

Steelworker killed at plant in Granite City, Illinois

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Fifty-four-year-old Roy Evans of Carrollton, Illinois, was killed while working at the American Steel Services foundry in Granite City, Illinois, around 1:00 p.m. on December 13, where he had worked for 15 years. A spokesperson for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) released an initial statement to the press the following day and determined the death resulted from a stack of metal skids falling on top of him, crushing his body.

Evans was brought to Gateway Regional Medical Center in Granite City where he soon died of his injuries. The skids that fell on top of him are metal frames used to hold industrial parts, weighing approximately 2,000 pounds each.

OSHA Region V director for public affairs and media relations, Scott Allen, told local news that the agency had up to six months to complete an investigation. Nearly all OSHA investigations into workplace fatalities take the full six months, in part due to understaffing, the result of budget cuts by successive Democratic and Republican party administrations.

The Madison County Coroner's Office told the *World Socialist Web Site* that the cause of death was determined to be blunt trauma to the chest area.

Evans was a member of the United Steelworkers union (USW). His funeral service was held yesterday at the Crawford Funeral Home in Jerseyville. He is survived by his wife, Vicki, their four children and children's spouses, and three grandchildren. He is also survived by four brothers and five sisters.

A collection was taken at the funeral home to help provide financial support for the Evanses' youngest son. Like many working class families, the Evanses are no doubt under serious financial and emotional strain as the holiday season approaches, deepened by the loss of their beloved family member.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports Fatal Occupational Injuries increased steadily in recent years, from 4,585 in 2013 to 5,190 in 2016. The latest data shows that workplace deaths dipped only very slightly to 5,147 in 2017, still a significant increase over the 2013 numbers.

Antonio Wellmaker, president of United Steelworkers Local 1063, issued a statement on Evans' death, telling the *Belleville News-Democrat*, "USW Local 1063 would like to express our deepest condolences to the family and friends of our brother Roy Evans." However, the facts show the USW complicit in the steady undermining of safety conditions.

The American Steel Foundry in Granite City, owned by Amsted Rail Company, has five OSHA reports at its Granite City location on record since 2011, and many others at its other locations throughout the US. The OSHA investigations have resulted in seven serious safety violations and fines of over \$20,000. A 2015 report revealed that a worker suffered a broken pelvis as a result of being crushed between a rolling car and a parked forklift. The next year, a chain partially amputated a worker's thumb.

The repeated serious safety violations by the company are an indictment not only of the ruthlessness of corporate management's cost-cutting measures, but of the USW, which has been complicit in the undermining of worker safety.

The USW has faithfully implemented every cost-cutting measure the corporations have demanded, including increasing the hiring of contract work, outsourcing safety and health training, and the forming of management dominated joint labor-management safety and health committees in the plants.

The USW has carried out all of these attacks in the name of defending the American steel industry, telling

workers that in order to keep their jobs, they must take concessions in order for US companies to remain profitable in the face of competition from steel producers based in Asia, Latin America and Europe. The unions falsely proclaim that the workers' interests are tied to those of the corporations, hiding the fact that workers interests and corporate interests are in fact diametrically opposed.

Top officials in the USW bureaucracy, including International President Leo Gerard, who makes an annual salary of over \$200,000 per year (not including Wall Street investments), have been some of the most vocal supporters of President Trump's "America First" nationalist policies from the earliest days of his 2016 presidential campaign.

Not only that, Gerard hailed Trump's Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, the notorious asset stripper who oversaw the consolidation of the steel industry in the 2000s, as someone who was "open and accessible and candid and honest" and saved "literally tens of thousands of jobs."

Trump's visit to a US Steel (USS) mill in Granite City on July 26 trumpeted the re-opening of the mill's blast furnace as proof that his administration's "America First" nationalism and trade war policies were leading to increased employment in the US. In reality, USS only planned to hire for 800 positions through this year in Granite City, less than half of the 2,000 jobs that were lost in layoffs in 2015 under the Obama administration.

Furthermore, the trade war measures, mainly aimed at China, including a 25 percent tariff on steel and aluminum shipped into the United States, have produced a heated international trade conflict, which pits workers in different countries against each other in a race to the bottom. At the same time the Trump administration lauded the re-opening of the furnace at US Steel, farmers in the area were experiencing a crisis as the Chinese government levied retaliatory tariffs on soybeans imported from the US.

Contrary to the lies of both the Democrats and Republicans, nationalist economic policies do nothing to benefit the working class. They ultimately lead to tit-for-tat trade war and ultimately military war, pitting workers against one another as corporations scramble for profits. The inevitable results are ever-deeper attacks on jobs and working conditions.

The right to a job, decent pay, good benefits and a safe workplace where no worker runs the risk of dying because they must feed their families will not be secured through the representatives of the corporate ruling class in either of the two capitalist political parties or their lackeys in the trade unions.

The only way forward for workers to secure a safe workplace is to form rank-and-file safety committees in every plant, independent of the USW. Workers in steel mills need to link up with workers at General Motors, Chrysler and Ford, who are fighting against plant closures and layoffs, and workers at United Parcel in solidarity with the millions of workers around the world who are coming into struggle against the capitalist system.

These committees must have as a guiding perspective opposition to corporate rule, and must advance a socialist perspective—in which the productive forces of society are used to meet the social needs of the international working class, not the profit interests of a wealthy few.



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