

Workers and workplace safety experts at the IWA-RFC hearing on death of Ronald Adams Sr.

Our reporters
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The World Socialist Web Site is continuing its reporting on the July 27 public hearing of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees' investigation into the death of Stellantis worker Ronald Adams Sr. by publishing statements submitted to the investigation by workers and safety experts.

Ronald Adams, a 63-year-old skilled tradesman, was crushed to death by an overhead gantry at the Dundee Engine Complex in Michigan on April 7 under circumstances which have still not been explained by either the company, the United Auto Workers, or the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA).

The hearing was attended by 100 workers, youth and community members. It was addressed by Shamenia Stewart-Adams, Ronald Adams' widow, and featured powerful reports from Mack Trucks worker and IWA-RFC member Will Lehman, WSWS labor reporter Jerry White, and other autoworkers and rank-and-file workers.

The meeting unanimously adopted a resolution to continue and expand the investigation, establish rank-and-file safety committees and build an international campaign to defend the lives and rights of workers.

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

Steve, former Cal/OSHA compliance officer

My name is Steve, and I am a former Cal/OSHA Compliance officer with over 30 years of occupational health and safety experience. I am writing to give my opinion on behalf of the independent rank-and-file inquiry into the death of Ronald Adams Sr.

First, if I had investigated the death of Ronald Adams Sr., I would have immediately looked at why Stellantis and the UAW had skeleton keys in their lockout/tagout program. Central to an effective lockout/tagout program is effective key management. The existence of skeleton keys that circumvent each lockout lock that has a unique key brings into serious doubt that an employer has an effective lockout/tagout program.

Second, I would look at the employers' administrative section of their lockout/tagout program. Why would an employee be allowed to work on a piece of machinery or equipment for maintenance that was energized? The consequences of deviating from a lockout/tagout program, or not having an effective one, almost always result in a serious injury or death.

I would also like to offer my thoughts on the horrific death of Brayon Neftali Toniel Canu Joj (19-year-old worker who was killed in July at the Tina's Burritos frozen-food plant in Vernon, California.) California General Industry Safety Order 8 C.C.R. 3202 *Injury and Illness*

Prevention Program, which requires all employers in California to establish, implement, and maintain an effective Injury and Illness Prevention Program. Once more, it appears that Mr. Joj was cleaning a machine that unexpectedly energized, which resulted in his death. This, on its face, is a violation of General Industry Safety Order 8 C.C.R. 3314. The Control of Hazardous Energy for the Cleaning, Repairing, Servicing, Setting Up, and Adjusting Operations of Prime Movers, Machinery and Equipment, Including Lockout/Tagout.

The right of employees to have a safe workplace is specifically spelled out in the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, aka the Williams-Steiger Act. Several states have supplemented the Williams-Steiger Act with their legislation on workplace health and safety.

It is important to understand that all the regulations for workplace safety were paid for in blood. The blood of the people who were killed, injured, or sickened while trying to earn a living. Congress and state legislatures did not give employees these rights; workers demanded them.

Thomas Adams, former GM worker in Flint, Michigan and author of searing critique, UAW, Inc.

In relation to the death of Ronald Adams, I can find examples of the very same thing happening at General Motors where workers face speed ups and unsafe working conditions. UAW representatives on these safety committees are rubber stamping whatever management is doing. That's how they did it at General Motors.

The committees were supposedly established to maintain a high level of health and security in safety. But in fact, what the company was doing was buying the union's acquiescence in running their business however they wanted.

We had a bunch of accidents at Buick City in Flint, where we had people getting smashed under dies. There was nothing left of them. We are talking about two story tall dies. People had slipped underneath the dies and got completely turned to liquid. And this was lockout, tag out, not being enforced.

I never had an example of where they created an actual skeleton key, but what happened at Dundee doesn't surprise me. It sounds like the next logical thing.

The joint funds and funding mechanism they are using at Stellantis and Ford are under different names. But it's an insane amount of company money the UAW is getting even after they sold the training centers.

I reported in 2019 that GM spent \$3 billion on joint programs between 1982 and 2000. Ford and Chrysler reported spending more than \$1.3

billion on joint programs between 1996 and 1999.

Apparently the feds didn't see the importance of going after General Motor's management when they went after the UAW directors of the joint training centers. They only indicted UAW officials.

But, the UAW could not have spent any of that money unless there was 100 percent consensus by management and UAW officials on the board of directors. The federal government isn't serious about this. Wall Street interests are directing all of it. That's obvious. The investment class is calling the shots. That's why this rank-and-file investigation is so important. Workers deserve to know the full facts. To Ronald Adams' family, I send my condolences. It is sad in this day and age we have UAW members lives sacrificed for profit.

Autoworker and safety inspector in Michigan with over 40 years of experience at Big Three plants

I witnessed a coworker have a heart attack on the line a few years ago. Our foreman called 911 but the person ended up dying. A general foreman made a statement that our safety protocol "worked just like it should have." Obviously, I don't think it did at all.

A lot of times you have parents, husbands, wives, kids all working in one plant. So, when something like this happens, when someone dies, it impacts not just that person but also the whole plant, and a lot of times they're right there when it happens.

At another plant that I worked at years ago, a coworker and a relative of mine was also crushed to death. He was on the line in the body shop and a car carrier came down and pushed him backwards and killed him.

I didn't realize it was my family member until I was handed one of the arms of the stretcher that we were carrying him out on and it was clear to me that he was not going to make it.

I heard that his kids were not doing too well after that and were having a lot of trouble. So, when you say that something like this devastates a family, it sure as hell does.

He had to climb up a ladder where he was working in the plant. They could've had a proximity switch on the ladder that when you grab the ladder, it moved down just a little bit and stopped everything. They could've had a mat; they could have had a whole number of things in place to prevent that. But the company wants the numbers up. That's how the plant works. So, people are discouraged from having those things in place or using those things because it's all about keeping the numbers up.

I don't believe in the UAW's safety nonsense at all. They're not doing what they're supposed to be doing, they're not doing what they are getting paid for.

We workers have to look out for each other. Number one, we make sure if we see a problem, we tell our coworkers about it. I tell people, "I don't want to be telling your wife why you're not coming home."

In 1978, when I was 18 years old, I got my first job in an auto plant. My mom worked there and wanted to introduce me to an old nurse at the plant who was getting ready to retire. This nurse told me: "You have to be careful in that warehouse with the forklift." Even back then, older people were trying to teach me how not to get hurt. I don't know why that's been lost but we have to bring it back. This dog eat dog mentality of the UAW leadership, not listening to the people on the floor, just worried about feathering their own nest, all the corruption: it's all contributing to this problem of no safety in the plants.

Workers have to look out for each other. No one is going to speak up for us until we do it ourselves. We have to keep this in the spotlight and keep talking about Ronald Adams. Thanks to everyone who is coming forward and speaking out, and thanks to the WSWS for keeping it out in the open.

Tynisa Williams, a math teacher and founding member of the Alabama Educators Rank-and-File Committee

First of all, I want to send condolences to the family of Ronald Adams and to all of the families of those we have lost in these industries, including those of 19-year-old Brayon Neftali Otoniel Canu Joj and 22-year-old Casen Garcia. (Tyson worker in Illinois)

I'm so sorry that because your family members did what they were supposed to do—working hard to feed their families, and they lost their lives. However, we thank you for going to the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). We need to come together to stop this death and pain.

You are not alone. We're with you because it's together that we'll be able to fight these corporations. You represent us and we are all with you to represent our families, our moms, our dads, our spouses. We are right there behind you to get you justice for your lost family member.

The same thing happened here in Montgomery at the Hyundai plant where a worker on the line had a heart attack. When other workers stopped to try to help him, they were told to just keep going, that the ambulance was on the way. Well, shouldn't somebody be giving him CPR? The workers were told, "No, you need to finish your production." That production is more important to them than your life.

It took eight teachers to die in Montgomery, Alabama from COVID-19 [from November 2020 to January 2021] before they shut the schools down. They told us all that our lives were expendable.

We went to the school board and said teachers were dying but they didn't hear us out. We tried to go to our union, the Alabama Educators Association. We pay dues but when we called them they didn't help. They said, "Just do what they say and everything will be alright."

"No," we said, "you're supposed to be on our side." But the people we pay to represent us were not on our side.

So, we started taking pictures and showing the unsanitary and unsafe conditions in the school buildings. We started calling OSHA and the EPA and the Alabama Department of Public Health. It wasn't until we had our evidence to show that they started to pay attention. That information is only going to come from the inside, from the workers.

We, the workers, have to understand what our power is. It was only when we spoke up, protested and walked out, that the Montgomery schools closed. It was only when we informed the school administration that we had 300 teachers who would refuse to be there when school reopened that we got their attention. Look, I care about my job and paying bills. But I can't pay bills if I'm not alive. It gets to the point where we all have to walk out.

I support this independent investigation because there is so much intentional cover-up. Also, the people who provide the information need to be protected, because only workers will do what's in the best interest of the workers. Corporations will do what's in their best interest, and their best interests do not include their workers.

The only way we can defend ourselves is by having investigations like this one, where the people on the inside can speak up and provide evidence. I support the IWA-RFC because our power, our leverage, is all the workers, communicating together, like the Philadelphia garbage workers, the teachers, the meatpackers, and the autoworkers.



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