

The Tennessee munitions factory explosion and deaths at National Steel Car in Hamilton, Ontario: Workers must organize to defend workplace safety and their lives!

National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee
13 November 2025

Brothers and Sisters,

On Wednesday, October 8, a massive explosion ripped through a munitions factory in Bucksport, Tennessee (outside of Nashville), killing 16 workers. After expressing our sympathy for those involved in the tragedy, we must unfortunately admit that the conditions leading to the disaster have a lot in common with what has happened here at National Steel Car in Hamilton, Ontario.

Accurate Energetic Systems is a privately held company that operated the munitions plant. It produces explosives like RDX (cyclonite), TNT, and PBXN-series explosives for the US Department of Defense, the Department of Homeland Security, and commercial demolition clients. The company employs roughly 75 people in an economically depressed rural region, typical of much of the southeastern US.

Accurate Energy Systems in Tennessee, National Steel Car in Ontario: two workplaces with a deadly record

There was a history of explosions at the site prior to last month's horrific tragedy. A previous company using it, Rio Ammunition, had a deadly explosion 10 years ago killing one worker and critically injuring 3 others. Rio was another US defense contractor.

There were at least 5 serious health and safety violations at the plant in 2019 alone after multiple employees suffered seizures while working with RDX powder. RDX is a neurotoxin that can cause convulsions and unconsciousness along with headaches, dizziness, and vomiting. Long term exposure can cause damage to the liver and kidneys. The Tennessee Occupational Safety and Health Administration (TOSHA) found that workers were not given adequate protective equipment while dying and sifting the compound and carried the residue on their skin and into break rooms, which allowed for the ingestion that caused the seizures.

In 2023, a deal was cut by AES with TOSHA that downgraded the violations to "anything but serious." This allowed the company to get away with "improvements" like providing a hand washing facility and long sleeve uniforms...Oh, and a \$7,200 fine. Apparently, this is the value of a single batch of military grade explosives. In fact, it is similar to the pittance NSC paid for the industrial murder of Fraser Cowan (\$140,000 fine + \$35,000 Victim Surcharge Fine = \$175,000). This would be approximately the cost of one Through Sill Hopper car currently being built in P1 at our plant. Five a day are being produced on that line.

As we all remember only too well, Cowan was one of three workers

who lost their lives here at NSC between late 2020 and the middle of 2022. The other two were Colin Grayley and Quoc Le. All three deaths were bound up with cost-cutting and the refusal by management to implement adequate safety precautions. Not a single company executive was charged, let alone convicted, for these industrial murders.

We can testify based on first-hand experience what it's like to be strung along with official promises of investigations and stronger workplace protections, by government officials and United Steelworker (USW) bureaucrats alike. The very building in which we labour is structurally unsound, as we've previously noted, but management is doing next to nothing about it. This committee therefore wholeheartedly agrees with the demand for an independent workers' inquiry into what happened at the AES plant in Tennessee. No faith can be put in any organization within the structure of the US government that might look into the cause of this explosion to hold anyone accountable.

Since the mainstream media has hardly mentioned any of this, here is a *World Socialist Web Site* report. It provides information on just who the 16 workers killed in a split second in a factory whose owners had proven they could not care less about them—other than as producers of profit—were.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident, and even worse, not really an accident. If you stub your toe, that's an accident. If you're playing catch with a friend and you overthrow him and the ball goes through a window, that's an accident. This is because in both cases there was no intention for anything bad to happen.

On the contrary, workers lives are being deliberately subordinated to the accumulation of corporate profits across the board.

This is underscored by the cases of Fraser Cowan, Colin Grayley, and Quoc Le; Ronald Adams Sr, the Stellantis autoworker crushed to death while repairing equipment in April 2025; the two fatalities of last August's explosion at US Steel's Clairton, Pennsylvania, Coke Plant; the two contractors burned to death at Stelco's Lake Erie Works in 2023, and the Accurate Energetic Systems mass industrial murder incident.

All this is terrible enough on its own, but, there's something even more insidious that is not openly spoken about that workers in both the US and Canada will have to face. The US and Canada are currently in what amounts to a rearmament drive to build up their military might for ongoing wars and upcoming global conflagrations, especially with China. The ruling class wants to discipline the workforce, unionized and non-unionized, to produce for wartime production. Workers lives will be sacrificed for the "greater good of the nation," particularly in industries directly related to things necessary to the military, including steel production.

The United Steelworkers and the other union bureaucracies are well suited to chloroform workers into “sacrifices” for “saving jobs,” while waving the flag. They’ve done this for years, while slobbering all over the respective national ruling classes they assist in propping up.

Dangers for workers in Canada grow as ruling class attacks our rights

For those reading this in Canada thinking this explosion happened in the US and thankfully it cannot happen here, they should look soberly at what our former central banker and current prime minister is doing without any real pushback. The Liberal government has already eviscerated the right to strike within the whole of the public sector and sections of the private sector (see: Air Canada workers, the post office, the rail industry and dockworkers in BC and Montreal). The current federal government has committed to a massive war build-up, hiking defence spending by \$9 billion in 2025/26 so as to ensure it will reach NATO’s 2 percent of the GDP benchmark on war spending this fiscal year. And it has vowed to hike military spending to 5 percent of GDP by 2035.

To placate the erratic whims of the would-be Führer in the White House, the Carney Liberals are pushing forward with two pieces of legislation that contain sweeping attacks on democratic rights and immigrants (the favoured diversion of all right-wing governments). Bill C-2 is an omnibus bill that is a massive power grab by police, spy agencies, and Cabinet combined with a full frontal attack on immigrants and refugees. On October 8, after the usual opportunistic posturing by both the Conservatives and the NDP, a new bill, C-12, was tabled which carved out the police state provisions but kept the attacks on immigrants and refugees.

On October 11, the current federal public safety minister said that the police spying measures would not be abandoned. They would be introduced separately after being “refined” to eliminate “overreach.”

More austerity for the working class is contained in the budget that was delivered on November 4. All of this military spending and spying on us costs money and it is the working class in Canada that will pay for this. By the way, the two go hand in hand as the misery that is about to be unleashed on all of us will cause massive social outrage against the conditions imposed on us. To maintain “order,” the ruling class intends to spy on the populace and condition it to accept the austerity. This will include, undoubtedly the reduction of transfer payments to the provinces, the weakening of provincial safety rules and laws and/or enforcement of the existing rules and laws. The unfortunate result of that will be what we’ve seen at NSC and in the cases cited above in the US and Canada.

What is the way out?

First and foremost, we must take stock of objective reality. There is no solution to the socio-economic problems we face within the current political structure. No faith can be put in voting our problems away through ANY of the political parties on offer. The Liberal and Conservative parties are basically the legislative voices of factions of the ruling class and the NDP, the mouthpiece of the union bureaucracy that’s responsible for destroying working conditions and imposing sellout contracts on us for decades, is indistinguishable from them. No faith can be put in any trade union bureaucracy as they are firmly tied to the state and the socio-economic system (i.e.: capitalism) that has brought us to this

point. No faith can be put in the legal system that seems to exist, not to punish employers who treat workers like disposable and replaceable slaves, but to protect the bosses from the justice they deserve and prevent the workers from resisting ruling class attacks.

What is required is a class conscious movement of the working class, which is the class that produces all goods and services and all wealth. The recent “No Kings/ No Tyrants” protests and the wave of strikes that have swept across Canada over the past three years show that mass social opposition is beginning to emerge.

What is lacking is the necessary leadership, alongside a political party, coupled with a proper class-based perspective to galvanize the working population in an **independent** and **international** fashion. A complete break is needed from the political parties and organizations that keep us tied to the dying hulk that is capitalism and the degraded class that principally has benefited from it.

To assist in that, the working class requires new organizations of struggle, independent of the current trade union apparatus, that can bring working people together across different trades and countries. These would be democratically run rank-and-file committees, affiliated with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

The issues cited above are happening all over the world because capitalism is global in scope. Therefore, the fight for democratic rights, safe workplaces, wages and benefits, a general quality standard of living, and staying alive when you go to work must by necessity be international! That is the perspective of this committee and the current situation proves it to be correct.

The pace of the degradation of the capitalist profit system and of those who own it is accelerating and their only way of dealing with this is through increased worker exploitation, the dismantling of public services and social supports, repression, dictatorship, and war.

We are faced with the choice between a way out where wealth and technology are employed and distributed for the benefit of us all or the barbarism of a decaying ruling class that is desperate to maintain its wealth and power on a global scale through violence and death. One only needs to see what is going on in Gaza or internally in the US to understand what the ruling class has in store for us if we stay on the current path.

If you agree with any or all of this perspective, join us by filling out the form below. The time for a counteroffensive by the working class in defence of worker rights and our very lives is now, and we’re leading the charge to organize that fight. Attend the IWA-RFC’s meeting on Sunday, where we will discuss how to build a mass movement against mass layoffs and hunger.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact