

“There is no reason this should happen in a modern, civilized society”: Canadian Stellantis workers back 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.

Autoworkers during the shift change Friday afternoon at the Windsor Assembly Plant (WAP) in Ontario, Canada expressed support for the rank-and-file investigation into the death of fellow Stellantis worker Ronald Adams Sr. at the Dundee Engine Complex in Michigan on April 7.

The 63-year-old machine repairman, well-known for advocating for the safety of his co-workers in the plant, was crushed to death by an overhead gantry while performing maintenance work on a machine used to wash engine blocks. In the more than six weeks since his death, family members and co-workers have not received any definitive information about the causes of the fatal accident from the company, the United Auto Workers or the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA).

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) has initiated an independent investigation, to be led by rank-and-file workers themselves, to prevent another official cover up, expose the truth and hold those responsible to account. On Friday, IWA-RFC supporters distributed a statement on the rank-and-file investigation at the plant, which employs 4,000 Stellantis workers.

Many workers did not know about the death even though it involved a Stellantis worker and occurred only sixty miles away. This is chiefly the responsibility of the United Auto Workers and Unifor unions, which do everything to keep workers in the dark and divide them along national lines. This includes UAW President Shawn Fain’s backing of the Trump administration’s tariffs and trade war policies, while Unifor supports Canadian countermeasures against the US.

Even though the Windsor plant is being hit with rolling

layoffs due to the tariffs and Stellantis has just postponed plans to build a Dodge Charger EV model at the plant, many workers expressed a strong desire to unite Canadian, US and Mexican workers against the global automakers’ attack on jobs and working conditions.

“These companies do everything they can to divide us and make us fight against each other,” a Windsor worker told the WSWS. “But we’re all connected, not only in the North American economy but the global economy. We need to come together not let these employers divide us and take up the real issues at hand, including safety,” he said.

Addressing himself to the family of Ronald Adams, Sr., another worker said, “I am very sorry for your loss.” He continued, “This is the first I heard about this, that is why I grabbed your flyer. We are all brothers and sisters. This is concerning. I’m very interested in learning more details. I read about him being crushed in a machine. I want to look deeper into that.

“There is lockout/tagout. There is no excuse. We have safety mechanisms for this. There is no reason why this should happen in our modern, civilized society. You think of that stuff happening in overseas sweatshops or something, not in a modern, operating system. They preach World Class Manufacturing, but people are losing their lives and even getting injured, that’s not supposed to happen.”

Especially during product launches he said, management cuts corners. “They say, ‘Can you do that quick.’ Even when they say they are not rushing a person, you see it happen all the time.”

He added, “Sounds like [Adams] was ready to retire soon, and he wasn’t too far off. He was an advocate for safety.” Asked what he thought about a rank-and-file investigation into the Dundee worker’s death, he said, “I don’t see how anybody can have an issue with that if there is no concern with the policies and procedures. The company or anyone

involved can't say [the family] doesn't deserve that. They lost a family member, and they at least deserve that. They deserve that and then some."

Another worker rushing to punch in stopped to say briefly, "Hey my brothers I support an investigation into your brother's death. Hopefully, we can get this all figured out." As he rushed off, he said, "Unite American and Canadian workers together," with a thumbs up.

A younger worker also stopped to speak on Adams' death, saying, "Something like that happened in our plant a while back when someone was hurt by a vehicle backing up into her." Asked what he thought about rank-and-file workers carrying out their own investigation and enforcing their own safety in the plant, he said, "I think that's the right thing to do. Especially if the union is not getting involved, and the company isn't. It's been six weeks, like you say, and the workers have to do something about it."

Asked about uniting workers across borders, he said, "It's the right thing to do, of course. In the end of the day, we're all trying to earn money. And we don't want to die, so this is a good movement going on, and I support it."

Another worker added, "Our condolences for the person who died. They have to fix the safety. Something needs to be done. The first thing they should talk to the family and tell them what happened." Asked why the company and the union were covering up what caused Adams' death, he said, "It's a liability, and they are trying to watch their asses."

In March 2020, Windsor Assembly workers took matters into their own hands and walked off the line as Covid-19 was spreading throughout the North American auto plants. On March 12, hundreds of workers downed their tools after learning that a worker at the company's Kokomo Transmission Plant in the United States was diagnosed with the potentially deadly disease. Just prior to the wildcat strike management said that it had worked with the Ontario Ministry of Labour and Unifor leaders to "investigate and determined our protocols and work environment to be safe."

A week later wildcat strikes across Toledo, Ohio and the metro Detroit area—in defiance of management and UAW officials—led to the two-month shutdown of the North American auto industry, saving countless lives.

Disregarding the dire danger facing workers, the unions on both sides of the border enforced management's back to work drive. When anger erupted at the Windsor plant over the failure of the company and union to report Covid-19 cases spreading in the plant, Unifor Local 444 President Dave Cassidy defended the company, saying, "The joint health and safety committee is making sure all proper safety protocols are being followed."

Summing up the struggle all workers face against the corporations, the union bureaucracy and the capitalist

governments over safety, Frank, a retired Stellantis Windsor Assembly Plant worker told the WSWS:

It is heart wrenching to see a fellow worker, so close to his retirement especially, be struck down by corporate greed. It seems all the advancements made in society are in the name of efficiency and profits. We are always the last in line to see our working life benefit from them.

I can recall a worker at the WAP having a heart attack while working on the assembly line and he was immediately shoved away from the production line so that work can continue with almost no missed jobs. His fellow workers left stunned into obedience and continued to work. An unbelievable scene while medical workers continued to save his life. If that didn't explain your role at work, then nothing else does. The Bob Seger song, 'Feel Like A Number,' really always hit home with me,.. "I work my back till it's racked with pain. The boss can't even recall my name." That really sums it up.

Ronald Adams Sr didn't deserve this. His life was taken away needlessly. His family is going through immeasurable loss and of love with his passing. All workers must support each other over corporate greed and corruption. We have to stand in the way of capitalism and bring our lives back towards a world where we are not each other's enemy but are simply seeking out a place where the working men and women work in harmony with each other and profits are as important as old news.

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