

EXCLUSIVE
BY NIGEL NELSON
Political Editor

RETIRED miners cannot pay for family funerals because the Tories refuse to use more than £1 billion of investment windfalls to boost their pension fund.

Welsh ex-miner Emlyn Davies, 77, who suffers from lung disease from his time underground, could not scrape together the £2,900 needed to bury his wife.

Working pitmen contributed 5.25% of their pay to the pension scheme, but after 26 years in the mines Emlyn gets only £61 a week.

Now a leading lawyer has been so outraged by stories of ex-miners too poor to afford coffins he has offered his services for free to press for a judicial review into the scandal.

Malcolm Bishop KC said: "Many retired miners maintain this is a continuing vendetta against them first perpetrated by Margaret Thatcher."

The respected advocate, who spent five years defending the Commonwealth's biggest corruption case involving the Turks and Caicos islands, warned: "They should know they are not playing with schoolboys here."

SURPLUSES

The scandal dates back to 1994 when British Coal was privatised and the Government acted as pension payout guarantor. Any future surpluses were to be split 50/50 between the Treasury and the pension members.

But the fund did much better than expected, handing the Treasury huge extra revenues.

Successive governments have pocketed £4.4 billion over 27 years without putting in a penny. And the Tories are set to take another £1.9 billion.

Last year the Commons Business Committee called for £1.2 billion to be returned to fix the "historic injustice". That could have handed 125,000 retired miners a cash windfall of £728 a year each.

But despite MPs branding it as "unconscionable" that ex-miners struggle on an average £84 a week – some widows get as little as £8.50 – the then-Chancellor Rishi Sunak refused to give the money back.

The Sunday Mirror has long backed the campaign to get retired miners a fairer deal and a judicial review of the trustees is aimed at deciding whether they are acting in the best interests of beneficiaries.

Charles Chiverton, of the

PENSION ROBBERY MEANS WE CAN'T AFFORD FUNERALS

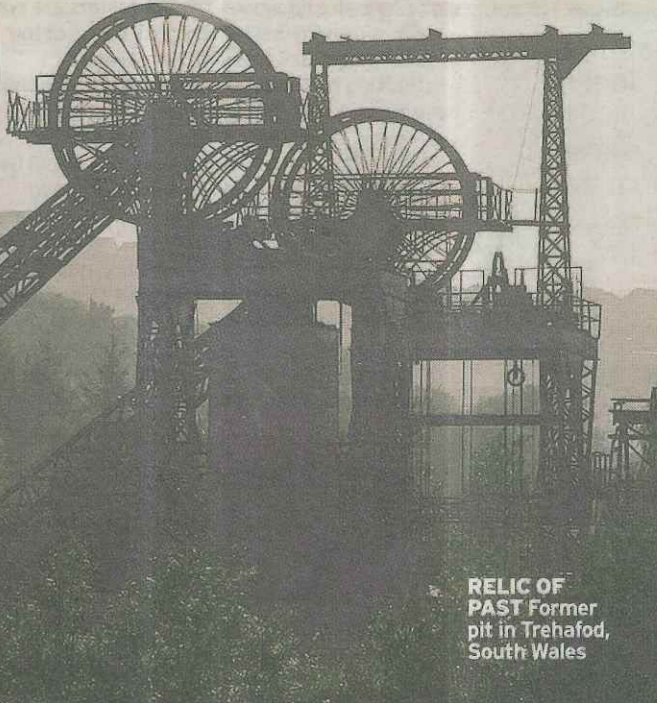
Top lawyer backs miners' bid to force ministers to pay up



BETTER DAYS
Emlyn Davies with late wife Gwyneth



TOGETHERNESS
Davies children stepped in to give mum a send-off



RELIC OF PAST
Former pit in Trehafod, South Wales

Mine-workers Pension Campaign Group, said: "Ministers have behaved like gangsters. Now we have trustees as the gate keepers looking after the Government's interests."

Pressure for the review comes as the UK's first new coal mine in three decades is announced, creating 500 jobs at Whitehaven in Cumbria. Emlyn Davies worked at

OUTRAGED
Malcolm Bishop

Penrikyber colliery at Mountain Ash, South Wales, until it closed in 1985 following a 12-month pit strike.

When his wife Gwyneth died of cancer at 66 in 2014 he could not afford a funeral and he could no longer keep up his home near the pit. His daughter Maggie, 54,

a school cook, took him in, and the family of five children made sure their mother had a proper burial. Emlyn said: "Not being able to pay for the funeral hurt a lot and I was in a terrible state."

"It's bloody rotten what governments have done to us given they didn't put any money into the pension. Now I want to

save enough to at least pay for my own funeral. And if I can't I've told the kids to throw me on a bonfire and spread the ashes over my allotment."

Nearly 300,000 miners have died since privatisation and Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves has pledged to return money to those still living if Labour comes to power at the next election.

Meanwhile the Government insists the arrangements "work well and are fair to all parties".

Consultancy Capita which administers the trustees declined to comment.

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TYCOON Jimmy Lai
Hong Kong's Lai jailed on fraud charge

BY KAREN ROCKETT

HONG Kong media tycoon Jimmy Lai was yesterday sentenced to five years and nine months' jail and fined nearly £210,000 for fraud.

The owner of the now closed pro-democracy Apple Daily newspaper has already served time for joining a banned vigil last year for victims of China's 1989 Tiananmen massacre.

A separate trial of Lai, 75, on national security charges due to start this month was postponed at the request of Hong Kong leader John Lee Ka-chiu.

If convicted he faces up to life imprisonment.

China has imposed its security laws on Hong Kong, making it easier to prosecute protesters.

A judge said Lai, found guilty of illegally sub-letting office space in October, felt no remorse.



EXPLORER Robert Scott
Hero Scott's dying letter sets record

BY IAN FLETCHER

A LETTER found on the body of heroic Antarctic explorer Robert Scott has sold for £415,000, a record for a Polar artefact.

The farewell note was written on March 16, 1912, to financier Sir Edgar Speyer during the doomed South Pole expedition.

In it Scott expresses concerns for his companions' families and asks that the nation provides for their futures.

The letter, found that November, is to "My dear Sir Edgar" – honorary treasurer of the trip's fundraising committee – and signed "R. Scott", "Lat 79.50S. March 16, 1912".

It was auctioned by Bonhams in London and is one of 12 letters found with Scott, thought to have died on March 29 during the return journey.