

Detroit and Toledo autoworkers back rank-and-file investigation into death of Stellantis worker Ronald Adams Sr.

Our reporters
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The WSWS urges workers to come forward with information and support this investigation. Fill out the form at the end to send us your comments.

Autoworkers in Detroit and Toledo, Ohio, have expressed their support for the rank-and-file investigation into the death of Stellantis worker Ronald Adams Sr., initiated by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

The 63-year-old machine repairman was a highly skilled and respected worker at the Dundee Engine Complex who was known for standing up to management in defense of his co-workers' safety. A beloved member of his Detroit community, Adams is survived by his wife, Shamenia Stewart-Adams, and their blended family of 10 children and 11 grandchildren.

According to initial reports, Adams was performing maintenance on a Cinetic Washer in Department 7300 when an overhead gantry engaged, pinning him between the gantry and the conveyor, and causing fatal injuries to his upper torso.

In the five weeks since the accident, Stellantis, the United Auto Workers union and the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA) have failed to provide Adams' family, co-workers or the public with any information about the causes of the incident or the circumstances surrounding it.

The IWA-RFC is opposing the official cover-up and attempts to sweep Adams' death under the rug. It is organizing an investigation independent of Stellantis, the UAW apparatus and state authorities to uncover the truth, expose systemic safety violations and prevent future tragedies.

"Ronnie's family has the right to an independent investigation," said a GM worker from the Detroit area. "Everything should be documented and made public. A worker gets killed, and the story is gone the next day. The union leaders don't keep these stories alive. They're part of the problem."

"Ronnie's death was a big story at first, and we talked about it in our safety meeting," the worker continued. "But since then, nothing. There are a lot more workers who die in these plants—we just never hear about it. The companies have a

motto: 'Nobody ever dies in these plants.' A guy could have his brains on the wall, and they'll still say he had a heartbeat and was DOA at the hospital. That's because they have to pay out more in a legal case if the worker dies in the plant."

He added:

We heard from some Dundee workers that they were retooling, and that Ronnie did the proper thing by locking out his machine. But it was another machine that killed him. They said the gantry that crushed him had been moved from another part of the plant, but the placard [diagram that shows the location and power source of each machine] was never updated.

I know when I used to lock out, you had the main power that locks out everything on that machine, and you have auxiliary lockouts too. His co-workers should be able to explain what happened. We can't let the company and the union run this investigation; it's like letting them police themselves.

The only way we'll get at the truth is for workers to speak out. Maybe they're scared. But they're the only ones who know what kind of lockout system was in place and if the system failed.

On Thursday afternoon, supporters of the IWA-RFC distributed copies of the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter*, featuring the statement on the rank-and-file investigation, to workers at the Stellantis Toledo Jeep complex.

Located just 30 miles from the Dundee plant, the factory was the site of another fatal accident on August 21, 2024, when 53-year-old Antonio Gaston, a father of four, was crushed to death. Stellantis was later cited for "serious" safety violations—specifically, a failure to provide adequate machine guarding—but the company is contesting the \$16,131 fine.

Ten months later, the MIOSHA case on Gaston remains open, and the UAW has never informed workers of the results of the so-called "investigation" carried out by the joint UAW-

Stellantis Health and Safety Department.

"I support a rank-and-file investigation and think it's a good thing," a Jeep worker said. "We won't know the truth unless people who do the work tell what happened."

He added:

The company hasn't said anything about the death of Ronald Adams or about Antonio Gaston at my own plant last August. I know that after Mr. Adams' death, they started doing random safety audits and cracking down on everything. As for Mr. Gaston, the company never really commented on it. The rumor was that he was asked by management to reach over the line, and the safety feature—which is supposed to prevent the car from moving if someone is in the way—wasn't working that day.

If OSHA wanted to do a proper investigation, they should have randomly interviewed employees about safety. That way, workers wouldn't have to worry about retaliation. I've personally been asked by management to do things that were unsafe, and if I hadn't spoken up for myself, they probably would've made me do it.

Hundreds of workers took copies of the *Autoworker Newsletter*, which featured a statement by Mack Trucks worker and IWA-RFC leader Will Lehman, published in *Newsweek*, denouncing UAW President Shawn Fain's embrace of Trump's tariffs and calling for the unity of autoworkers in the US, Canada, Mexico, China, and internationally against attacks on jobs and working conditions.

Frightened by the strong response from workers, UAW Local 12 officials called in security to remove the campaigners and block workers from learning about the rank-and-file investigation.

The campaigners then went to the nearby Dana Driveline plant, where they distributed the statement to workers who were also familiar with Ronald Adams' death and the sweatshop conditions in their own facility. "Safety is the best way for survival," one worker said, shaking his head at how the UAW bureaucracy is helping Stellantis cover up the truth.

A worker at the Ford Rouge complex in Dearborn, Michigan, denounced MIOSHA's decision to reject the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request by the WSWS for the results of its preliminary investigation into Ronald Adams' death.

The worker, who received a near-perfect score on the Michigan OSHA test for safety laws and procedures, said, "There is no way that public disclosure of the required documentation of regular inspections for machine safety and effectiveness could jeopardize the integrity of the investigation."

"They are required by law to conduct those inspections at regular, legally established intervals. Machine effectiveness and safety go hand in hand," the worker said. "Everybody in the plant and everybody in the community has the legal right to see those records."

He added:

We have a history of people getting killed and injured in the plants. That is why these laws were enacted. The union, OSHA and the corporation are all supposed to work together to carry them out. If they are not willing to bring those records forward, that can only mean one thing: Somebody did not do what they were supposed to do in following their safety procedures.

I have OSHA training. I have an OSHA card. I am certified by the state. Now, Trump is attacking OSHA.

Another Rouge worker said:

In all my years of working in the steel and automotive industry with matched time spent as a UAW rep at a small plant and a plant safety team member, I find the death of Ronald Adams Sr to be one of negligence. Not by the hands of the worker but by the capitalist they slave their lives away for.

Hour after hour, day after day, me and others would bring up concerns about safety in the workplace and though the company touted itself as a lover for safety, it failed month after month to put in the things required to make the workers feel safe!

As the IWA-RFC call for the rank-and-file investigation states: "An inquiry independent of Stellantis, the United Auto Workers (UAW) apparatus and state authorities is essential to uncover the truth, expose systemic safety violations and prevent future deaths. It must gather testimony from Dundee workers, autoworkers at other plants, safety experts and others with relevant knowledge. Such a workers' investigation is crucial to laying the basis for genuine rank-and-file oversight over safety and production conditions in the factories."

Fill out the form below to become involved in and support a rank-and-file investigation into the death of Ronald Adams Sr.!



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