

11 months since the death of Stellantis worker Ronald Adams Sr.: "We need an explanation," says widow

Jerry White
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March 7 marked 11 months since Ronald Adams Sr. was killed at the Stellantis Dundee Engine Plant in Monroe County, Michigan. His widow, Shamenia Stewart-Adams, and co-workers have still received no official explanation of what happened to her husband. The Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA) has issued no findings. The United Auto Workers (UAW) has said nothing. The engine plant is back in full production.

A spokesman from MIOSHA said that the case was “still open,” almost a year since Adams’ death. An independent investigation conducted by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), which presented its initial findings at a public hearing in Detroit in July 2025, provided evidence of widespread safety violations by management, including disregard for the most basic lockout/tagout procedures and a rush to complete the retooling of the critical engine plant, which was more than a year behind schedule. Far from opposing this, union officials from UAW President Shawn Fain down, enforced these deadly conditions and joined in the corporate coverup afterwards.

In comments to the *World Socialist Web Site*, Shamenia Stewart-Adams said, “We need an explanation as to what happened. We have not gotten an update on the investigation or anything. We’ve got no answers. You just wait—no answers. We’re just empty right now. I just feel like a report should have been given. Especially since the factory is back in full production.”

Stewart-Adams also expressed her sympathy with the widow of Antonio Gaston, a worker at the Stellantis Toledo Assembly Plant in Ohio, who was crushed to death eight months before her husband died. The worker’s widow, Renita Shores-Gaston, has filed a wrongful death lawsuit against Stellantis. “We’ve gone through similar things. There has to be justice for her family and mine,” Shamenia said.

Next month, Stellantis, a multi-billion company, is

expected to pay an \$11,292 fine in a final settlement of three serious safety violations that led to Gaston’s death, including failing to provide safety guards to protect workers from “pinch points” on the inverted IPF Chassis Delivery Conveyor. According to the family’s attorneys, workers at the plant have alleged that the guards were removed to boost production and Gaston, a materials handler, was not trained to work on the assembly line. Management allegedly assigned him there because of manpower shortages due to hundreds of previous layoffs at the plant.

Will Lehman: “Workers cannot forgive and forget”

Will Lehman, the Mack Trucks worker and socialist who is running for UAW president, condemned both Stellantis and the UAW bureaucracy for their treatment of the Adams and Gaston families.

The UAW bureaucracy is demonstrating a callous indifference for not only the victim of the working conditions at Stellantis that led to the death of Ronald Adams Sr., but towards his widow, and his many family members who have been effectively abandoned by the UAW in the family’s search for answers. To workers he was the protector of the plant, but the UAW is demonstrating that in addition to being only a number to Stellantis, he was only dues revenue to them. Workers cannot forgive and forget what happened to our brother, and both the company and bureaucracy will pay for their indifference for one of our own.

As I said in my campaign announcement, the death of Ronald Adams Sr., crushed to death while

performing maintenance, stands as a brutal indictment of a system that sacrifices workers for profit. Every day in America's industrial slaughterhouse, workers are maimed and killed on the job as corporations drive speed ups, cut safety and treat human life as if it is disposable.

We cannot defend our lives and livelihoods while we are bound hand and foot by a union apparatus that stands against us at every turn. As it is presently constituted the UAW is a union in name only. It functions to isolate us, discipline us and protect the interests of a privileged bureaucracy that is in bed with the companies and the government.

We, as workers must collectively organize in defense of our social and democratic rights, including the right to a decent standard of living, secure jobs and safe working conditions. My campaign is not about replacing one bureaucrat with another but abolishing the pro-company UAW apparatus, transferring power to workers on the shopfloor, and establishing workers control over safety and production standards by rank-and-file committees, controlled democratically by workers ourselves.

MIOSHA opened an investigation into Adams' death the day of the fatality on April 7, 2025. Nearly a year on, no findings have been released, no citations issued, and Stewart-Adams has received no communication from the agency. This is less a failure than a feature. Federal and state safety agency investigations are chronically delayed, and when they conclude, typically produce fines that are rounding errors for a corporation the size of Stellantis. The agency exists to absorb public outrage, not to hold corporations accountable.

The Dundee Engine Plant has been returned to full production. The machinery runs and the quotas are filled in a plant stained with workers' blood.

The UAW's guilty silence

In the eleven months since Adams' death, Shawn Fain's UAW has issued no statement demanding accountability from Stellantis and made no public demands of MIOSHA. Instead, it moved as quickly as possible to reopen Dundee Engine—protecting production continuity and its dues base over the demands of Adams' family and coworkers.

This is not a failure of individual leadership but the institutional character of an apparatus built on class collaboration. For decades the UAW has functioned as a labor-management partnership, suppressing rank-and-file opposition, delivering a disciplined workforce to the corporations, and pocketing the dues. The deaths of Ronald Adams Sr. and Antonio Gaston are the human cost of that arrangement.

These deaths are the direct consequence of the 2023 sellout agreements signed by Fain & Co. after the bogus "stand up" strike at GM, Ford and Stellantis. Hailed as "historic" by the UAW, the Biden administration and the corporate media, the deals paved the way for massive layoffs in the auto industry, most recently in the permanent layoff of 1,100 workers at GM's Factory Zero in Detroit. Fain who called Trump a "scab" as he stumped for Biden and Harris, turned around and hailed Trump's "America First" trade measures and illegal tariffs of the fascist president.

More than 5,000 workers are killed on the job in the United States every year—a figure that dramatically undercounts the toll when occupational illness is included. The auto industry has been among the most dangerous, as Stellantis and its rivals have driven speed increases, expanded job combinations and cut safety staffing to maximize returns. Workers who raise safety concerns face discipline or termination with the collusion of the UAW apparatus.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) demands the full public disclosure of the MIOSHA investigation; criminal accountability for Stellantis executives responsible for conditions at Dundee Engine and Toledo Assembly; and an end to the UAW's cover-up of the company's safety record. We call on autoworkers and workers throughout industry to take up the fight for the families of Ronald Adams Sr. and Antonio Gaston as their own.

The building of rank-and-file committees in opposition to the UAW-management "safety committees," is the first step in the fight to assert workers control over safety and production. This must be combined with a political struggle, uniting the full power of workers across industries and national borders, to convert the global auto industry into a public utility, as part of the socialist reorganization of the world economy to meet human need, not corporate profit and war.



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