

Another steelworker killed at ArcelorMittal in Indiana

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Steelworker Edwin Fleming, 49, of Schererville, Indiana was killed on Tuesday while working at ArcelorMittal's Indiana Harbor plant in East Chicago, Indiana. Fleming was operating a railroad engine, which struck a railcar on the adjacent track in the No. 7 blast furnace raw materials yard. He left behind his wife, daughter, son, young granddaughter and his dog.

His niece wrote after his passing on Facebook, "This is SO hard to process. I'm so sad and angry and I cannot stop crying. My Uncle Flem gained his wings yesterday after being fatally injured on the job.

"He was an amazing husband, father, son, brother, uncle, and friend. He worked hard and he loved his family SO much!! He had the biggest smile and heart, he was kind, and he could make anyone laugh. I hate that this has happened to him and my family."

When he died, Fleming had worked for ArcelorMittal for 17 years. His death is the 392nd to occur at the mill, which has operated since 1902. It was first operated by Inland Steel until it was acquired in 1998 by ArcelorMittal. Fleming's is the third death at the plant in the past 25 months, preceded by Alfredo Cardena, who died in a buggy accident at the No. 3 Continuous Annealing Line in December 2017, and Willie Batteast who was killed in a crane accident in March 2017.

In another recent disaster at the mill, a worker was injured in an explosion in November 2018.

An investigation into Fleming's death is reportedly being conducted by ArcelorMittal, the United Steelworkers union (USW) and other "outside agencies" who are not named in the press. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has not listed an open case for the incident on its website. The last OSHA inspection at the facility took place on March 26 after a complaint was filed for safety reasons (the case remains open). OSHA has not

updated its fatality reports since February 18.

Any investigation into the incident by the company—whose cost-cutting practices have led to the deaths of workers—or its lackeys in the USW, will result in a whitewash. OSHA, while ostensibly an organization to regulate health and safety practices in workplaces in the US, will also do nothing to uncover the true cause of death, or find a solution to the safety problems facing workers at the plant.

The role of the USW and OSHA in covering up the real causes behind worker deaths in the steel mills has countless examples, one being the attempt to cover up the death of 31-year-old Jon Arizzola, a father of two, who was killed at US Steel Gary Works in September 2016. His widow, Whitney Arizzola, was forced to subpoena documents from US Steel after her husband's death, the investigation into which resulted in slap-on-the-wrist fines, which the company was allowed to contest.

The USW has pushed through numerous concession contracts that have significantly reduced the living standards of steelworkers. Workers have been laid off, lost wages and benefits, suffered from improper job training, and have been forced to work overtime in conditions in which safety measures have been drastically undermined in order to make sure that the companies remain "competitive" in the global market.

Most recently, workers at ArcelorMittal and US Steel in the United States were forced to accept a deal that included a pitiful 14 percent wage increase over four years, a slap in the face to many workers, who suffered financial difficulties after being forced by the union and company to take a three-year wage freeze, as a result of the ratification of the sellout 2015 contracts.

The contracts were pushed through last November after the union refused to carry out a strike after

workers both at ArcelorMittal and US Steel voted unanimously to take such action. The USW kept rank-and-file steel workers in the dark about contract negotiations from beginning to end.

The USW has long been involved in joint labor-management environmental, health and safety committees at the two steelmakers, in which union officials and corporate management work hand-in-hand to cut back on health and safety protections for workers and suppress opposition by workers to unsafe practices.

In order to justify the sacrifices that it forces workers to take, the union uses nationalism to pit workers in the US against workers in other countries. USW International president and AFL-CIO vice president Leo Gerard—who earns a six-figure salary in addition to income from Wall Street investments—has appeared on television numerous times to slander Chinese workers as the enemy of the working class, and has been one of the most vocal supporters of US President Donald Trump’s reactionary “America First” economic campaign, which has resulted in the layoffs of thousands of workers since his inauguration in 2017.

In reality, the corporate ruling elite and the trade unions are the enemies of workers worldwide—not their brother workers abroad who are being exploited by the same corporations. ArcelorMittal reported gross annual profit of \$9.79 billion in 2018, well above its total of \$8 billion in 2017 and more than three times the profits earned in 2015. CEO Lakshmi Mittal owns personal net wealth of \$13.8 billion.

With this amount of money flowing into its corporate coffers there is no reason that workers should face any health and safety risks at its plants and mines around the world. Instead, essential safety protections are being stripped away at the cost of workers’ lives in order to further enrich executives and stockholders.

For the truth to be revealed about the death of Edwin Fleming an independent rank-and-file investigation is needed. This will require the organization of rank-and-file committees to oversee all safety measures in every mill.

There is plenty of money to address safety issues as well as other concerns such as declining wages and benefits, lack of leisure time to spend with family and friends, healthcare and other important matters. But the USW has proven incapable of putting up a fight for the most basic demands. Instead, it has demonstrated that it

is an instrument of the corporations and the big business Democratic and Republican parties.

Workers around the world are waking up to the reality that they cannot live under capitalism. From the striking maquiladora workers on the US-Mexico border, to the “yellow vest” protesters in France, striking teachers in the US, Latin America and Africa, and steelworkers, autoworkers and logistics workers coming into struggle worldwide, there is a growing mood of resistance.

In order to unite these struggles workers must reject the nationalism of trade unions like the USW. The fight for the basic needs of workers requires forming rank-and-file committees with a socialist and internationalist perspective, aimed at ending capitalist rule and reorganizing economic life globally on the basis of production for social need, not private profit.



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