

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

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 leader Will Lehman, WSWS labor editor 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.

Mexican workers support Ronald Adams investigation

Xavier - Delta staff worker in Durango, northern Mexico

This message is for all workers of Mexico, the United States, Central America and the rest of the world who have suffered work-related deaths. You know that the deaths of your relatives are not just another work place accident statistic, as employers and the state claim in order to absolve themselves of responsibility for the murder of a person who, by selling their labor, perishes because of the greed and ambition of employers and their representatives.

They have caused all these people to lose their lives; people with family members who love them, with partners, parents or children who will miss them the rest of their lives; people who the bosses sent to their deaths to save a few minutes in the procedures.

- No more unpunished deaths of workers!
- No more lives lost at the dirty hands of capital!

Only by organizing will we be able to defend our lives, whether that means better wages or a co-worker who keeps their life. We will fight until victory!

Auto parts worker from Matamoros

Fellow workers around the world. I am a worker at an assembly plant in Matamoros, Tamaulipas sending you my warmest regards and hoping that our struggles against the employers and governments will not be in vain, and that justice will be served in favor of us, the force that moves the world.

Listen to audio:

Wasantha Rupasinghe, Sri Lanka

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka extends its greetings to this important meeting of the rank and file to investigate the death of Ronald Adams, who was killed in a horrific workplace incident at the Stellantis Dundee Engine Complex in southern Michigan on April 7. We also extend our full support to the investigation launched by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) into the shocking death of Ronald Adams.

Extensive reporting by the *World Socialist Web Site* has already exposed how safety procedures were ignored to keep production running, putting workers' lives at risk for the profit interests of Dundee Engine Complex's wealthy owners. Months after the tragedy, no explanation has been offered by the trade unions, including the United Auto Workers, or by the relevant safety authorities, underscoring their complicity in covering up the profit-driven circumstances behind this preventable death.

Such sacrifices of workers' lives on the altar of corporate profits is a global phenomenon and it has been prevalent in South Asia, including Sri Lanka and India, where hundreds of millions are forced to labor under appalling and dangerous conditions for the benefit of local and foreign investors.

According to official reports, as a result of the deliberate violation of safety norms, at least three workers are killed and 11 seriously injured every day in similar industrial accidents in India, which has a workforce of 500 million. This amounts to an average of 1,100 worker deaths and between 2,700 and 4,500 injuries each year. Given that the informal sector—comprising 80 to 90 percent of workers—and other high-risk areas such as construction, mining, logistics, ports, sewers and agriculture are not included in official data, these grossly under-reported figures represent only a fraction of the true toll.

As reported by the *World Socialist Web Site* just last month, a massive explosion at a pharmaceutical factory in Telangana in southern India

burned 42 workers to death. Media coverage revealed multiple safety violations, including faulty temperature sensors and failed alarms that did not detect the overheating of the MCC (microcrystalline cellulose derived from wood pulp), which ignites at around 339 degrees Celsius. While the investigation is ongoing, no factory owner responsible for these breaches has even been charged.

The government of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has created highly favorable conditions for the super-exploitation of labor by local and foreign investors through widespread privatization, the erosion of labor rights, and the promotion of precarious working conditions. This has significantly contributed to the rise in industrial accidents.

As indicated, Modi has only intensified attacks on the working class, continuing a vicious anti-worker, pro-corporate agenda aimed at transforming India—now the world’s most populous country—into a cheap labor platform competing to replace China. In pursuit of this goal, the Indian bourgeoisie abandoned basic safety norms long ago, creating a living hell for millions of workers and the oppressed.

On December 3, 1984, more than 40 tons of deadly methyl isocyanate gas leaked from a chemical plant owned by the US multinational Union Carbide, turning the city of Bhopal into a gas chamber. About 8,000 people died immediately and around 170,000 were hospitalized. The total death toll is estimated to be between 16,000 and 30,000, partly due to unclaimed immigrant worker victims. The Bhopal disaster remains one of the world’s worst industrial tragedies, affecting half a million people in Bhopal. Yet, more than four decades later, not a single Union Carbide executive—let alone its owners—has been held accountable for this act of mass murder, which continues to claim victims to this day.

Similar stories come from other South Asian countries. In 2012, at least 289 garment workers died in a Karachi factory fire where locked exits, barred windows and lack of fire escapes trapped them inside. Similarly, in Bangladesh, the world’s second-largest garment exporter after China, over 1,200 workers died when the Rana Plaza building collapsed in April 2013. Its owner, backed by ruling party connections, ignored blatant structural defects for profit.

In Sri Lanka, where the capitalist ruling elite is no less ruthless than their counterparts across South Asia and the world, workers’ lives have been gambled away for decades through the creation of Free Trade Zones (FTZs), where even limited safety regulations are absent. The incumbent government of Anura Kumara Disanayake, mired in a deep economic crisis, is creating the most favorable conditions for investors.

In 1993, the Revolutionary Communist League, the predecessor of the SEP in Sri Lanka, conducted an important independent workers investigation into the death of Premalal Jayakody at the Korea-Ceylon shoe-making factory in the Katunayake FTZ. The investigation received a powerful response from workers. What the RCL uncovered was shockingly similar to the circumstances surrounding the death of Ronald Adams Sr. Jayakody was forced to work on a defective shoe-making Atom clicking press machine from which a photoelectric safety cell—designed to automatically stop the machine if a person or object entered a dangerous area—had been removed. The factory owners had deliberately readjusted the machine without this crucial safety feature to keep production running, a decision that ultimately cost Jayakody his life.

The investigation concluded by putting forward a series of demands to improve working conditions. Crucially, it highlighted the need to build independent action committees outside the trade unions, which remained silent and demonstrated their loyalty to the factory owners. Today, as ruling elites around the world launch a counter-revolution amid the deepening crisis of the global capitalist system, the building of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) is more relevant than ever. To prevent more workers from meeting the same fate as Ronald Adams in the US, Premalal Jayakody in Sri Lanka, and countless others worldwide, the development of the IWA-RFC is

vital.

Eduardo Parati, Brazil

I’m Eduardo Parati, a member of the Socialist Equality Group in Brazil, and I send greetings to this meeting of workers, which is an expression of growing active opposition to the current situation in the US. Millions of workers are compelled every day to work in dangerous environments just to make ends meet.

Decades of cuts in favor of greedy corporate boards have resulted in a deterioration of working conditions everywhere. Workers in the US and Latin America are pushed to their limit for corporate profit, and, just like in the case of Ronald Adams Sr., they are forced to risk their lives to meet corporate deadlines.

In the weeks leading up to the world-famous Carnival festivities in Brazil, workers in Rio de Janeiro had been put to work around the clock for costume production in factories and depots. Dozens slept inside the factory to avoid paying extra bus tickets and to meet the deadline. In February 12, a fire broke out in the early morning hours claiming a life and injuring dozens of workers. But despite rhetorical condemnations by the state governor, the conditions that allowed this tragedy to happen were completely ignored.

Such conditions are reproduced throughout Latin America. Brazil’s most populated state of São Paulo reported its highest number of workplace accidents in 2023 since the beginning of the records in 2012. Data from the Workplace Safety and Health Observatory reported 31,981 workplace deaths in Brazil from 2012 to 2024, or one death every three and a half hours. The observatory reports more than one accident in the workplace every minute nationwide.

According to the non-profit Colombian Safety Council, there were more than 520,000 workplace accidents and 408 deaths in Colombia in 2024. In 2023, 423 accidents with sick leave were reported for every 100,000 workers in Ecuador, much above the pre-pandemic rate. The Argentinian Superintendency of Occupational Risks notified 37 fatal incidences per million workers in 2023, above the 35.3 reported in 2019.

Like in the US, there is enormous opposition among workers to the policies of cost cutting and ever more intense exploitation. But justice for these social crimes is impossible without a correct understanding of their fundamental causes. Social devastation in the US is brought by the crisis of the capitalist system everywhere and a national solution is impossible.

Donald Trump’s tariff offensive aims at maintaining the US ruling class’ dominant position in world affairs through a policy of diplomatic, economic and, increasingly, military threats. Meanwhile, in Brazil, President Lula of the fake-left Workers’ Party is promoting economic nationalism with the integral support of the trade union apparatus.

In March, Lula participated with multiple ministers in the launching of a Stellantis center for the development of hybrid fuel vehicles in Betim, in the state of Minas Gerais. While Lula thanked the company for investing in Brazil, the leader of the Betim Metal Workers Union in the plant stated, “We had a 3.4 percent GDP growth, bigger than the United States, Germany and France. I believe it is bigger than all G7 countries.”

Lula and the unions are united in suppressing workers opposition. The investments being made by Stellantis are only possible because the multinational company was able to ram through major cuts with the critical help of the UAW in the US.

In reality, in today’s globalized economy, the national policies defended by the unions can only divide workers and pave the way for further attacks by the corporate boards and the state against workers rights. Now Lula is whipping up a chauvinistic campaign in order to suppress social

opposition and make workers pay for the economic impact of Trump's tariffs.

Therefore, workers in Brazil and the US—and in fact, in the entire American continent—must unite in a fight across the borders to protect even their most basic interests. As long as the capitalist class remains in power, workers will inevitably be put in ever more dangerous situations for profit. We join the call for the formation of rank-and-file committees to organize unified opposition to the policies of all capitalist politicians, who put profits above workers' lives.

Only the international working class is capable of putting an end to the endless cycle of avoidable deaths in the workplace.

Tom Peters, New Zealand

The topic of your meeting, the investigation into the workplace death of autoworker Ronald Adams Sr., is of immense significance for Ronald's family, his co-workers and for workers throughout the US and internationally.

It may come as a surprise to many workers, but New Zealand has one of the highest workplace death rates in the OECD—60 percent higher than Australia and more than 200 percent higher than the UK. A terrible example of the attitude of New Zealand companies to the lives of workers was the 2010 Pike River Mine disaster that killed 29 workers—one third of whom were under age 30 and the youngest 17 years old. This was the deadliest workplace disaster since 1914 when another mine explosion killed 43.

The Socialist Equality Group in New Zealand has, for the past 15 years, been in the forefront of the fight to uncover the full truth about this tragic disaster. The mine explosion and the death of these workers were entirely preventable and had been warned about by workers months earlier.

There were constant build-ups of explosive levels of gas, no emergency exit, and equipment that repeatedly broke down. All of this was in breach of the law. However, the state regulators turned a blind eye, and the company, Pike River Coal, refused to pause production to bring its mine up to a safe standard due to the associated costs.

Workers had repeatedly raised the alarm before the explosion. There was even a spontaneous walkout to protest the lack of emergency equipment at the mine. But the trade union, the EPMU, refused to organize any action to protect its members and covered up the life-threatening conditions underground.

After the mine exploded, the EPMU leader Andrew Little defended the company's safety standards, falsely telling the media that it had a good health and safety committee and there had been no problems with the mine.

Since then, despite overwhelming evidence of the company's safety breaches, successive governments have shielded the corporate managers and owners. Not one person has been prosecuted.

Amid growing outrage in the working class, the Labour government led by Jacinda Ardern, promised in 2017 to re-enter the mine to retrieve the bodies and gather evidence to prosecute those responsible. These were lies. The Ardern government partially explored the mine, but the operation was aborted, and the mine was sealed before any key evidence was obtained.

The Socialist Equality Group was the only political organization that opposed the Labour government's decision. We exposed the complicity of the union bureaucracy in the disaster and its cover-up, and fought to mobilize the working class in support of the families' ongoing fight for accountability.

The role of the unions in New Zealand is the same as the United Auto

Workers, which is protecting Stellantis and ensuring that the horrific death of Ronald Adams does not lead to any accountability or disruption to the company's production and profit-making. These organizations are a corporate police force; their job is to suppress opposition to low wages and life-threatening working conditions.

The experience of the miners' families and workers who demanded answers and accountability is that this will only happen through the independent struggle and organization of workers—independent from the union bureaucracies, companies and political forces who defend them.

It is high time for workers to fight back by building new organizations: rank-and-file committees that are controlled by workers themselves.



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