

Workers internationally state support for IWA-RFC hearing on the death of Ronald Adams Sr.

Our reporters
8 August 2025

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' (IWA-RFC) investigation into the death of Stellantis worker Ronald Adams Sr. by publishing international statements of support to the investigation.

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.

Bahadır Çelik, a municipal worker and member of the Sosyalist Etkilik Grubu in Istanbul, Turkey

It has been about four months since Ronald Adams Sr.'s death. No progress has been made in the investigation during this time, and Thomas Cornman just lost his life in a workplace "accident" at the Stellantis Sterling Stamping Plant.

These deaths are the result of companies prioritizing profit over workers' lives and of the complicity of trade unions and state institutions.

The third workplace homicide in a year at Stellantis factories highlights the importance of the independent workers' investigation into Adams' preventable death, launched by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). As workers from Turkey, we want you to know that we are following and supporting this investigation.

Our goal should be to hold those responsible for preventable deaths to account and to ensure that no worker ever falls victim to a workplace fatality again. This includes preventing deaths from work-related illnesses.

According to the European Statistical Office (Eurostat) in 2019, the rate of fatal occupational accidents in Turkey is approximately 10 times higher than the European Union (EU) average. Turkey, which has the highest rate of worker deaths in Europe, is among the countries with the highest

number of deaths from work accidents.

A perspective published on WSWs on Saturday reports that a total of 5,283 workers were victims of workplace fatalities in the US in 2023. According to a report by the Workers' Health and Safety Council (?S?G), the number in Turkey was 1,929 in the same year. While the number of employed people in Turkey is 32 million, the number in the US is approximately 135 million. That is, the death rate in the US is three per 100,000, while the rate in Turkey is six per 100,000.

At least 1,897 workers in Turkey were killed at work in 2024. In the first six months of 2025, this figure reached 961. The report by the Workers' Health and Safety Council (?S?G) explained that 103 of these deaths were in the metal sector, adding that "Precariousness is at an extreme level in this huge area [the metal sector], from auto body workshops to large automotive factories, from explosives production to the production of cables, pipes, iron-steel, etc."

In Turkey alone, three workers died in a cave-in at the Oltu Mine in Erzurum last month; one worker fell from a construction site in Bursa; six workers died in a mine collapse in Zonguldak; and five forest workers and five volunteer search and rescue personnel lost their lives while fighting forest fires. These are just a fraction of the approximately 150 deaths that occur each month.

These workplace homicides are caused by unbridled capitalist profit motives and governments working with companies to ignore necessary precautions. This is an international issue.

Why is an independent workers' investigation by rank-and-file committees important? Because no one else will conduct this investigation.

Trade union structures cannot be trusted to carry out such an investigation. Trade union confederations stand by and watch thousands of workers fall victim to preventable accidents every year, sweeping these incidents under the carpet.

Workers should not rely on legal processes and official investigations either. The trial of those responsible for the Soma miners' massacre in Turkey, in which 301 miners died in 2014, once again revealed that company owners can act with impunity, thereby inviting new mass killings. In this trial, the owner of the company involved served just eight days in prison for each worker killed. Throughout the trial, both prosecutors and judges were replaced. Yet no official responsible party was sentenced.

The investigation you are conducting is therefore of the utmost importance. The rank-and-file investigation into Adams' death should not only be seen as an attempt to shed light on a single incident but also as an example and a starting point for the struggle for decent working conditions. It should inspire workers in Turkey and beyond to take action to prevent workplace homicides and conduct their own investigations.

As a municipal worker from Turkey, I call on automotive workers and all sections of the working class in Turkey and internationally to support the IWA-RFC investigation and join the struggle to transform the automotive sector into a public sector under the democratic control of workers.

National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee in Hamilton, Ontario

Brothers and Sisters:

We all know the risks we take when we punch in at National Steel Car. This has been hammered home to a greater degree since the gruesome deaths (better described as industrial murders) of our former colleagues Fraser Cowan, Colin Grailey and Quoc Le at NSC's Hamilton, Ontario plant.

Unfortunately, the very same fate recently befell Ronald Adams Sr., a Stellantis autoworker in Michigan, USA, in very similar circumstances.

The National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee unequivocally endorses the initiation by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) of an independent inquiry into his death, and we will do everything we can to support it.

Some may ask why we are making this statement about a worker in another country? Simply put, an injury to one is an injury to all! The basic cause of Ronald Adams Sr.'s death was the same as that of the three deaths at our plant right here in Hamilton: the prioritization of corporate profits over the safety and the very lives of the workers who produce them. What's more, Adams worked for Stellantis. Stellantis has facilities in Canada, where workers here suffer under the same questionable safety practices as we do at NSC and under the same legal framework (the Ontario Health and Safety Act and the Employment Standards Act) that fails to hold employers accountable.

As it relates to workers' struggles, international borders have become relatively meaningless. We build railcars for the major railroad companies whose networks stretch across North America, including Canadian National, Canadian Pacific Kansas City and BNSF. The company's annual turnover was over \$500 million in 2021, but virtually none of that is spent on protecting our safety.

In September of 2020, Fraser Cowan was crushed when a 700-lb. lifting device fell on him after he accidentally lowered a crane, and the device unhooked itself because no safety latch was on the hook. This came after NSC had been previously ordered to install them by the Ministry of Labour.

In April of 2021, Colin Grailey was crushed after having a health issue in a skyjack. He passed out with his hand on the lever while hanging over the rail. The skyjack kept going up until it hit something, and Grailey was crushed to death. The job had previously been a two-man job, but Grailey was working alone. As we previously stated, it later came to light that the ground controls had been disconnected unbeknownst to anyone but management.

In June 2022, Quoc Le was crushed to death by a bulkhead for a gondola car after a chain broke.

Even after three industrial murders in the span of less than two years, the United Steelworkers (USW) kept telling us that we had to handle this through the legal system because that's what it was set up for, that taking matters into our own hands was not the way to deal with these issues. How wrong they were!

The company was fined a total of \$650,000 for killing three people! No one has been charged for criminal negligence or manslaughter in any of these deaths, let alone done any time. It's clear that NSC management views these expenses essentially as the cost of doing business.

No faith can be put in the corporatist UAW bureaucratic apparatus to stand up for one of its members. No one can expect anything from Stellantis. They seem to have as much concern for people's lives as National Steel Car does. Workers should put no faith in the government "safety" organizations in the US. Not only have they proven ineffective before, but now they have been gutted by Trump, the would-be Führer currently residing in the White House.

That the union and company have been silent for over a month shows the necessity for an independent inquiry to get to the bottom of what went on, show the truth, and hold to account those responsible. Adams' surviving family, friends and fellow workers deserve nothing less.

Warwick Dove, a metal worker and member of the Socialist Equality Party in Australia

My name is Warwick Dove. I am a member of the SEP in Australia. I worked in the metal manufacturing industry, including railway rolling stock, equipment maintenance in food production and mining for over 50 years.

To Ronald's family, I send my deepest condolences for the tragic and entirely preventable death of your husband and father.

The safety of the workers employed is often given very low priority in the running of a business. Thus, many of the workplace deaths have their source in the continual drive for profit and the pressure from management to achieve unrealistic deadlines or output.

As a result of the combination of management, trade union bureaucrats and government inspection departments, many workers have not been provided with an answer as to why their loved ones perished. In fact, often there is a strong attempt to apportion blame back to the worker as being "careless" or "not following instructions."

However, the main cause of many of these tragedies is that workers are prevented from fully shutting down production to protect their own safety and that of others. Production is only partially shut down, allowing it to continue in other areas, which leads to machinery being turned on again during maintenance.

Then, in investigations led by companies or unions, workers often report that their input is ignored, their evidence is dismissed and their practical knowledge is overlooked.

To determine how Ronald was placed in a position that ultimately cost him his life, the IWA-RFC has called for a rank-and-file investigation. This investigation would enable the collection of information from experienced workers around the workplace, pertaining to the facts. Whether electrical switches are correctly identified. Were enough workers made available to carry out the work safely? Were procedures in place to ensure all moving machinery that could entrap workers was deactivated and electrically isolated?

In 1993, two of our comrades travelled to Thailand to investigate the Kader toy factory fire that killed 188 workers, mostly young women. Most died trapped behind doors locked by management. The fire—the worst of its kind in history—remains a vivid example of the dirty, dangerous and slave-like conditions that are spreading worldwide.

In Australia, workers face dangerous industrial conditions, as in all countries. While Australia is often portrayed as a haven at the bottom of the world, the reality is that the same situation exists here as elsewhere.

According to the ACTU—the peak union body in Australia—each year an average of 200 workers die from workplace accidents and 5,000 from work-related diseases.

But while the ACTU reports the growing number of workers killed or maimed on the job each year, the real role of the union bureaucracy is to

force workers back on the job as quickly as possible after an incident and to suppress any attempt to strike against unsafe conditions.

Meanwhile, the government safety regulators carry out bogus “investigations,” often dragging on for multiple years, the purpose of which is to cover for the corporations responsible for workers’ deaths.

My own firsthand experience is that I have seen or been close to a number of serious industrial injuries, some leading to the loss of life. Some have involved both international corporations, such as Kellogg’s cereal company in Sydney, and smaller worksites. I have seen workers sustain injuries that led to their early deaths from burns and broken bones, and others permanently maimed from crush injuries.

In the building industry alone, the resurgence of the once-controlled workplace disease, silicosis, has already resulted in thousands of stone-cutting workers contracting the disease due to the unsafe cutting of this stone. A study by Curtin University predicts 83,000 workers will contract silicosis due to the use of this deadly product, and the majority will be young workers.

The investigation by a rank-and-file committee will allow Ronald’s fellow workers at his workplace to put on record all they know about the events leading up to Ronald’s death, as well as any subsequent changes to work practices that may be management’s attempts to cover their own responsibility.

The final report of this committee will be able to give Ronald’s family a truthful account of how his life was taken while at work.



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