

Workers indict Bridgestone after tire factory death in Brazil

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The death of Daniel Silva Saraiva, 37, at the Bridgestone tire factory in Santo André, in São Paulo's ABC industrial region, brought to light a series of denunciations of unsafe working conditions inside the plant.

A video of a former employee talking about the lack of safety at the company, recorded during a procession in honor of Daniel, received almost 8,000 likes and more than 500 comments on social media. The former employee's complaint encouraged many others:

"I left that company 11 years ago, where I worked for 10 years, always running that risk, always under that pressure, with the company always wanting more and more production. Sad reality."

"I had an accident there, but I didn't file a report [Work Accident Report] for fear of being fired... I worked there for four years. Only those who work or have worked there know how things work inside."

"It's a miracle if you don't leave this company with lasting damage, and you're only useful as long as production is on track. If you get hurt, you're done. We're just numbers."

"The company is large, yes, and a multinational, but it is completely unprepared for this type of situation. In terms of worker safety, it leaves a lot to be desired. The priority there is production, so it's no surprise that the man died and the next day the machine was already cleared to return to work, and everyone, without exception, refused."

The news had a strong impact on the ABC industrial region. In addition to the workers' own accounts, comments from family members underscore that the lack of safety at the Bridgestone factory is widely known and has a history dating back decades.

"My father became ill while working at this company and passed away at the age of 39. It's very sad, I don't have the strength to tell the whole story, it's been 35 years," said one woman.

Another woman said: "My husband had an accident at work at this company, almost lost his leg, has permanent sequelae, and has been off work for almost 10 years. There is no social worker to call, visit, and check if everything is okay."

The mother of a dismissed worker also spoke out: "I thank God that my son was fired from there [the factory]. He also had an accident and they didn't even want to know anything else."

Daniel, the most recent victim, died on August 19 while performing maintenance on a machine. He had been working at Bridgestone for eight years. Several reports indicated that his death could have been prevented, as workers had already alerted those responsible about the machine malfunctioning.

People close to Daniel denounced the company's response, which minimized its responsibility by saying that he died when he was no longer with the company. One woman protested:

Guys, he didn't die outside, I accompanied his wife from the beginning. The company didn't even notify us if we hadn't gone there and knocked on the company's door. Absurd. Mourning, justice must be done!!!! A machine cuts off the employee's head, he loses his brain matter inside the company and they come and tell me he came out alive. Give me a break. Justice for Daniel.

Another person asked: "Didn't he die inside? That's a bad joke! There was no way to help him! Bridgestone being Bridgestone."

There is a striking contrast between the massive outrage expressed on social media and the silence of Sintrabor (the Greater São Paulo and Region Tire Repairers Union), led by the Força Sindical union federation. Despite holding a meeting on the day of the accident and formally expressing its solidarity with Daniel's family, Sintrabor is treating the death at the factory as an isolated case – a complete distortion of reality, which is even more evident in the face of so many complaints.

Some of them even pointed to the union's responsibility in covering up unsafe conditions at the factory:

I worked for years at this company, and accidents, or "incidents" as they like to call them to avoid lawsuits, happen every day! The company is large and well-known, but even so, much of the machinery is in poor condition. The environment is not pleasant. You work under pressure every day. When things get busy and the machines can't be stopped, the managers don't even think about safety or PPE. If a worker says anything about it, they get reprimanded.

I worked during the heavy rains in the ABC region, with water at my feet, Firestone Avenue flooded, water inside the company, even though the floor was a metal platform and the machines were electric. We couldn't stop working because we were required to keep the machines running.

Unfortunately, one person died, but you don't know a

third of what happens inside, of the nasty accidents that occur. The union only serves to take money from workers during negotiations. Go there and demand something from them and you'll see what happens.

Only the most serious cases of “accidents” make the news. One of them was in March 2014, when an outsourced worker died at the factory. While performing maintenance on a refrigeration unit, an oxygen tube exploded and hit the head of maintenance mechanic Jaelson da Silva Pontes, 35. And in June 2015, a worker was injured during a fire at the factory.

The Santo André plant was Bridgestone’s first tire factory in Brazil, opened in the 1940s. Currently, the multinational company has a second tire factory in Camaçari, Bahia, as well as two tread factories in Campinas (São Paulo) and Mafra (Santa Catarina), and a proving ground in São Pedro (São Paulo). In total, there are more than 3,000 direct employees in the country and an undisclosed number of outsourced workers.

In 2012, the factory in Camaçari, Bahia, experienced one of the longest strikes in the industrial sector, a 52-day work stoppage. An article by the Camaçari Rubber Workers’ Union (Sindborracha) reports that the motivation for the strike “was the constant and unbearable moral harassment experienced daily on the factory floor,” where workers were treated “with threats, harassment, and blackmail.” In protest against the mistreatment and dissatisfaction with their wages, the workers began to stop work in the middle of each shift until they decided to go on strike.

The article highlights that “A day that marked this process was when workers walked from Bridgestone to the Labor Court building in downtown Camaçari, carrying a coffin, which was later burned by protesters in front of the factory.”

The strike resulted in the dismissal of company directors and managers, but according to the union itself, it ended with an agreement that offered “little economic progress and fired employees.”

In Santo André, a more recent movement took place in 2020, with a wildcat strike during a COVID-19 outbreak at the factory. There was also a strike in 2023, this time controlled by the union, in protest against the firing of 600 workers.

This year, further layoffs may occur. Bridgestone Americas has already announced cuts across the region. The plan includes the closure of a factory in the United States, with the firing of 700 workers, as well as cuts in Argentina and Brazil. The company said in a statement that about 1,760 – or nearly 4 percent – of “our nearly 44,000 employees in North America and Latin America are leaving the company as part of voluntary and involuntary staff reductions.”

Job cuts and unsafe working conditions are directly related. When a company reduces its workforce, it requires the remaining workers to compensate for production, which means less time for machine maintenance, putting on protective equipment, or even taking adequate breaks. The workday becomes longer, faster, and more dangerous – a perfect recipe for new accidents.

Job cuts also exert pressure externally: from the corporations’ point of view, the workforce is easily replaceable as they have a

reserve army of unemployed people at their disposal.

The strategy of Bridgestone, a transnational giant, is rooted in its need to maximize profits. Always in search of cheaper labor and cost reductions, it uses its global structure to transfer production from one region to another, temporarily suspending certain products, postponing the replacement of precarious machinery as long as possible, and exhausting its workers to death, if necessary.

Daniel’s death at Bridgestone in Santo André cannot be viewed as merely an accident or an isolated case. In recent weeks and months, the *World Socialist Web Site* has reported on worker deaths in Italy, South Korea, and numerous US states. These examples are part of the global industrial slaughterhouse that kills millions of workers around the world every year.

The working conditions that killed these workers cannot be tolerated, at the risk of new victims and the normalization of death in the name of capitalist profit. The slogan “Workers’ lives matter” must be a starting point for the unification of workers in this and other factories, in other cities and across national borders.

The Socialist Equality Group in Brazil, in solidarity with the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), supports the struggle of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) against the criminal negligence of corporations internationally, which was recently expressed in the investigation it launched into the death of Ronald Adams Sr. in the United States.

The GSI also supports the IWA-RFC’s call for the struggle for safe working conditions to be carried forward through the creation of rank-and-file committees independent of the unions, which are complicit in the social murder of workers by the capitalist system, and based on an internationalist socialist program.



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