“Our family wants answers that we have not gotten”: 8 months since the death of Stellantis worker Ronald Adams Sr.

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December 7 marked eight months since the death of 63?year?old machine repairman Ronald Adams Sr. at the Stellantis Dundee Engine Complex in Michigan. His death on the shop floor—crushed while performing maintenance when a gantry hoist suddenly activated—continues to be shrouded in silence.

The Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA) has still not issued the results of its probe into the April 7 fatality, with MIOSHA spokesman Mike Krafcik informing the WSWS by email Monday that “the investigation remains open.” He did not provide any explanation for the long delay, stating only that “fatality investigations can take significant time due to their complexity, including the availability of witness interviews, technical and engineering review, records examination and required legal due process.”

Far from holding the company accountable, the United Auto Workers union has been complicit in suppressing the facts. UAW President Shawn Fain and UAW-Stellantis Department head Kevin Gotinsky assisted management in bringing the plant back to full production, and Stellantis is churning out engines for new Stellantis models as if nothing happened.

This cold bureaucratic choreography—management’s cover?up, the union’s whitewash and the state agencies’ delays—is the logic of a system that treats workers’ lives as expendable.

“The holidays are especially difficult for our family” Ronald’s widow, Shamenia Stewart-Adams, told the WSWS. “We miss him in a way that is beyond words. We had no time to prepare. There was no illness. One day, he was just gone.”

Addressing the silence of company, UAW and state safety officials, she said, “We have not gotten any answers from OSHA and the closure we need. Our family wants answers. We want answers that we haven’t gotten, and that’s really, really unsettling.”

On July 27 the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) held a public hearing in Detroit, where it presented the initial findings of its independent investigation into the death of Ronald Adams Sr. During the hearing, Adams’ widow made an impassioned appeal for his co-workers to come forward and provide information to uncover the truth and hold accountable all those responsible.

Now, Shamenia has spoken out in support of the families and co-workers of two United States Postal Service (USPS) workers, who were killed in the space of a week last month. On November 8, 36-year-old maintenance mechanic Nick Acker was crushed to death by a mail sorting machine at the Detroit Network Distribution Center in Allen Park, Michigan. One week later, on November 15, mail handler assistant Russell Scruggs, Jr., 44, fell and hit his head at a mail processing center in Palmetto, Georgia.

Shamenia said:

> Find the strength and don’t stop fighting for workers to be treated not just as an employee ID number but a human being who was just trying to make a living for their family. These are not just numbers being sacrificed but are our loved ones, our husbands, fathers, brothers, uncles and grandfathers who deserve to be valued.
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> A lot of these companies have the mindset their workers are just numbers, who have no value. That’s where we are at now. My husband went to work. He did his job. He did it well. He saved lives on that job, multiple times, and I feel like his life was devalued and that hurts. In a nutshell, our family just wants answers.

Following the lead of the Ronald Adams investigation, the Postal Workers Rank?and?File Committee (PWRFC) issued an open letter calling on postal workers to come forward with information as part of an independent, worker?led inquiry into the deaths of the two workers.

Postal workers have reported that grievances over safety violations—including complaints about the very mail sorting machine that killed Acker—were filed with the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) and ignored. They also said that safety features had been disabled, maintenance staffing was

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inadequate, and management kept machines idling rather than shutting them down for proper repairs. As for Russell Scruggs, Jr., workers said there were significant delays in potentially lifesaving medical treatment due to the lack of cell phone service and emergency protocols.

The same pattern of corporate indifference and union collusion has been present at the Stellantis Toledo Assembly Complex, just north of the Dundee Engine plant, where there has been a spike in injuries due to exhausting work schedules imposed with the blessing of the UAW bureaucracy.

Citing lost production due to supply chain interruptions, management has kept the factory on "emergency status" for months. Workers are on shifts lasting between 9 and 12 hours, 6 to 7 days a week, with many not seeing a day off for more than three weeks. According to an internal safety memo posted inside the plant, the factory accounted for 30 percent of the injuries at all 75 Stellantis factories and parts distribution centers in North America since September 1.

Eight months before Adams' death, Antonio Gaston, a 53-year-old father of four, was crushed to death at the Toledo factory. Attorneys who are filing a wrongful death lawsuit on behalf of Gaston's family alleged that although he was a material handler, Gaston was put on the assembly line because of manpower shortages due to a previous mass layoff. In addition, they say that safety guards may have been removed on the machine that killed him to prevent any delays in production. OSHA cited the company for the lack of safety guards but only fined the company $16,000 for the safety violation that led to Gaston's death. Stellantis has challenged the fine.

Although Stellantis' own internal records show a spike in injuries, the *Toledo Blade* reported that "the Occupational Health & Safety Administration has not recorded any accidents at the Jeep plant since Aug. 21, 2024, when Antonio Gaston was killed while working on the Gladiator line." This is despite the fact, as the *Blade* notes, that "OSHA requires employers to report work-related fatalities within eight hours and accidents that lead to inpatient hospitalizations, amputations, or loss of an eye within 24 hours."

To avoid reporting "lost time injuries" and paying workers compensation, employers routinely force injured workers back to work when they are assigned menial chores. A former Dundee worker described this inhuman practice during his testimony to the July 27 IWA-RFC hearing.

Additional evidence was presented during the hearing showing how management in Dundee routinely cut corners on safety to finish retooling the plant whose reopening was more than a year behind schedule. This included pressure to hurry repairs and bypass lockout/tagout procedures—the basic safeguards that stop machines being energized when they are being repaired or maintained.

After Adams' death, workers reported being assembled in an auditorium and ordered not to speak publicly; emails were sent telling employees to return "cheater keys" used to defeat lockout/tagout systems; those who tried to speak to Adams' family or expose conditions were threatened with dismissal, and one former worker says he was verbally menaced after speaking out. Far from the authorities carrying out a thorough investigation, the contractors who programmed the Cinetic washer and the very overhead gantry that killed Adams were never interviewed by OSHA, the company and the UAW.

In his report to the public hearing, Will Lehman, a leader of the IWA-RFC, called Adams a "martyr in the class war against the working class," explaining that at least 15 workers are killed on the job every day in the US, or roughly 450 workers each month, or over 5,200 every year. Globally, nearly 3 million workers lost their lives from workplace injuries and occupational diseases, an average of 8,000 deaths each day.

Lehman pointed to the broader political context pointing to the Trump administration's drive to gut whatever is left of OSHA and lift any restriction on the exploitation of the working class to further enrich the oligarchy of mega-billionaires.

Workers cannot look to the Democrats or the union bureaucracies to defend their lives, Lehman said, but had to build rank-and-file committees in every workplace "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."

Lehman concluded:

> 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.
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> Ronald Adams' tragic death must not be in vain. He symbolizes a global crisis, representing all workers who have lost their lives, suffered injuries, or endured exploitation and abuse under capitalism.
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> This hearing will review what we have uncovered so far, but this is just the beginning of a movement, an international movement to end industrial slaughter once and for all. We call on everyone here to join us in that fight.

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