

“The union works with the bosses behind closed doors to cover up the injuries and deaths that happen every day”

Autoworkers speak on the investigation into the death of Dundee Engine worker Ronald Adams Sr. and continuing industrial carnage

Our reporter
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Following the July 27 rank-and-file hearing into the death of Ronald Adams, a 63 year-old tradesman at the Stellantis Dundee Engine Complex, the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* spoke to autoworkers in Dearborn, Michigan, and Toledo, Ohio.

Adams 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, held at Marygrove Campus in Detroit, was attended by 100 workers, youth and community members. Among those who spoke were Shamenia Stewart-Adams, Ronald Adams' widow, safety experts and rank-and-file autoworkers. Reports were given by Mack Trucks worker and IWA-RFC member Will Lehman, WSWS labor reporter Jerry White and others.

The three weeks since the hearing has seen a spate of industrial disasters across the country. On August 11, two workers died and another 10 were seriously injured in an explosion at the U.S. Steel coking mill in Clairton, Pennsylvania. The United Steelworkers and management are seeking to downplay the unsafe conditions that led to the tragedy, calling the deadly event “unforeseeable.”

Max, a worker at the Ford Dearborn Truck plant, said the following of the hearing:

“Everywhere I turn I see a victim of a system that is dominated by an oligarchy to exploit the vast majority of citizens for profit.

“Beaten, bruised, assaulted and verbally abused in workplaces where the bosses claim to uphold family values; but in reality, their only concern is the value of their stocks. The union works with the bosses behind closed doors to cover up the injuries and deaths that happen every day. Ronnie Adams died four months ago, and the truth has been kept secret until

this very day.

“When we go to work, it is common practice to remind one another to ‘leave the same way we came in.’ That means ‘in one piece.’ But sadly, more than a few good souls do not leave the building alive.

“Ronnie Adam’s did not die because of an accident. He died because the system we live under values speed and profit more than the workers that produce all the profits and more than their families that depend on them. If we don’t take up the fight for justice for Ronnie Adams, no one else will.

“In my first job, I slaved for 11 years being overworked and underpaid. I started just over minimum wage and worked as a shear operator, hi-lo driver, laser operator, assembler and utility man for many different spots in the shop. The union talked me into being shop steward, but that was useless because they had already given up the right to strike before I got there.

“I’ve seen people lose multiple fingers in a press break machine, burn themselves handling hot cut parts and slice their knuckles open on sharp steel. Whatever safety equipment we had we had to buy it ourselves, and we faced constant harassment.

“We called it a ‘war dog’ factory because they manufactured ambulance tanks for battlefield equipment. They made a lot of money, but they never gave us a proper raise.

“The capitalist owners only care about one thing—PROFIT—and grow the company to make more of it. They are constantly cutting jobs and cutting corners. The similarities between the factories I have worked in and the failure to follow lock-out/tag-out procedures that was responsible for Ronnie’s passing are frightening.

“I’d like to point out that in 1999, February 1st at 1:20 p.m. an explosion at the Ford Rouge Power Plant took place claiming the lives of six men who were incinerated in the blast. Thirty more were severely injured. The head of the UAW, Ron Gettelfinger, jumped to defend the company, claiming the plant

was the safest it could be.

“That was a lie and a cover-up. Workers had been filing grievances for months against the plant and the boiler that exploded for gas leaks that went on to cause the explosion. The union never even sued the company, and Gettelfinger became UAW president.

“This is why we need to build rank-and-file committees in every factory. I joined this movement because it is up to us to put a stop to the bloodshed. We have to enforce our own safety conditions on the shop floor.

“The UAW behind Shawn Fain has come out in support of Trump’s tariff war. They want us to blame foreign workers for the problems here in the factories. But these are our brothers and sisters. We are all in this together, and we have to stand together as one united world working class. That is the policy of the IWA-RFC (International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees). We are independent of the union apparatus, the Democratic Party, the Republican Party and the institutions of the capitalist state such as OSHA.

“I repeat, the time has come to put a stop to the bloodshed. We must demand justice for Ronnie Adams, for Tywaun Long, for Terriel Wooten and Darius Williams and for everyone else who has died in a factory an early and unnecessary death. I stand with Will Lehman, and I urge all my brothers and sisters to join with us and build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.”

“Workers are just another dollar sign to them”

World Socialist Web Site reporters also recently spoke to autoworkers in Toledo, Ohio.

A worker at the Dana Driveline plant told the WSWS that he supported the investigation into the death of Ronald Adams and saw the disregard of safety as a problem at Dana too.

“I am well aware that workers are just another dollar sign to them (corporations). They don’t even view their inventory as their inventory. It’s money. It’s all money to them, and you can’t expect good decisions from people when everything they view is money. I’m very much a pro-worker person.”

Nick, another worker at Dana, said that he supported the rank-and-file investigation and that he reads the WSWS often. “It’s important to talk about this because Dana always covers up all of the workplace deaths that are happening in the area.”

Callie, a former Stellantis temp worker at the Toledo Jeep Complex, stopped by Dana to pick up a relative at work. “They work people here to the bone, and there is no real incentive. You don’t even get time off for your family. They don’t care.”

The WSWS explained that Ron Adams had been placed in an unsafe situation by Stellantis, and now the UAW and management were trying to cover it up. “Yes, they are a billion-

dollar corporation.”

Callie agreed the unions were not standing up for the rank and file. “They treat you like the poop on the bottom of their shoes.”

A worker at the Toledo Jeep complex said that he understood the importance of the rank-and-file investigation into the death of Ronald Adams. He pointed to the death last year of Jeep worker Antonio Gaston, who was crushed to death in August 2024 while working on a conveyor where safety guards had been removed.

“I have been over to that area of the plant. It is surrounded by a big old cage. There are locks on that cage. When the skilled trades go in there, they have lockout/tagout. They actually have to put a lock on there and put a tag saying there are de-energizing it.

“Anyone who goes in there without locking out would have to be nuts.”

The WSWS pointed out that Antonio Gaston was a production worker, who had not been trained for that machine. “He was not qualified to go in that area. I don’t know if someone sent him in there. All I know is that it is a very dangerous area. You have the body coming down on top of the frame and then you have these bolts holding it together. As soon as they come down together, the bolts all pin the body into the frame.”

The family of Antonio Gaston recently filed a wrongful death lawsuit against Stellantis which it alleges removed critical safety equipment in the area where Gaston died. In a statement announcing the lawsuit, Antonio Gaston’s widow, Renita Shores-Gaston, said, “I want to know the truth of what happened to my husband at work because I haven’t gotten anything—I haven’t gotten any answers.”

The WSWS and the IWA-RFC pledge to continue the fight to uncover the truth about the death of Ronald Adams Sr. as part of a fight to mobilize the working class to uphold the right to safe and healthy working conditions. The continuing toll of needless workplace deaths can only be halted through the independent organization and initiative of rank-and-file workers. To get involved, fill out the form below.



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