

Report to the IWA-RFC hearing

Ronald Adams Sr.: Martyr in the war on the working class

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The following report was delivered by Will Lehman to the public hearing in Detroit on Sunday, July 27, on the death of Stellantis worker Ronald Adams Sr.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) convened the meeting to present the initial findings of its independent investigation into the death of the 63-year-old skilled tradesman, who was killed at the Dundee Engine Complex on April 7.

Will Lehman is a Pennsylvania Mack Trucks worker and a leader of the IWA-RFC. He ran as a socialist candidate for the United Auto Workers presidency in 2022.

To become involved in the inquiry or to report information on workplace deaths and injuries, submit the form at the bottom of this page.

Brothers and sisters,

We are gathered here today for a critically important event: the public launch of a rank-and-file investigation into the tragic death of Stellantis worker Ronald Adams Sr.

This hearing is not just about examining the circumstances of one death, as tragic as it is. It marks the beginning of a fight initiated by the working class itself. Our aim is nothing less than to end the deadly conditions imposed on workers in factories and workplaces around the world.

Ronald Adams: Martyr in the class war

Ronald Adams was deeply respected and widely known by his co-workers at the Stellantis Dundee Engine Plant as the “protector of the plant,” precisely because he fought tirelessly to uphold safety standards. He did so not because it was his official responsibility, but because he understood the deadly consequences of the company’s relentless drive for profit. Ronald dedicated himself to ensuring that his co-workers returned home safely at the end of their shifts.

But no single worker, however committed or experienced, can guarantee safety under a system where profit is prioritized over human life. Ronald Adams was crushed to death by a gantry crane on April 7, 2025, because Stellantis—backed by the United Auto Workers bureaucracy—cut corners on safety to meet production quotas. His death, like so many others, was not simply an accident; it was a crime—a preventable tragedy resulting directly from the capitalist system in which it took place.

Ronald Adams is a martyr in an ongoing class war that takes thousands of lives every year. Workers who die or are injured rarely receive justice, and their families often struggle for compensation that amounts to a pittance, if they receive anything at all.

The scale of the crisis

The terrible truth at the heart of capitalist society is this: every single day, workers lose their lives in factories, mines, construction sites, and countless other workplaces.

Officially, at least 15 workers are killed on the job every day in the United States alone. That’s roughly 450 workers each month, or over 5,200 every year. Thousands more are maimed, permanently disabled, or poisoned by exposure to dangerous chemicals. These staggering numbers barely begin to convey the true scale of the disaster that workers face every day they clock in.

Globally, the situation is even more catastrophic. Every year, nearly 3 million workers worldwide lose their lives from workplace injuries and occupational diseases—an average of 8,000 deaths each day. Approximately 330,000 of these deaths result from traumatic injuries, such as the crushing incident that took Ronald’s life. The vast majority, over 2.6 million, are victims of occupational diseases caused by exposure to hazardous substances, unsafe working conditions, and relentless exploitation.

Across every region—from Asia-Pacific, which accounts for nearly two-thirds of global fatalities, to factories and worksites in Europe, Africa, and the Americas—the working class confronts this deadly reality every day.

Moreover, the figures I’ve cited don’t even include the long-term effects of workplace poisoning and industrial illnesses, or workers killed or disabled by the reckless response of employers and governments to COVID-19, which killed millions throughout the world.

Workers in the 19th and 20th centuries fought bitter and often heroic struggles against precisely these deadly conditions. The history of industrial capitalism is written in the blood of workers killed in preventable tragedies—and in the mass struggles that erupted in response.

From the 1930s through the 1970s, immense battles were waged by coal miners, meatpackers, autoworkers, and others over the right to a safe workplace. The gains of these struggles were not handed down by the companies or the government—they were fought for. Often, they took the form of rebellions not only against the corporations, but against the pro-corporate union bureaucracies and the capitalist state itself.

The list of industrial disasters is long and damning, each one a testament to the deadly consequences of a system that prioritizes profit over human life. In 1906, the Courrières mine disaster in France killed over 1,000 miners. A year later, the Monongah explosion in West Virginia took the lives of more than 360 coal miners. In 1911, 146 young immigrant garment workers were burned alive in the Triangle Shirtwaist fire after bosses locked the exits. The 1968 Farmington mine disaster killed 78 and sparked nationwide outrage over mine safety. These are just a few

examples in a long and bloody history.

In more recent decades, the toll has continued. The 1984 Bhopal disaster in India killed thousands and poisoned tens of thousands more. In 1993, 184 workers—mostly young women—died in the Kader Toy Factory fire in Thailand. In 2010, 11 workers were killed in the BP Deepwater Horizon explosion, unleashing a massive environmental catastrophe. In 2013, the Rana Plaza collapse in Bangladesh killed over 1,100 garment workers who had been forced to work in a visibly crumbling building.

These are not isolated incidents or “natural” disasters. They are the inevitable result of a system where profit comes before human life. The continued reoccurrence of such tragedies proves that nothing fundamental has changed.

If a worker from 125 years ago walked into this meeting today, they would immediately recognize the relevance of the issues we are discussing. They would say, with complete justification, “After more than a century, you still haven’t solved this? You still allow the bosses to kill us?”

Workers’ lives matter!

The vast majority of workers know that from the shareholders’ and companies’ perspective we are only numbers, and we are treated in many cases worse than the machinery in the plants. We are here today not only for the investigation of the social murder of Ronald Adams but to continue and massively expand the fight for the safety of all workers he led while alive, and to advance our international working class interests for ourselves.

We are here today to declare: Workers’ lives matter! But we understand that the fight to defend workplace safety cannot be waged by individuals alone. It must become a collective struggle of the entire working class. Ronald Adams’ death underscores the necessity of workers taking matters into their own hands through independent rank-and-file committees, free from union bureaucrats and corporate executives.

We cannot rely on any section of the political establishment to wage this fight for us. The Trump administration is currently dismantling the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), as part of a wholesale attack on every social and democratic right of the working class.

OSHA itself is already grossly underfunded, understaffed, and subordinated entirely to corporate interests. Last year, OSHA had only one inspector for every 85,000 workers in the United States, and companies received fines averaging a mere few thousand dollars for violations that result in death or severe injury. The average fine for killing a worker in America is a pathetic \$16,131.

Yet even this minimal regulatory oversight is now being systematically dismantled. The clear aim of Trump and his allies is to remove every remaining restriction on the corporate exploitation of workers, pushing conditions back to the most brutal days of the industrial revolution.

The Democratic Party is not merely complicit; it is a full partner in the crimes of corporate America. Under Obama, they covered up the BP Deepwater Horizon explosion in 2010, shielding the oil giant from accountability. Under Biden, they orchestrated the cover-up of the toxic derailment in East Palestine, Ohio, in 2023, siding with Norfolk Southern over the health of working class residents.

The political system exists to defend the interests of the rich, not working people. Consider this fact: The total wealth of US billionaires is \$6.2 trillion, an almost unfathomable sum. This is nearly 9,460 times greater than the entire annual budget of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) for 2025, which is approximately \$655

million. To put it in perspective, the combined wealth held by the country’s billionaires could fund OSHA’s entire budget for nearly 9,500 years at its current level.

The trade union apparatus, particularly the United Auto Workers bureaucracy, bears immense and direct responsibility for the continuation and worsening of these conditions. The union apparatus has become little more than an extension of corporate management, actively collaborating in the destruction of workers’ rights, safety, and lives.

Every autoworker knows that if one complains to union officials about unsafe conditions, one is met with stonewalling and inaction. When Ronald Adams was killed, UAW officials immediately moved to defend the company, helping to rush the reopening of the plant before providing any explanation to Ronald’s family or coworkers.

This collaborationist model—known as corporatism—emerged over decades as the unions embraced nationalism and abandoned any semblance of independent working class struggle. Safety grievances are systematically ignored or buried, while union officials enrich themselves through comfortable positions, embezzling dues money, expense-paid junkets, and direct bribes from corporate training centers, as exposed in recent corruption investigations.

The UAW’s Federal Monitor, the government body tasked with cleaning up the image of the UAW bureaucracy in the wake of the corruption scandal, released a report this past June that gives a tiny glimpse into the degenerated state of the union bureaucracy. One small example of this, quoting from the report, “At a staff meeting involving hundreds of participants in late 2023, several attendees recalled Fain making a statement to the crowd he would “slit” or “cut” the “fucking throats” of anyone who “messed” with certain members of his core team.

The reality of the divide between the workers and the bureaucrats in the UAW could not be expressed more succinctly. Ronald was a worker dedicated to the safety of his co-workers, and the leading bureaucrat in the UAW, billed as a shining example of reformist politics in trade unionism, vowed vulgarly to violently attack any other bureaucrat who challenged the bureaucrats close to him.

Our response: Building a rank-and-file movement

This hearing marks the start of a movement. Through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, we will fight for the truth about Ronald’s death and the countless other workplace fatalities around the globe. We will publish our findings, mobilize workers, and build an international network to fight for our interests.

The critical task facing workers is to take power into our own hands. We cannot rely on any section of the political establishment. And we cannot rely on the union apparatus. The IWA-RFC calls for workers to build rank and file committees, through which we as workers can advance our interests and fight for our rights.

Every effort is made to try to convince us that we are powerless, that workers have to just accept our fate, that we have to accept a society that sacrifices our lives and health for profit and the wealth of the rich, that there is nothing we can do. In reality workers have enormous power, because we produce everything of value in society. We can only realize this power through organization. No one is going to do it for us. We need to recognize that the danger of our inaction is greater than the danger of us acting in our best interests. It is up to us to take a stand.

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. In consultation with trusted safety experts of our own choosing, workers must have full authority to set safety standards and shut down unsafe

operations through collective action.

Our goal is to place control over workplace safety into the hands of the working class itself, as part of the broader struggle for workers' control over production. As long as production is driven by profit and controlled by corporate owners, workers' lives will remain expendable.

Ronald Adams' tragic death must not be in vain. He symbolizes a global crisis, representing all workers who have lost their lives, suffered injuries, or endured exploitation and abuse under capitalism.

This hearing will review what we have uncovered so far, but this is just the beginning of a movement, an international movement to end industrial slaughter once and for all. We call on everyone here to join us in that fight.



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