

Memorial Day 2025: Honor the memory of Ronald Adams Sr. and the other victims of class war in America

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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.

Today is Memorial Day in the United States. For the corporate-controlled media and political establishment, the holiday—first nationally observed in 1868 following the American Civil War—will be marked by speeches and proclamations aimed at promoting “America First” nationalism and militarism.

“Memorial Day is a sacred day of remembrance, reverence, and gratitude for the brave patriots who have laid down their lives in service to our great Nation,” President Trump declared in a statement posted by the White House on Saturday. This from a fascist president who is backing Israel’s genocide in Gaza, deporting international students for opposing it, and pushing for the largest military budget in history—all while cynically proclaiming Memorial Day “a day of prayer for permanent peace.”

Statements about “America’s fallen heroes” from big business politicians are drenched in hypocrisy. The political representatives of American imperialism have not the slightest concern for the young people they send to occupy foreign lands and seize resources—many of whom return with PTSD, traumatic brain injuries and other lasting physical and mental scars. The Trump administration is cutting funding to the Veterans Administration even as veterans make up 20 percent of the male homeless population, and an average of 17.6 veterans die by suicide every day.

The promotion of “national unity” on Memorial Day is aimed at concealing the fact that, within the United States itself, a relentless war is being waged against the working class by the same corporations that profit from endless wars abroad. One of the sharpest expressions of this domestic class war is the growing number of workers sacrificed in factories and other workplaces for corporate profit.

Workplace hazards kill approximately 140,000 workers in the US each year—including 5,283 from traumatic injuries and an estimated 135,000 from occupational diseases in 2023. Severe

injuries and illnesses are even more widespread. Due to chronic underreporting, the AFL-CIO estimates the true number of work-related injuries and illnesses in private industry ranges from 5.2 million to 7.8 million annually.

The annual death toll in US workplaces is roughly two-and-a-half times the 58,281 American soldiers killed in Vietnam between 1960 and 1975. Yet in the official Memorial Day ceremonies, there will be no mention of the victims of the class war being waged by the corporate and financial oligarchy that rules America and dominates both political parties.

The number of preventable deaths and injuries will only increase as Trump and Elon Musk—a notorious violator of workplace safety—move to gut the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and eliminate what few remaining restrictions exist on the exploitation of the working class.

This Memorial Day will be the first that the family and friends of Ronald Adams Sr. will observe without him. The 63-year-old skilled trades worker was crushed to death by an overhead gantry crane at the Stellantis Dundee Engine Complex in Michigan on April 7. Adams leaves behind his wife, Shamenia Stewart-Adams, along with 10 children and 11 grandchildren in their blended family.

Memorial Day marks exactly seven weeks since Adams’ death. In that time, neither his family nor his co-workers have received any definitive information about the cause of the fatal accident from Stellantis, 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 launched an independent investigation—led by rank-and-file workers—to oppose the whitewash of corporate murder, uncover the truth and hold those responsible to account. The investigation has received support from Adams’ family and co-workers. His widow, Shamenia Stewart-Adams, wrote: “Please read this article, SHARE and join the efforts to push for answers from Stellantis, UAW and MIOSHA... our family still has no answers.”

Other autoworkers who should be honored include:

• **Antonio Gaston**, a 53-year-old father of four, was crushed to death on August 21, 2024, while tightening undercarriage bolts on the Gladiator Line at the Toledo Jeep Complex. Stellantis was cited for “serious” safety violations, including inadequate machine guarding, but has contested the \$16,131 fine. Ten months later, the case remains unresolved.

• **Franklin “Tracy” Logsdon**, a 57-year-old machine repairman, died on June 25, 2024, after falling into a 21,000-gallon tank at the Metalsa plant in Kentucky. OSHA cited the company for seven violations and issued \$172,000 in fines, which the company is contesting.

• **Daulton Simmers**, a 28-year-old worker, was “thermally annihilated” at a Caterpillar foundry in Illinois on June 6, 2024, when molten iron poured onto his workstation. Caterpillar was fined \$32,262 for two serious violations, which the company is contesting.

This industrial slaughterhouse extends far beyond the auto factories.

Two days after Adams’ death, on April 9, 2025, Leony Salcedo-Chevalier—a 34-year-old father of two daughters—was struck and killed by a truck backing into the loading dock at Amazon’s JFK8 fulfillment center in Staten Island, New York City.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote about the April 9 fatal accident: “Amazon is the poster child for high-tech exploitation, in which robots and surveillance systems are used to force workers past the point of injury, struggling to ‘make rate.’ It is well known that workers who are injured at Amazon are practically thrown out on the street, while one of the world’s largest corporations denies them workers’ compensation.”

The carnage has continued over the past week. A partial list includes:

• **Allen Kowalski**, 27, was killed when an unsecured load fell from a forklift and crushed him at the Hyundai Motor Group Metaplant America battery facility near Savannah. Just two months earlier, another worker was killed in a separate forklift accident at the same plant.

• **Marion Jose Rugama**, a 33-year-old contractor, was found dead on May 19 at the Hanwha Qcells solar panel plant in Cartersville, 50 miles northwest of Atlanta. Authorities suspect he was asphyxiated by a nitrogen leak at the top of a tank, where oxygen levels measured just 15 percent—too low to sustain life.

• A 59-year-old employee of New York City’s Department of Environmental Protection was killed and two other workers were injured Saturday morning in an explosion aboard a sewage boat docked on the Hudson River. The unnamed worker had served the city for 33 years.

This is international phenomenon: On May 20, three German construction workers fell to their deaths from a great height at a bridge construction site near Horb in the Neckar Valley, south of Stuttgart.

These are only the latest victims of the ongoing class war against workers. Their lives should be honored by supporting the rank-and-file investigation into the death of Ronald Adams Sr. and by building independent shop floor organizations that equip workers with the information and collective power needed to enforce safety standards themselves.

Nothing the working class has ever won—including basic safety standards—was achieved without mass struggle: From the decades-long battles of coal miners against mine disasters and black lung, to the fight by meatpackers against the horrific conditions exposed in *The Jungle*, to the efforts of chemical workers like Karen Silkwood—who was murdered for exposing radiation poisoning at a nuclear plant.

Today’s fight requires a rebellion against the corporatist trade union bureaucracies. After colluding in the betrayal of strikes, overseeing the deindustrialization of entire regions, and suppressing rank-and-file resistance to speed-up and unsafe conditions, the AFL-CIO established Workers Memorial Day in 1989—supposedly to honor workers killed or injured on the job. In reality, it serves as a cover for the bureaucracy’s own complicity.

“Workers Memorial Day” is marked every April 28, coinciding with the anniversary of the 1970 Occupational Safety and Health Act and the founding of OSHA. In a travesty of the memory of Ronald Adams Sr., the UAW observed this year’s Workers Memorial Day with a joint video alongside Stellantis management, hailing the company’s supposed commitment to safety and blaming accidents on individual carelessness rather than the relentless corporate drive for profit.

As the IWA-RFC explained, “Only a workers’ investigation—free from company and UAW bureaucracy interference—can reveal the truth and hold those responsible accountable. Otherwise, the auto plants will remain industrial killing fields.” This investigation will be a critical step in building a powerful rank-and-file movement of the working class, in the US and internationally, to establish workers’ control over production and safety, and replace the capitalist system with socialism and production for human need not private profit.

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