

# “What are they covering up?”: Stellantis Dundee Engine worker provides details for rank-and-file investigation into death of Ronald Adams Sr.

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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. All submissions will be kept anonymous.*

The World Socialist Web Site spoke Wednesday with a Stellantis worker at the Dundee Engine Plant about conditions inside the facility prior to the death of Ronald Adams Sr., the 63-year-old machine repairman who was crushed to death by an overhead gantry crane on April 7.

More than six weeks after the incident, Adams' family and co-workers have yet to receive any explanation about the causes of the fatal accident from Stellantis, the United Auto Workers union or the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA).

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) has launched an independent investigation to uncover the truth and hold accountable those responsible for the tragic death of this respected worker and beloved husband, father and grandfather.

The Dundee Engine Plant is undergoing a \$150 million retooling project to produce engines, battery trays and frame components for the next generation of Dodge, Jeep and other Stellantis models. Co-workers of Adams have raised serious concerns that key safety measures, including lockout/tagout procedures, may have been bypassed in the rush to restart operations. Following several costly delays, production is reportedly set to resume at the beginning of June.

As part of the rank-and-file investigation, the WSWS is collecting testimony from workers at Dundee and other Stellantis factories. The following is a discussion with a Dundee production worker who has been laid off during the retooling process. His name has been changed to “Steve” to protect him from retaliation by Stellantis and the UAW bureaucracy.

**WSWS:** Thank you for participating in this rank-and-file investigation.

**Steve:** Trust me, we are all frustrated right now and want to get as much information as possible. First, my heart goes out to Ronnie's family, because I know how it feels to lose a relative. It's just that I don't understand the feeling of losing a relative due

to a work-related accident. That could be confusing for anybody.

**WSWS:** The family has received an outpouring of support from workers at Dundee and other plants. They want answers, not only to get justice for Ronnie, but to make sure more workers' lives are not lost due to the negligence of the company and the UAW.

**Steve:** His family has the right to demand answers, because they've lost a support system. They lost their loved one. They lost the head of their household. They deserve every answer possible. And by delaying that, you are making it seem like you're trying to create a cover up.

**WSWS:** What are Dundee workers being told about Ronald Adams' death?

**Steve:** Honestly, based on what I heard from workers who attended the union meeting on Sunday, only that the investigation on MIOSHA's side was almost wrapping up. The local union president told people MIOSHA was finalizing their details and bringing everything to a close.

**WSWS:** The UAW says it is conducting its own investigation with the company. Have they told workers what they found?

**Steve:** No, they have not given us any details whatsoever. We should know about this. We should know what safety concerns are arising that are not being addressed.

**WSWS:** What are your fellow workers saying about the possible causes of Adams' death?

**Steve:** The only thing that's being said is they're changing a lot during the retooling process, and they're shifting to a new lockout/tagout procedure. If you're not in the plan right now, you don't have information about it.

**WSWS:** We have gotten reports that management took the gantry that killed Ronnie from the South plant and reassembled it in the North Plant. Some workers said the placards were never updated after it was relocated.

**Steve:** I will honestly tell you I believe that.

**WSWS:** Could you describe for our readers what the placards are and what would happen if they were not properly updated?

**Steve:** Placards are signs posted near a particular set of machines. They are supposed to tell you what the machines are for and where all the lockout points are located. It shows how to lock

out a machine and cut off its energy source so a skilled trades worker can safely work on it.

**WSWS:** So, if a machine is mislabeled there's a possibility the gangry was still energized even if workers thought it was locked out?

**Steve:** That's one of the major possibilities. I didn't know they were moving parts from the South to the North. We were told we've been waiting on parts to come in and get retooled. I didn't know they were just shifting stuff from one side of the plant to the other. That's another concern, because why are we doing that when we should be retooling us the correct way? But that's what happens when you're doing an in-house retool instead of a third party retool by people who are certified to move stuff and connect it the correct way.

**WSWS:** So, it's a cost-cutting measure?

**Steve:** Yeah, it's definitely a cost-cutting thing.

**WSWS:** Did you witness safety issues that concerned you before Ronnie's death?

**Steve:** Honestly, there's been times where I saw some maintenance workers just go open the door and work on a machine while the line was running. So, it was a concern. How are you able to bypass that? Or when a machine goes down, it seems like they just put a band aid on it. We know we need this machine fixed properly, because who knows what can happen next. I've seen machinery fail and pose the potential of a serious injury.

**WSWS:** What happens when workers complain about safety issues? What is the response of the UAW?

**Steve:** We don't get a response. We get, 'Oh, it's okay, you know, we're doing what we have to do.' But they don't follow the proper protocols to where they come out and, you know, stop what's going on and take the proper time to investigate before things start back up again.

**WSWS:** What do you think about an "investigation," which consists of management and the UAW investigating themselves?

**Steve:** No, that should never happen. It's like the police investigating themselves. Can you really trust it? No, not at all. They're protecting their interests. The UAW officials are trying to keep their seats at the table, and they're doing whatever they can to not make the company and themselves look bad.

**WSWS:** The company and the union issued a joint video for Worker Memorial Day suggesting that accidents are caused by careless workers, not cost-cutting, layoffs and prioritizing profit over safety.

**Steve:** They can't pull that off with Ronnie. He would chew out our managers over safety. They wanted him to do stuff without taking proper safety protocols. So, if they even try to say that he didn't follow safety procedures, we all know that's a lie.

I knew Ronnie well enough and would watch him when he came to work on a machine. I watched him go through the proper lockout/tagout procedures. He never entered a machine area without locking it out the proper way. So, it doesn't make any sense. Why hasn't this investigation been wrapped up yet and the information released? What are they covering up?

**WSWS:** You have all these UAW-company safety committees, from the national to the local level, that are run through the joint training centers, which were the center of the UAW corruption

scandal. A few weeks ago, they attended a largely all-expenses paid UAW Health and Safety Conference at the union's golf course resort in Black Lake, Michigan.

**Steve:** Yeah, we got a little insight about that, and the worst part of it is one of the people from another facility in our union local got sent to Black Lake. Sure enough, she said she had fun the entire time she was up there. But as far as the safety protocols and all that the stuff, she said it was a bunch of BS.

**WSWS:** What do you think about an investigation led by rank-and-file workers themselves?

**Steve:** You know, the rank and file, we need to know, because it's like now you're putting our lives on the line, and we don't have answers. You're putting our safety at risk if you're not telling us anything about what happened and what you're doing to fix what happened. How do we know that when we go back to work, we're going to be safe?

**WSWS:** Even if MIOSHA finds Stellantis violated safety procedures, all the company and the union have to do is give the state paperwork saying things have been corrected, and MIOSHA won't even do another inspection to see if they are telling the truth. It's the honor system.

**Steve:** No, that's not right. I disagree with that through and through. When it comes to health and safety, there should be no such thing as an honor system.

**WSWS:** What about rank-and-file workers asserting their own control over safety on the shop floor?

**Steve:** Well, I mean, I thought that's what becoming a member of a union was all about. Making sure that your work environment is safe, and if it isn't, you don't work, right? So, I'm completely in favor of that. Honestly, it goes back to this episode we had at Dundee back in 2020 when COVID started, and we were concerned about it spreading in the plant, and we didn't work. We were like, "No, we're not going to work because we don't know if the plant is contaminated or not. And you got us working in here." How do we know that we're safe?

**WSWS:** It wasn't the UAW that stopped production, it was the rank and file.

**Steve:** It was the rank and file. We stopped production. We were the ones who backed away from unloading the trucks. The UAW came out and said that we were violating protocol. And we said, "No, we're not. We're trying to maintain our safety."

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