

Hundreds attend viewings for Timothy Quinn, steelworker killed in Clairton explosion

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Hundreds of workers and community members turned out for two viewings in Smithton, Pennsylvania honoring 39-year-old Timothy Quinn, one of the two steelworkers killed in Monday's explosion at the US Steel Clairton Coke Works. The large turnout was a reflection of the deep sense of loss felt not only by Quinn's family and friends but by his coworkers and the broader working class community in the Mon Valley of Pennsylvania.

Quinn leaves behind his three children—Jeremiah, Lilliana and Teagan, as well as his mother, Debra Quinn, for whom he was caring, his siblings and his longtime girlfriend, Lucinda Dodds. Funeral services are being held on Saturday.

Also killed was 52-year-old Steven Menefee, a devoted husband to Danielle and father to two daughters, Eliana and Ariella. Visitation services for Menefee will be held Monday and Tuesday, followed by his funeral.

Ten other workers were injured in the blast, three of whom remain hospitalized. Among the latter is Ty Antonelli, who was severely injured. Antonelli, the father of three young children, including a two-month-old, was described by coworkers as deeply dedicated to his family. His wife, Allesandra, is his college sweetheart.

These deaths and injuries have become a focal point of outrage among workers, who told the *World Socialist Web Site* that the explosion "could have been prevented." They underscore the broader social reality that steelworkers are being forced to risk their lives each day in unsafe conditions while management and the union apparatus do nothing to protect them.

Hundreds of workers, family, friends and community members lined up for the viewings on Friday, at times stretching out of the church and into the parking lot. Alongside many of Quinn's coworkers from the Clairton plant, where he had worked for 17 years, were

steelworkers from other mills across the Mon Valley, including US Steel's Irvin and Edgar Thomson plants.

New evidence has emerged that workers were given only five seconds' notice to evacuate before the explosion. Workers told the WSWS that management had refused to take the necessary 14 hours to shut down the batteries and purge the pipes of explosive gases before ordering repairs on the valve.

Since 2009, the Clairton Coke Works has suffered at least five major explosions and fires, killing one worker and injuring dozens more. Workers report that many other blasts have occurred but were never publicly disclosed.

A worker from the Irvin Works wrote to the WSWS, underscoring that the deadly conditions at Clairton are not unique but part of a systemic disregard for workers' lives across US Steel's operations:

Safety is always last, usually only addressed after someone is injured. I've seen first hand red tags being removed from lifting devices and then being forced to use them for months while being told, "We need to get this work done so we can run" from both management and union safety.

I witnessed a new maintenance worker lose three fingers in a crushing accident, only to be blamed while management covered up the fact that the cranes always lose power and drop uncontrollably.

They force crane operators on quick return doubles constantly while forcing us to have our lives depend on the sleep deprived craneman. Safety platforms that are crushed are ignored.

This company's moto is production first safety last, until it's time to be on camera.

Social media has also been filled with reports from workers about the dangerous conditions inside the mill.

“The plant has been in disrepair and disarray for years and years, but apparently they don’t think they can restart it once it’s shut down, so they just ... don’t do any serious maintenance that would require shut down,” wrote one worker. “This has been coming for a long, long time.”

Another recalled, “I did an internship there 20 years ago and it was rough. Up on the coke ovens in suit, respirator and goggles doing pressure testing all while the loading train was working. Would come off the unit with black covering all the spaces not covered by the respirator and goggles.”

People in the community have also expressed shock that such a tragedy had not happened sooner. “There was a major fire in February,” one local resident told the *World Socialist Web Site*. “We’ve heard five or six blasts coming from the mill just this year. I knew if they didn’t do something, someone was going to get killed soon.”

The company, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the United Steelworkers (USW) apparatus are already working to orchestrate a cover-up.

According to local reports, officials now claim the investigation will take 18 months, while OSHA has stated it will not issue even its initial report for six months.

The company has already offered the victims’ families paltry financial settlements, and it is clear that by dragging out the investigation they hope the tragedy will fade from public attention.

The United Steelworkers apparatus bears equal responsibility for this tragedy with US Steel. Workers must ask themselves: What has the USW done in the 16 years since the 2009 explosion to improve safety and protect workers’ health and lives? The answer is nothing.

For decades, the USW bureaucracy has functioned as a second layer of management, overseeing the destruction of tens of thousands of jobs, forcing through contracts with massive concessions and working to suppress workers’ struggles even as the company piles up one safety violation after another.

The United Steelworkers apparatus, along with the United Auto Workers, Teamsters, the building trades and other unions, long ago ceased to operate in defense of the workers they claim to represent. With billions of dollars in assets and funds, the bureaucrats sell their services to management, working to block any struggle by workers for higher wages, decent benefits and safe working conditions.

In particular, the United Steelworkers promotes nationalism, chauvinism and anti-socialism to divide the working class and divert anger away from the company.

In the days since the explosion, the USW has hardly said a word about the deaths of Timothy Quinn and Steven Menefee. The union issued only a perfunctory statement on August 11, declaring, “In the coming days, we will work with the appropriate authorities to ensure a thorough investigation and to see that our members get the support they need.”

Notably absent was any demand for halting production, shutting down the unsafe batteries, or holding management accountable. Instead, the USW signaled its readiness to collaborate with the company and government regulators in a drawn-out cover-up, leaving workers to face the same deadly conditions.

The lives lost and the families shattered must not be swept under the rug through endless investigations and token fines! To uncover the truth and hold those responsible to account, workers themselves must take the initiative.

An independent rank-and-file investigation into the Clairton disaster, led by steelworkers and supported by workers throughout the region, is necessary. Only such a workers’ inquiry can expose the full extent of management’s negligence and the complicity of the union apparatus and lay the basis for a genuine fight for safe workplaces and the protection of workers’ lives.

Do you work at Clairton Coke Works or another steel mill? Send a report on conditions at the plant by filling out the form below. Submissions will be kept anonymous.



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