

Will Lehman: “Support the rank-and-file investigation into the death of Ronald Adams Sr. Now is the time to come forward for your coworkers and for his family”

Will Lehman
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The WSWs urges Dundee workers and other autoworkers to come forward with information and to support the investigation into Ronald Adams Sr.’s death. Fill out the form at the end of this article to send us your comments. Your identity will be kept confidential.

Today marks eight weeks since the death of Stellantis worker Ronald Adams Sr. at the Dundee Engine Complex in Michigan. The 63-year-old machine repairman was crushed to death when a mechanical gantry pinned him to a conveyor in an enclosed workstation.

In the nearly two months since his death, Adams’ family and coworkers have not received any information from the company, the United Auto Workers union or the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA) about the causes and circumstances behind the fatal accident.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) has initiated an independent investigation, to be led by rank-and-file workers, to oppose this coverup, reveal the truth and hold those responsible to account.

The following is a statement by Will Lehman, a Pennsylvania Mack Trucks worker and a leader of the IWA-RFC. Lehman ran as a socialist candidate for UAW president in 2022 based on a program of abolishing the union bureaucracy and transferring power from the UAW apparatus to the workers on the shop floor.

My name is Will Lehman. I work at Mack Trucks in Macungie, Pennsylvania, and I fully support the

investigation being initiated by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) into the untimely death of Ronald Adams Sr. at the Stellantis Dundee Engine plant in Michigan. This investigation was launched to uncover the truth for his family and for the safety of all autoworkers that Ronald had fought for during his life.

Our brother was crushed to death on April 7 by a gantry crane in a fatal incident that never should have happened. He was a skilled tradesman and a respected veteran at his workplace. He was known by many as the “protector of the plant” because he fought to uphold safety standards even against the unsafe conditions the company and union bureaucrats enforced.

No individual worker on his or her own, no matter how experienced or conscientious, can enforce safety in conditions that are out of the worker’s control. Adams was placed in unsafe conditions imposed by Stellantis and rubber-stamped by the UAW “safety committee.” The conditions that killed him were not created by him or his coworkers. Again, they were imposed from the top-down, and those same conditions are now being covered up with the complete blackout of information from the company and, more importantly, the union bureaucrats.

Ronald Adams shouldered the responsibility of defending safety, not because it was assigned to him but because he had seen firsthand how dangerous the plant is. He stepped into the role of protector because the way things were and continue to be left no other alternative for him. What happened to Ronald was not just an accident. It was the outcome of a system that

puts profit ahead of lives.

When Stellantis pushes its objectives for launch deadlines and efficiency, its true intention is to push workers past the brink to achieve its goals, cutting corners on safety and covering up every injury and death along the way for the sake of labor peace—to keep workers producing without questioning the conditions we're in. Every autoworker knows this to some degree already. When the choice is between safety and profit, the company always chooses profit, and it's seen most tangibly every day in the drive to keep the line running in spite of anything else.

The joint company-union safety committees only exist to give the illusion that we have a say. But the death of Ronald Adams was not prevented by them. The question needs to be asked: What did they do to prevent Ronald Adams from being killed? The answer is obvious. Nothing. Now Adams' family is left without a father, a grandfather and without answers.

His widow, Shamenia, has said the UAW has told her nothing. MIOSHA (the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration), Stellantis and the UAW apparatus have stonewalled the investigation for more than seven weeks. While they discuss behind closed doors the best means of absolving themselves of all responsibility, the company is already preparing to reopen the plant, with workers reporting that it could be reopened as early as next week without any explanation for Ronald Adams' death.

The IWA-RFC is launching an investigation for answers for Adams' family and for ourselves. We're calling on every Stellantis worker and every autoworker to come forward with testimony, with information and with support. Breaking the silence surrounding our coworker's death cannot be left up to the company and the union bureaucrats. They do not stop the line and wait until conditions are safe.

Instead, they tell us to stay calm, to keep working and to stay quiet. Every time they try to pin the blame on the victims for the lack of safe conditions and on workers who can no longer defend themselves. That must end now.

If you are a worker and you know something about what led to the death of Ronald Adams or any other worker, if you have seen how safety corners were cut, if you know about the gantry system's existing problems, if you heard anything in the plant beyond company

rumors, now is the time to come forward for your coworkers and for his family.

Your identity will be protected, and you will not fight alone for the truth. This is not just a fight about Dundee. It's about all of us. Autoworkers everywhere, internationally, are being pushed to the brink by speedups, through layoffs and adding additional work to existing jobs, by dangerous machinery—all because of the capitalist system that treats us as expendable.

The working class, armed with the understanding that we are the only ones capable of fighting for our international class interests, is the only class that can stop this. That's why the IWA-RFC is fighting not only to uncover the truth of the untimely death of Ronald Adams but to fight for workers' control over safety and to carry forward the fight that Ronald Adams led while he was alive.

We demand the abolition of the company-union safety committees that serve to cover up safety violations, real rank-and-file oversight over safety conditions and full access to all documentation and records on Adams' death. No reopening of the plant until the full release of all information regarding his death, and not without the approval of a committee of rank-and-file workers tasked with independently investigating it with the assistance of trusted experts. Workers waiting to resume work need to be compensated fully by the company.

To the family of Ronald Adams, we say you are not alone. Your fight is our fight. To all autoworkers, join the investigation. Form rank-and-file committees in your plant and take back control. To get involved, visit wsws.org/ronaldadams and fill out the form.

The time to act is now. Thank you.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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