

# Stellantis Dundee engine workers speak out on the death of Ronald Adams Sr.: “They knew it was dangerous. He didn’t have to die.”

**Jerry White**  
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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. Your identity will be kept confidential.*

Nearly two months after the tragic death of Ronald Adams Sr., a 63-year-old machine repairman at Stellantis’ Dundee Engine Complex in Michigan, workers are breaking the silence and exposing the corporate negligence and union complicity that led to the fatal accident.

Several Dundee workers who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* provided detailed testimony for the independent investigation into Adams’ death, which has been initiated by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). They spoke about the conditions leading up to Adams’ death, describing a toxic combination of unsafe machinery and rushed production schedules, which were allowed by the United Auto Workers (UAW). To protect them from retaliation, all workers’ identities have been withheld.

Adams was killed in the early morning hours of April 7 when a robotic gantry system suddenly activated while he was working underneath it in a confined area. The gantry—a mechanical arm designed to lift and transport engine components—was expected to remain stationary during a “dry run,” a test mode meant to deactivate motion and allow maintenance work to be conducted safely. But the machine lurched into motion, striking Adams with devastating force and fatally crushing his torso.

Several workers have said that a subcontractor called PARI, brought in by Stellantis to install new equipment on the line, altered the software logic of the system. Previously, the gantries were programmed to remain off during dry runs, they reported. But when PARI installed gantries and conveyors for a new engine washer, workers said, they introduced an undocumented change to the logic.

“Operators thought the gantry would be off—like it always was—but it wasn’t,” a production worker told the WSWS.

In the days before the fatal accident, workers reported, the gantry had already moved unexpectedly on at least two occasions while in dry run mode.

According to workers, the layout of the machine and the logic

change created a deadly trap. “You think it’s safe because it’s in dry run,” one explained. “But because they added a new layer of programming, the machine was still live. Nobody knew.”

In the immediate aftermath of the accident, Stellantis blocked off access to both sides of the plant, even areas far from the scene. “Not like I was in any position to work anyway. I was devastated, it’s still unbelievable, even to this day. He didn’t have to die at all.”

Another worker added, “They changed out the gantry arm right away and replaced the part that crushed him.”

Dundee has been undergoing a multi-million-dollar retooling project to produce a new line of engines for gas-powered, electric and hybrid vehicles; assemble, weld and test EV battery trays; and machine front and rear beams for larger-framed Ram and Jeep models. A 5.7-liter Hemi V-8 engine, currently built in Saltillo, Mexico, is also reportedly coming to Dundee.

With the retooling project behind schedule, workers described a chaotic, high-pressure environment as Stellantis rushed to complete the installations of new machinery and restart production as soon as possible.

Coworkers say Ronald and many other skilled workers could work 12-hour shifts, sometimes seven days a week, because of the rush to complete the work. Due to mandatory overtime on many weekends, Ronald was only getting four days off a month leading up to the tragic accident, they said.

“It’s been a real push to get stuff done because everything’s been dragging,” a production worker said. “Literally, we were going to work doing nothing. They had us scraping tape off the floor and just cleaning, but nothing was moving.”

He added, “So, it got to be crunch time and that was the word with Ronnie’s crew too.”

Several workers reported that the same pattern of dangerous cost-cutting extended to safety interlocks meant to shut down power when maintenance doors were opened. Workers described how interlocks were routinely bypassed—unscrewed and left engaged while the doors were opened, allowing live machinery to be accessed unsafely. The day after Adams’ death, workers reported, management quietly asked anyone with an interlock key to return

it “without penalty,” an action they considered to be an implicit acknowledgment that such unsafe practices were widespread and known.

Despite the catastrophic nature of the incident, multiple workers complained that MIOSHA (Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration) investigators had not interviewed many of those working in the area where Adams was killed. “They haven’t talked to any of the workers on the line,” one worker said. “How do you call that an investigation?”

The role of the UAW apparatus has been equally appalling, they said. “They said they were conducting their own investigation, but they’ve said nothing to us,” one worker reported. “They’re working hand in hand with Stellantis to cover this up.”

Indeed, the UAW’s only public comment came in the form of a video released for Workers Memorial Day on April 28. The video featured UAW-Stellantis Vice President Kevin Gotinsky and top Stellantis management extolling their joint commitment to safety—while implying that accidents are caused by workers “cutting corners.”

“That’s crazy to come from the UAW,” a worker said of the joint video. “Whose side are they on? We already know how they are in bed together, and right now, I know they want to cover this up as much as possible. Our plant is being looked at for the HEMI engine, so you know, a blow like this could probably mess that up.”

Another worker added, “Whatever the company wants the UAW wants. They want to keep the money flowing.”

Responding to any efforts to shift responsibility for the fatal accident onto Adams, a worker commented, “That’s insane. Ronnie was one of the safest guys in the plant. He warned other people to stay out of danger. They’re blaming the victim to protect the company.”

Adams was well-known among coworkers for his consistent advocacy of safe practices, dating back to his earliest days when he started in the plant in the early 2000s. “He was always making sure we stayed out of harm’s way,” one colleague recalled, and “looking out for people.”

After his death, workers on the headline (a machining department where cuts and threading are done on engine blocks) refused to resume production until they were confident the line was safe, workers reported. “The line Ronnie was working on, that’s one of the strongest departments, as far as the rank and file. They were being told to get back to running and they would not run one part until they knew it was safe. They know exactly what went wrong.”

This act of collective defiance echoed another crucial moment in the plant’s recent history. In March 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic began to spread across the US, workers at Dundee Engine walked off the job to demand the shutdown of the plant, fearing for their lives. The action was not approved by the UAW, instead led entirely by the workers themselves.

“We didn’t wait for the union,” one worker said. “We knew what we had to do to protect ourselves.”

That tradition of rank-and-file initiative is once again being revived in the wake of Adams’ death. Several workers voiced support for a full, independent rank-and-file investigation. “The

truth has to come out,” one said. “They can’t just bury it. Ronnie had a 13-year-old son. He was a friend. A father. A human being.”

Another added, “We can’t trust the company. We can’t trust the union. It’s up to us.”

Support for such an initiative is growing across borders. In recent weeks, workers at Stellantis’ Windsor Assembly Plant in Ontario voiced their solidarity with Dundee workers and the Adams family after learning about the incident from the WSWs. They demanded a full investigation and denounced the union’s silence.

“There’s no reason anyone should die in a factory,” a Dundee worker said. “Whether it’s here, in Canada, or in Mexico. We’re all human beings. We all have families.”

Workers also expressed skepticism toward the UAW leadership’s nationalist rhetoric, which pits US workers against their foreign counterparts. “Yeah, jobs are going to Mexico, and we need jobs, but at what cost?” one said. “The answer isn’t to bring sweatshop conditions here. We need to link up with workers there. They don’t want to die on the job either.”

Many are critical of UAW President Shawn Fain’s support for Trump-style tariffs and “Buy American” rhetoric, which they see as a cover for suppressing wages and safety domestically. “They say we’ll do it cheaper and faster here,” one said. “That’s what killed Ronnie.”

In one case cited to the WSWs, a Dundee worker who sustained a shoulder injury requiring surgery was forced to report to the plant daily by taxi while recovering—just to avoid having the injury logged as lost time. “It’s all about the numbers,” one worker said. “They’d rather risk someone’s life than admit a mistake.”

As one worker summarized: “These companies will cut any corner to save a dollar. And the union goes right along with it. We have to organize ourselves, on the shop floor, across the country, and across borders. That’s the only way we’ll stop this from happening again.”

The investigation initiated by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) is aimed at providing the information workers need, and new, rank-and-file-led organizations to assert real control over workplace safety, including the power to shut down unsafe production.

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