

Ronald Adams Sr. and Brayan Neftali Otoniel Canu Joj: Workers' lives sacrificed for profit

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This week, the autopsy report was finally released to the family of Ronald Adams Sr., an autoworker who died on the job in April at Stellantis' Dundee Engine Plant. Adams, a machine repairman, was servicing a parts washer when a gantry that moves engine heads came crashing down on him, pinning him to the conveyor belt.

The details of the autopsy are horrific. The machine fractured 18 of his 24 ribs, crushed his sternum and broke his spine, while he suffered massive internal bleeding in his lung. Evidence of aspiration indicate he took several breaths before he died.

"The manner of death is classified as an accident," the report concludes. The word "accident" denotes an uncontrollable event. But the basic reality is that had existing workplace safety laws and regulations been followed, Adams' horrifying death would not have been possible.

Under current law, when machinery is being serviced, workers are required to place a lockout device on it, in order to physically prevent it from being powered up. If the machine was energized, it was because these procedures were not followed. Workers told the WSWS that management was rushing to restart production and routinely used "cheat keys" to override Lockout/Tagout (LOTO) procedures, a basic measure designed to depower machines during maintenance.

The United Auto Workers bureaucrats are Stellantis' accomplices through their collaboration in joint "safety" boards and their sabotage of all forms of workers' resistance. The guilty silence from UAW President Shawn Fain and UAW Local 723 is based on the principle that anything they say can and will be used against them. Meanwhile, Stellantis, with the full blessing of the UAW, has resumed full production at the Dundee plant, with every engine marked with the blood of a worker.

Adams' case was only brought forward through the efforts of his family and rank-and-file workers. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) has organized an investigation, taking testimony from

coworkers, safety experts and others to meticulously document every aspect of this preventable death. Its purpose is to arm workers all over the world with information that they need to defend themselves against similar conditions.

The death of Adams is part of an unending string of workplace fatalities in the United States. Earlier this month, 19-year-old Brayan Neftali Otoniel Canu Joj, a recent immigrant from Guatemala, was killed in a meat grinder he was cleaning at the Tina's Burritos plant in the Los Angeles area. (The family is asking the public for donations to pay for his return to Guatemala for his funeral).

The super-exploitation of immigrant workers, cowed into silence by threat of deportation or disappearing into prison camps like Trump's infamous "Alligator Alcatraz," no doubt was a contributing factor. Here too, the union bureaucrats bear responsibility. Eager to shift blame for the consequences of their own betrayals onto a scapegoat, they support Trump's "America First" policies. A sickening recent example is a demand by the building trades union for an ICE raid at an Arizona semiconductor factory.

Earlier this week, UAW Local 1264 reported the death of Thomas Cornman, a veteran third-shift worker at Stellantis' Sterling Stamping Plant in suburban Detroit. Cornman reportedly suffered severe head injuries after falling from a forklift and died on July 21 following more than two weeks in the hospital. The union acknowledged his death but made no mention of it being work-related, an omission workers say is part of a broader effort by the union apparatus to conceal unsafe conditions at the plant.

Cornman's death is the third known fatality at a Stellantis facility in less than a year, following the death at the Toledo Assembly Complex in August 2024 of Antonio Gaston, who was crushed on the line while tightening bolts, and Ronald Adams. OSHA fined Stellantis just \$16,000 for Gaston's death, a penalty the company is contesting.

The toll in numbers is staggering. In 2023, workers died every 99 minutes on average from workplace injuries, for an annual total of 5,283. The numbers for 2024 and 2025 have not been published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as the

government has no interest in keeping track of workers killed by capitalism. This contrasts sharply with the extreme punctuality of monthly figures for GDP growth and other economic indices useful for corporate America.

All of these workers are casualties in a war against the working class. The United States, the richest country on earth with huge technological advantages, has the sufficient means to make workplace deaths virtually unheard of. The sole reason for continued slaughter, year after year, is the subordination of life to profit. Capitalism has become an absolute barrier to human progress.

The ruling class considers all measures to protect workers' health and welfare to be an intolerable drain on surplus value, which they consider put to better use shoring up the stock market and funding criminal wars in defense of profits. The most horrendous example of this was the refusal to take basic measures to stop viral transmission during the coronavirus pandemic, which killed 1 million people in the US and is still ongoing in spite of lying claims by the government and media.

All safety regulations, which are in the final analysis concessions granted to workers through generations of struggle, are now being dismantled. Trump's labor secretary Lori Chavez-DeRemer, whom the union bureaucrats endorsed for her support for a bill making it easier for them to expand their dues base, cut 63 labor regulations in one fell swoop.

The new head of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is David Keeling, who as "safety" executive for Amazon and UPS bore responsibility for sweatshop conditions. Currently it would take 186 years for OSHA to inspect every workplace in America just once. With plans to reduce inspections by 30 percent this year, it would take 266 years.

The rail industry, which is floating mega-mergers to allow for price gouging and more layoffs, is pushing for the relaxation of track inspection requirements seven-fold. And the attack on healthcare and medical science escalates through anti-science quacks like Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and the more than \$800 billion in Medicaid cuts passed by Congress. Experts estimate the cuts will kill more than 18,000 people each year by denying them access to healthcare.

The Democrats are not only silent cowards but full co-conspirators. They were responsible for covering up corporate criminality leading to disasters such as the 2010 BP oil spill under Obama and the East Palestine, Ohio, derailment under Biden in early 2023. Within the two-party system, their particular specialty is to work closely with the union bureaucracy to help impose these conditions.

While extreme levels of social inequality make working

conditions in the United States particularly barbaric, workers everywhere confront different forms of the same underlying reality: the dictatorship of the capitalist class over the means of production, enforced by corrupt union bureaucracies that serve the corporations and the state. The union apparatus supports nationalism to split the working class and is offering its services to prepare the country for world war.

These killings must end! The critical task facing workers is to take power into their own hands. The IWA-RFC calls for the building rank-and-file committees independent of and in opposition to the pro-corporate union apparatus. Safety committees must be formed in every plant to fight for the principle that no job should be carried out unless and until it is made safe. Workers, in consultation with trusted safety experts of their own choosing, must have full authority to set safety standards and to shut down unsafe operations through collective action.

To break the grip of the profit system over every aspect of life, the working class must fight for the expropriation of the corporations and their transformation into public enterprises, collectively owned and democratically controlled by the working class itself. Such a struggle cannot be national but must be international, uniting workers across all borders in a common fight against the holiest of holies, capitalist property "rights."

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) and the International Committee of the Fourth International are fighting to build this movement. We urge all workers who want to put an end to exploitation, war, and social murder to join this fight—for workers' power, for internationalism, and for socialism.



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