWS was NOT part of the Chinese government!"

Stephen goes on "Don't ask me how, but Dave managed to fix it that SAWS became part of the government and after four or five years' work, the pieces fell into place and the programme launched. This is a huge tribute to Dave, the rest of us were no more than facilitators."

A colleague (in SAWS) during that time was Portia Zhou, and she remembers also that "the EU Embassy in Beijing finally agreed to fund a coal mine safety training programme with the aim of improving the abilities of the Chinese mine managers and mine safety inspectors. Two groups of Chinese delegates were sent to the UK for technical studies. At that time, Nick Costello, then a Counsellor at the EU Embassy, described him [Dave Feickert] as someone who always cared about mine safety and waved the Chinese flag in the EU. He was chosen as the project evaluator to assess the project results."

In the years from 2002-2009, there was a big leap in China's coal mining safety standards and the daily death rate dropped from 19.1 to 7.2, while expansion more than doubled in the industry.

By the winter of 2004, Dave had arrived in China to try and make a definite contribution to China's safety development. He understood that "Chinese coal miners' working lives are no different to those in the rest of the world, and the type of risks they face are the same, but the accident rate is higher."

Dave maintained that the Asian workers were among the best in the world and he was often touched by their bravery, resilient humour and their being supportive of one another. "They are used to working in teams, and team working has become their surviving principle." [See '[At the Coal Face](#)', by Liu Xuan, [Global Times](#).]

Dave commented to the [Global Times](#) "What I have learned in my working life are two things: There is almost always a solution to any problem and second, if you never give up, stay positive and believe in fellow humans, then you will generally help to find it." [See '[At the Coal Face](#)', by Liu Xuan, [Global Times](#).]



Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Dejiang (R) confers a medal and certificate to Dave Feickert, a foreign expert, at the Friendship Award Ceremony for Foreign Experts at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, Sept. 29, 2009

As a result of Dave's contribution to this marked improvement, in 2009 Dave was awarded the [Chinese Friendship Award for Foreign Experts](#), as had his brother Peter ten years earlier. China Premier Wen Jiabao also [thanked all the experts](#). [Dave was one of two New Zealanders out of 100 who were awarded that year, drawn from 10,000 nominees].

The problems that Dave faced in China were complex. On one side, was a highly fragmented coal mining industry with well-developed national-owned mines surrounded by thousands of private mines, which were often literally just a hole in the ground. Chinese coal-mining safety experts were too often inclined to try to find an engineering solution to all problems, but of course, in the real world, life is more complicated. He found it hard to introduce European standards into such a working environment. He stressed the importance of risk assessments before each shift went underground and emphasized: "Safety management procedures must involve all workers". He campaigned for five years for an organisational improvement paralleling advances in engineering among all levels of coal mine workers, from diggers to managers.

Dave also became interested in the effects of coal mining on the miners' health. He visited a hospital on the coast where they were treating the miners who had pneumoconiosis. At this hospital the doctors had started to develop technology to clean the lungs of the coalminers from the black coal dust they breathed in ('lung washing'). It was very radical treatment, and the work is still going on. Robert Cohen M.D. [now Professor in Pulmonary Medicine at Northwestern University Feinberg Faculty of Medicine and serves on the Board of Directors of Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago] and Mei-Li Lin, PhD [Exec Director Research and Statistics Services, National Safety Council, Editor; Journal of Safety Council] were the other experts who were involved in this. [Click [HERE](#) for images of a seminar for the **International Project To Develop Mutual Cooperation and Assistance in the Area of Coal Worker's Pneumoconiosis**, organised by Dave, Robert Cohen and Mei Lin].



April 20, 2011. A meeting between experts in various fields discuss pneumoconiosis and related treatment in Tangshan, Hebei, Province. Foreign experts and a team from the Kailuan Mining Group took part in discussions.

Pictured L-R: Mei-Li Lin, PhD, Dr Bob Cohen, and Dave Feickert, coal mine safety expert.

© Rob Welham BA, freelance photographer Tel: +44 [0] 7977 11 75 32 e-mail: rbwproductions@gmail.com

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Portia Zhou also told us that Dave had been involved in many other international projects on mine safety. He was selected as the independent evaluator in the Sino-US co-operation project, the Sino-EU project as well as the Sino-Australia project. He was also invited to attend the [5th China International Forum on Work Safety](#) to share his coal mine safety experiences.

She continues: “Dave was one of the most familiar overseas experts with SAWS colleagues. We enjoyed working with him. His optimistic attitudes and energetic working style had influenced us a lot. I still remember that each time when we met difficulties in a project which made me feel frustrated, it was Dave who encouraged me to move forward and told me that ‘Nothing is impossible’”.

[Pike River Mine Disaster](#)

On 19th November, 2010, a mine disaster of epic proportions happened near Greymouth, in the South Island of New Zealand. 29 coal miners died in the explosion at Pike River Mine and many questions were raised as to the safety procedures or lack of them that caused this tragedy. A Royal Commission took place [to establish the reasons for the disaster and to recommend measures to be taken so such a disaster could never happen again – more of this later]. None of the bodies of the victims has been recovered, despite much pressure both from the public and the families of the victims – the Pike River Families’.

In the efforts to find a way to recover the bodies three top international mine safety experts offered their services to the Pike River families to recommend how that might be achieved. The three experts were Dave Feickert, Bob Stevenson, and Dr David Creedy, three men with many years’ experience in mine safety.

Bob Stevenson was Principal Inspector of Mines in UK and now works as a mining consultant in high-risk countries, Russia and Turkey in particular.

Dr Creedy is a Chartered Engineer with many years’ experience in underground gas control, coal mine methane, coal-bed methane and in energy projects. He worked mainly in China initially as a consultant and then with [Sindicatum](#) to manage its coal mine methane business.

Dave had previously offered help to various disaster sites throughout the world including the [trapped Chilean miners back in 2010](#) and so was keen to discuss a feasibility plan for the Pike River body recovery with the victims’ families and find out the basis for a report on the explosion.



Dave Feickert (left) exiting the Pike River mine. He is talking to Bob Stevenson, former H.M. Principal District Inspector of Mines (UK). Behind is Ian Judd, Mine Manager, Solid Energy and David Creedy. David Creedy says "The visit took place on 7 Nov 2012. Maybe the reason for the smiling faces is relief from exiting the forbidding drift and freshly kindled hope that entry seems feasible." He sent a letter to the NZ Herald at this time, berating successive NZ governments for allowing the coal industry to self-regulate. He wrote:

"The professional mines inspectorate that we inherited from the UK, along with Australia, was abolished in the 1990s, along with the worker safety inspectors, elected by the men from among experienced miners. The industry was moved to self-regulation. "Pike River represents a spectacular failure of self-regulating companies in a high-risk industry. At Pike River, the management and men were on their own. When 31 men were caught in that terrible blast, only two managed to escape. They were near the single usable exit of the mine and one of these heroes dragged his mate to safety. It is time we dragged our country into the 21st century and caught up with best practice in China, for there are other folk to save and not just in mining."

Click [HERE](#) for the complete NZ Herald article. Also, for Dave's article 'Reflections as the Pike River Royal Commission wraps up', click [HERE](#).

The abiding principles that Dave had always worked under: full co-operation on safety habits between managers and staff and the tenet that private ownership self-regulation is anathema when considering safety in coal mines, were not being applied at home. It must have broken his heart to see the things he had worked for most of his life being ignored here in New Zealand. Bernie Monk, the families' spokesman, revealed details to the press: "[These people are going to help us](#)". The West Coasters now realise just how badly things have been run and we want to make sure it never happens again."

Nigel Hampton QC represented the miners' union, the EPMU, and [he said](#) that the problems at Pike included a shortage of exits, difficulties with methane gas management and ventilation and a lack of supervision by the poorly-funded and resourced Government Mines Inspectorate. The safety procedures had been allowed to run down so badly over the previous 20 years, that this enabled a mine such as Pike River to be set up which was inherently dangerous and with a design not found elsewhere except in third world countries.

We wanted to provide Dave's full evidence to the Pike River Commission. Unfortunately, Dave's submission is restricted (as are all submissions to the Royal Commission), and Dave's will not be allowed to see the light of day for 100 years – supposedly to protect the privacy of those giving evidence to the Royal Commission!

[Editor's note: This lamentable state of affairs still holds: the Minister of Internal Affairs refused (April 14, 2015) our request for Dave's submission to be released even though the relevant court cases were concluded in 2014. Your editor decided not to provide a draft of Dave's submission as there are too many differences between it and Dave's submission. We can, however, provide a list of the measures in hand and taken by the Government, in reaction to the recommendations made by the Royal Commission and which result, in large measure, from Dave's submission. Click [HERE](#) for that list. This list was supplied following our Official Information Application request]

Bernie Monk always wanted a team to go into the mine's drift to look for the bodies and hoped that the new owner of the mine, Solid Energy, would do just that. The three experts maintained that it was possible to enter the mine. However, it was finally [in 2014] [decided to leave the mine as a monument to the buried victims](#).

Dr Creedy was kind enough to send us a great deal of information on the work that Dave achieved, as well as some of the protest letters and [poems that Dave wrote](#) and which Dr Creedy kept as a memento of his good friend.

As a final note in his email, he states that "Dave was never frightened of publishing his strongly held views in China. The railway disaster at Wenzhou is an example". Dr Creedy goes on to say, "Dave made significant contributions to coal mine safety and deserves honouring." The [examples that he has chosen](#) from 7 years worth of e-mails demonstrate Dave's dedication and strength of character.

Dave met Jing, his Chinese wife to be, in 2008. They were both involved in the Chinese safety procedures and they were drawn together in their mutual dislike of dangerous workplaces. Jing, of course, has many happy memories of their few short married years. She says, "He visited my Company on safety procedures and I managed his presentation for him. After lunch, we visited a training centre and played table tennis there. Once, twice, three times and I won each time. Dave was certainly impressed!" They visited New Zealand together in 2010 and attended a party where most of the people were old or grey-haired. She joked with him saying "He was the best grandfather there". From then on, she nicknamed him 'Grandfather'.

During this time [2012], Dave travelled once again to South Africa to try to help the situation in [South African Mines where the police had opened fire on miners](#) who wouldn't work because of poor conditions. He was financed by the 'Methodist Church in South Africa' for this trip, to find a way forward for the miners and the owners.



Dave and Jing marry, with Rodd Trott, Dave's bestman (right)

Jing and Dave were married both in traditional Chinese dress in Whanganui, but Jing still carried on working periodically in Beijing. When they discovered Dave had cancer, which was quite advanced by then, Jing was determined to get him to take TCM, Traditional Chinese Medicine. His Western doctors had taken scans of the liver and found a large tumour and several small ones. They warned him that he may not have long to live. However, Jing insisted that Dave go to Beijing and seek the help of a Chinese doctor who was also conversant in Western medicine.

It was during the period of enforced inactivity when he was receiving TCM treatment in Beijing that he wrote a [number of hard hitting articles](#) for [Global Times](#), on various topics, both in China and elsewhere.

Dave still attended his medical appointments here in New Zealand and although initially reticent about TCM, was surprised to find that he felt better and on examining the next scan in NZ, found that the smaller tumours had gone and the large one had stopped growing. This went on for some time, but gradually he lost weight over the months and began to lose interest in the treatment. This saddened Jing, as she felt the TCM, which had already achieved more months than the doctors anticipated, would have given him longer to live.

Eventually he took to his bed in Whanganui and moved to Hospice the day before he died on July 2nd 2014.

One of his oldest friends, Rod Trott (with whom he had spent his youth in Rowing 8 circles and later renewed his friendship during the last few years of Dave's life: Rod was Dave's best man) attended the funeral and gave the eulogy. It describes the kind of man Dave was and his abiding love for his fellow man. It can be read [here](#).

Apart from the testimonies above, a few final touching tributes from the other colleagues were received by your reporter.

First a tribute from Mr Sun Huashan, Vice Minister State Administration of Work Safety, (SAWS), People's Republic of China:

Mr Sun sent a heartfelt letter, unusual in strict-protocol China, describing Dave's true love and care for the Chinese people, and particularly for Chinese workers' safety, which was returned in full measure by everyone he met there, from the highest government official to the lowest mine worker. **Click [HERE](#) for the full text.**

The following are from three TUC colleagues and a Brussels colleague. The first was written in French and below is the English translation.

Jean Lapeyre, ETUC General Secretary in Brussels, writes:

"One can never truly know someone until you have faced difficulties together. I had the pleasure and luck to know Dave in the difficult and complicated period of the European social construction of the European Social Dialogue and in particular its contractual aspects.

"The difficulties are immense for peoples of many diverse social cultures and language and to find solutions for their problems is almost insurmountable. Fortunately, Dave was a person who was calm and optimistic in dealing with these problems and was a great influence in my introduction to the EU". He ends:

"Thanks, Dave, for being my guardian angel in all those negotiations. I know that if I have any future difficulties, I only have to think of you, and ask myself how you would advise me, to find my serenity again and find a solution." **Click [HERE](#) for the full text.**

There follows more tributes from men he had met in the UK, Brussels and China.

"I met David in 1985. From that time on we were good friends and colleagues. Most of the work undertaken had direct implications for mineworkers underground and not only in the United Kingdom. Dave's work efforts were extensive and reflected the needs of mine workers. He worked many days without rest on issues involving mine workers health and safety, in many cases not limited to mineworkers in the UK. He had an ability to mobilise support within and beyond the coal industry when required. In many cases the support he created came from outside the UK.

"Dave was a major player in a six-year defence of the UK Mining Regulations – this at a time when the government was under pressure to deregulate the industry prior to its privatisation. He also campaigned against the use of diesel vehicles underground along with providing scientific evidence of the carcinogenic effects of the exhaust particulates. He campaigned against the extensive use of private contractors underground, providing evidence of a poor safety culture, which resulted in higher accident rates during their employment. He fought against the attack on the legal protections given to mineworkers on their hours of work .

"Dave also worked for the better conditions for mineworkers outside of the UK including those in South Africa, China, USA and Russia.

"I kept in touch with Dave and recognised that the many years of hard work, long hours and total commitment was catching up with him but his responses were always clear and precise. He kept actively moving forward and was clearly proud of his many successes and I am proud to say I knew and worked with Dave. Along with my wife Moira we met David and Jing in June, last year (2013) in Bruges. The weather was beautiful, Dave and Jing were clearly a very happy couple and Dave was pleased to be able to update me on many of his ongoing projects. He was a good friend, a friend to all workers and he did make a difference and will be very sadly missed. **Peter McNestry**

From **Paul Hackett**: "Hi, what sad news. Below is my testimony about Dave.

"I got to know Dave during the pit closures debacle when he was head of research at the NUM. I got to know him even better when he took the TUC job. In fact I had a bit of a hand in his destiny in taking that post. I remember John Monks (the GS at the time) asking if I knew anyone who might fancy the Brussels job, and Dave sprang to mind. I actually guessed he was ill when I stayed at his flat a few times on ETUC business all those years ago. Anyhow, it was all 'back in the day', and Dave was not one for nostalgia and sentiment. I put that down to spending too much time with burly miners (and pit deputies) who knew a thing or too about living for the present and fighting for justice.

"What can I say about Dave? Well, you had to admire the guy's intellect and cutting wit, not to mention his cunning and sense of humour. I also found Dave very kind and generous and always helpful. As a young man finding my feet in the union world he was someone I admired and respected. I knew he was carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders at the NUM, but never a moan or disloyal act. He was always focused and willing. He knew about solidarity and fighting hard, and had the steel to get things done when others would have packed up and gone home. The last time I heard from him was earlier this year when I got a typical Dave rant about the Labour Party and how Mr Miliband was triangulating policy and appeasing the right-wingers. All good stuff as usual, and pretty accurate.

"So, it is a great loss that he has gone. I will always remember his cheeky grin and crafty smile. You gave a lot of people some fond memories. Thanks for being there, and my heart goes out to all his friends and family. A man who will be much missed. Cheers Dave". **Paul Hackett**

Dr Richard Saundry says, "Peter McNestry passed on your request for contributions to the obituary you are producing for Dave Feickert.

"I worked with Dave for around 4 years at the NUM Headquarters in Sheffield where he was Head of Research. This was at a time of immense change as the union faced the Conservative government's pit closure programme announced in October 1992, which proposed to close 31 deep coal mines making over 30,000 miners redundant.

"Dave worked tirelessly to oppose these closures and to help build the campaign against closures and the positive case for the UK coal industry.

"He will be remembered as an inspirational colleague with a fierce intellect and someone who was passionate about the rights of working people and particularly about the health, safety and well-being of coal-miners around the World."

Such was the man...

Teri France (and Duncan France, research)

Acknowledgements:

I wish to thank the following for their help in writing this biography:

David Creedy, BSc Mining Geology (1974), MSc Mining (1980), PhD Mining (1986), Chartered Engineer (1989), Fellow of the Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining, Bureau member of the [UNECE Committee of CMM experts](#). Present position (2015): Managing Director [Sindicatum Sustainable Resources](#).

Jing Feickert (née Jiang Bingjing), Dave's wife and Vice director and safety engineer, [Zhong An Zhi Huan Risk Assessment Company, Beijing](#);

Peter Feickert, Dave's brother

Paul Hackett, Director, [the Smith Institute](#), friend and ex-TUC colleague;

Stephen Hughes, Friend and former Member of European Parliament;

Jean Lapeyre, ETUC General Secretary in Brussels;

Peter McNestry, Chairman of the [Coalfield Regeneration Trust](#);

Bernie Monk, Leader of the Pike River Disaster Families;

Dr Richard Saundry, Associate Professor (Reader) in Human Resource and Leadership Studies, [Plymouth Graduate Management School](#), Plymouth University, Plymouth;

SUN Huashan, Vice Minister State Administration of Work Safety (SAWS), Beijing;

Rod Trott, close friend of Dave, from Whanganui;

Jon Winterton, BSc (Hons) MSc (Econ) PhD, Professor, Dean of Faculty of Business and Humanities, [Curtin University, Sarawak](#), Malaysia;

Phil Wright MA, PhD. Currently Academic Director of the [Observatory of the Colombian Caribbean](#) in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, friend and cycling mate since 1984;

Tim Wright, Emeritus Professor of Chinese Studies, University of Sheffield. Author of [The Political Economy of the Chinese Coal Industry: Black Gold and Blood-stained Coal](#) (London: Routledge, 2012);

Portia ZHOU Hongfang, staff member of the Centre for International Co-operation at SAWS (State Authority for Work Safety), Beijing.

Further links:

For a video of an interview (on People's Daily Online) with Dave after his receiving the Friendship Award, in 2009, entitled "**Warrior waving flag for China**", click [HERE](#). He talks of the improvements in Chinese mine safety, applauding the efforts made by SAWS, and the role of coal in the energy and environmental policy of developing China. He underlines China's having 235 coal-burning power stations with super-critical boilers and the extensive use of solar-heating in China, etc. He advocates how to reduce the use of energy: cleaner and more efficient energy and greener lower-carbon economy. The video lasts 37 minutes.

For a list of the articles Dave wrote for Global Times (Mar 2010 to Oct 2011), click [HERE](#).

Pike River Disaster:

[Press release on NZCFS website, 11 Jan 2011](#)

Article by Dave in 'Industrial Safety News' website: "[Reflections as the Pike River Royal Commission wraps up](#)"

Nov 2010, John Key, NZ Prime Minister, announced Royal Commission to be set up. Nov 2012, report of Royal Commission published:

- For access to different parts of the report via the webpage of the Royal Commission: Click [HERE](#)
- Alternatively, the following two links give direct download of the entire Royal Commissions Report: [Royal Commission Report on the Pike River Mine disaster Vol 1](#) and [Royal Commission Report on the Pike River Mine disaster Vol 2](#)

Note: Following our Official Information Application to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, we learned that Dave, in addition to his 'submission' to the Royal Commission [access-restricted, see above], also presented as evidence comprising two reports that are in the public domain:

1. ["Maximising Effectiveness and Efficiency in a Mining Industry Funded Health and Safety Regulatory Regime". JD Leaver, UNITEC, at the 1998 NZ Petroleum Conference.](#)
2. [Best Practice Guidance for Effective Methane Drainage and Use in Coal Mines, Economic Commission for Europe Methane to Markets Partnership, Energy Series No. 31, United Nations.](#)

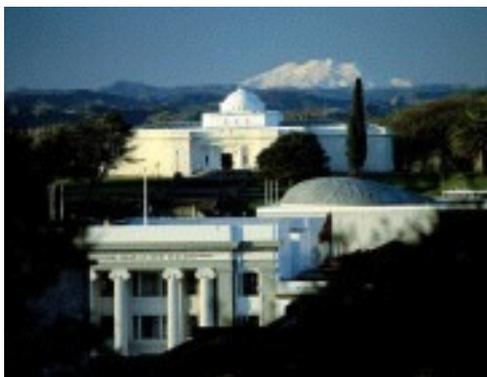
NZ Governmental action following the findings of the Pike River Mine Disaster Royal Commission: Following an Official Information Application, the author received the following information on Governmental measures taken, or being taken (April, 2015): click [HERE](#).

Dave's submission (post the Royal Commissions recommendations) to the '[Independent Taskforce on Workplace Health and Safety](#)', re. a Strategic Review of the Workplace Health and Safety System' in New Zealand – Nov 2012: click [HERE](#)

[Dave's CV \(pdf\)](#)

[Dave's Facebook Page](#)

Below are a number of photos from Dave's Facebook page:



Whanganui (Dave's home town) looking North towards Mt. Ruapehu



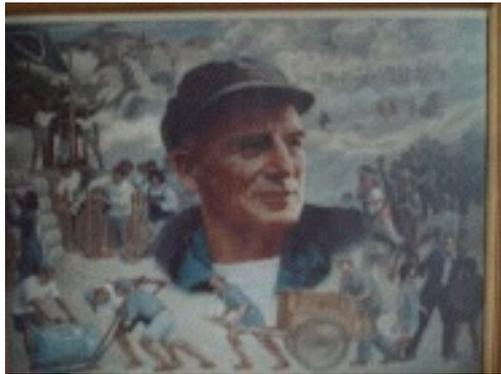
Union Boat Club house, founded 1877 by workers who broke away from original club. Where Dave learned to row when at school



Whanganui and Palmerston North NZCFS members visit Rewi's cottage, in the back blocks behind Waitotara



Rewi Alley's old woolshed, near his cottage, 1920s



'Rewi Alley, the man himself'



Sonia and her dad, 2010



Chile: First drill reaches 33 trapped miners – Hooray!!



Wedding group: Left: Peter Feickert, Rod Trott, Dave and Jing, and Eileen (Jing's bridesmaid)



Whanganui River Institute's waka amas,



Daw Mill mine, one of the UK coal mines that should have been saved. MRP Photography