

# P-06-1270 Make October 21 an official Memorial Day for those killed and affected by the Aberfan Disaster

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 23 Mai 2022  
Petitions Committee | 23 May 2022

Reference: SR22/2716-1

**Petition Number:** P-06-1270

**Petition title:** Make October 21st an official Memorial Day for those killed and affected by the Aberfan Disaster

**Text of petition:** At 9.15 am on Friday, October 21, 1966, a waste tip above the mining village of Aberfan began to slide down the mountainside, firstly destroying a farm cottage and killing all its occupants. It then approached Pantglas Junior School, where the children had only just returned to their classes after singing All Things Bright and Beautiful at their morning assembly. The slide then engulfed the school and about 20 houses in the village, killing 144 people, including 116 school children.

On 26th October 1966, a tribunal was appointed to inquire into the causes of and circumstances relating to the Aberfan disaster, which was chaired by Welsh barrister and Privy Councillor Lord Justice Edmund Davies.

The Tribunal's report found that

\* The blame for the disaster rested entirely with the National Coal Board, and their "total absence of a tipping policy"

\* Repeated warnings about the dangerous condition of the tip had been ignored.

\* The tips had never been surveyed and were continuously being added to in a chaotic and unplanned manner. The disregard for the unstable geological



---

conditions and the NCB's failure to act after previous smaller slides were found to have been major factors that contributed to the catastrophe. This innocent people should never be forgotten and should always be remembered. The 21st October should be made a national Memorial Day to remember and never forget.

## 1. Background

On 21 October 1966, the worst mining-related disaster in British history took place in Aberfan, a small village in south Wales. A coal tip constructed on the hillside overlooking Aberfan village collapsed, and the ensuing avalanche destroyed mountainside farmhouses and cottages, 18 houses in the village, the primary school and part of the secondary school.

In total, 144 lives were lost, 116 of them children aged mostly between seven and ten who died in their classrooms. 109 died in the junior school. Of the 28 adults who died, five were primary school teachers.

## 2. Welsh Government action

The Welsh Government's response to this petition says:

Every year, on 21 October, we remember the 116 children and 28 adults killed at Pantglas School and neighbouring homes on 21 October 1966. The memory of this day will continue to live with us all in Wales. The Welsh Government has provided financial support to the Aberfan Memorial Charity to help with the maintenance of the memorial gardens and the Aberfan Education Charity for school projects in Aberfan and Merthyr Vale.

Unfortunately, we do not have the powers to designate national days – this rests with the UK Government.

Paragraph 190 of Schedule 7A to the Government of Wales Act 2006 reserves:

Timescales, time zones, the subject-matter of the Summer Time Act 1972, units of time, the calendar, bank holidays and the date of Easter.

---

The concept of a “*Memorial Day*” – as put forward by the Petitioner – calls for the date of the Aberfan disaster to be recognised as a memorial day across Wales, It is not calling for a particular date to be made a legally-designated Bank Holiday, therefore the reservation in Schedule 7A does not apply.

Armistice Day (celebrated on 11 November) is an example of an occasion which is recognised as a national day of remembrance, which is not designated as a Bank Holiday. The Welsh Government supports Welsh Language Music Day, a day that “celebrates all forms of Welsh language music”.

### 3. Welsh Parliament action

On 19 October 2016 the Senedd commemorated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the tragedy with speeches in Plenary from all the parties, led by Dawn Bowden MS, Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.