

Dundee Engine nearly six months after workplace death: “The machines are running at full blast, and not a word is being said about Ronald Adams”

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Hundreds of Stellantis workers in Dundee, Michigan, returned to work on Monday, September 22. They had been laid off for six months or more from the engine plant where Ronald Adams Sr., a 63-year-old machine repairman, was crushed to death on April 7. At a meeting for returning workers, management and United Auto Workers officials discussed new production targets but maintained a guilty silence about Adams.

It has been nearly six months since the well-respected skilled tradesman, father and grandfather was killed while performing maintenance on an industrial washer in an enclosed factory cell. An automated hoist, also known as a gantry, suddenly activated without warning, pinning Adams to a conveyor and inflicting horrific crushing injuries to his torso.

In nearly a half-year, Stellantis management, the UAW and the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA) officials have not given any explanation of the causes of the workplace fatality to his family and co-workers.

“I think everybody has been brought back to work now,” a Dundee worker whom we will call “Kevin” to protect him from retaliation. “They are definitely ramping up for full production. They called us into the auditorium and said the plant had to build 11,000 Hurricane engines by November 3.”

During the meeting, Kevin said, company and UAW officials made a few perfunctory remarks about safety. “They mentioned power lockouts, something about a new process for maintenance workers doing repairs on the line. But they did not even mention Ronald’s name. So, they are going to have every machine running at full blast, and they’re not saying anything about how Ronald died.”

The silence visibly upset many workers. “They have never even given a reason why this happened to his widow, his family or any of us. It’s like they want to sweep it under the rug,” Kevin said.

Several officials who were suspended after Adams’ death were back on the job, he said. “Nobody is being held accountable. The plant manager, the safety manager, they’re all back. I don’t know if the UAW Safety rep who got fired is back, but I wouldn’t be surprised.”

On May 13, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) launched an independent investigation into the death of Ronald Adams Sr. After interviewing dozens of workers at Dundee and other auto plants, Adams family members, experts on workplace safety and other relevant witnesses, the IWA-RFC presented the initial findings of its investigation at a public hearing on July 27, which was held in Ronald Adams’ community in Detroit.

Stellantis was more than a year behind the \$100 million retooling of the Dundee factory, which is set to produce hybrid-ready and HEMI V.8 engines for the 2026 Jeep Cherokee and Ram 1500 models and European brands. Witnesses detailed how management, with the blessing of the UAW bureaucracy, regularly cut corners on safety to reduce cost overruns and shorten the downtime period.

A safe lockout/tagout system, designed to cut power to machines before maintenance and repair, was virtually non-existent. Management acknowledged its widespread distribution of so-called “cheater keys,” which can bypass a lockout. Contract workers from Fives Cinetic, who programmed the specific washer and gantry system and worked with Adams before he was killed by the automated hoist, testified that they were never

interviewed by the company, the UAW or MIOSHA.

The workers and young people who attended the public hearing voted unanimously to continue the investigation and to expand it to other workplace fatalities, including the August 2024 death of 53-year-old Antonio Gaston at the Stellantis Toledo Assembly Complex.

Earlier this week, this reporter questioned MIOSHA spokesman Michael Krafcik about the agency's investigation. Krafcik said the "investigation is still ongoing" and confirmed that the process had not even reached the point of a "closing conference," where a MIOSHA compliance officer presents the agency's findings to management and union representatives, along with potential violations and required corrective actions.

Asked why the investigation was taking so long, Krafcik said, "I can't say more than what I've said before. You know, it's under investigation and not concluding conferences held yet, concluding conferences." He could not explain why MIOSHA had not given any updates to Adams' widow Shamenia Stewart-Adams and other family members which the agency's own guidelines say it must do.

Commenting on the IWA-RFC hearing, Kevin said, "It's good to see the support and just a lot of people who will volunteer to do the right thing. It's important to bring attention to this, because, as I saw at the plant meeting, these people in the corporations and the UAW don't care. They trying to sweep the deaths of Ronald Adams and Antonio Gaston under the rug.

"I might have been timid at first about putting myself out there, but you have to speak out so that other people will step up. I'm not scared anymore," Kevin said. "We have to right to speak and to have a safe workplace."

Asked what he thought of Trump's efforts to destroy freedom of speech and what few workplace protections workers have left, Kevin said, "Trump and his followers want to put their foot on everybody's neck who doesn't go along with him. They don't care about us."

During the public hearing, Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker and leader of the IWA-RFC, urged workers to form their own organizations, independent of the UAW bureaucracy, to defend their lives.

Safety committees must be formed in every plant to fight for the principle that no job should be carried out unless and until it is made safe. In consultation with trusted safety experts of our own choosing, workers must have full authority to set

safety standards and shut down unsafe operations through collective action.

Our goal is to place control over workplace safety into the hands of the working class itself, as part of the broader struggle for workers' control over production. As long as production is driven by profit and controlled by corporate owners, workers' lives will remain expendable.

Asked about this, the Dundee worker said, "Yeah, I totally agree with that, and the need to get people to be on board. So that's going to be the biggest challenge, but it definitely needs to happen."

Such a fight must be conducted in opposition to UAW President Shawn Fain and the entire union bureaucracy. Fain's bogus "Stand Up" strike and the sellout of the 2023 contract struggle paved the way for mass layoffs and other cost-cutting, which contributed to the death of Gaston and Adams. Fain has fervently supported Trump's tariffs and economic nationalism and blocked or quickly shut down strikes that threaten military production, including most recently at GE Aerospace. This has only emboldened the fascist president's dictatorial moves.

Autoworkers must reject economic nationalism and unify with workers internationally against job cuts, deadly working conditions, dictatorship and war. Earlier this week, Stellantis announced temporary layoffs at several plants in Europe, due to lagging sales and competition from lower-costing Chinese EVs. Several European states are on the verge or already in recession and imposing the cost of military rearmament on the working class.

Production of the Alfa Romeo Tonale and Fiat Panda vehicles is being suspended in Pomigliano, Italy, from September 29, after the company meets with local labor union officials. Stellantis is also halting production of the Opel and DS cars at its Poissy plant near Paris from October 13 to October 31. Other factories suspending production include Tychy in Poland, Eisenach in Germany and two plants in Spain.



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