

“It was a pleasure working with you Oscar, we love you forever buddy”

Moving tribute to Oscar Robayo, Montreal airport worker crushed to death amid systematic safety violations by subcontractor

Our reporter
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Oscar Robayo, a 39-year-old ground handling worker at Montréal–Trudeau International Airport, was crushed to death Monday while performing a routine pushback operation on a passenger jet. The fatal incident occurred due to systematic violations of basic security protocol by the subcontractor Samsic, a French-based multinational conglomerate that has played a major role in an accelerating race to the bottom in working conditions in airport operations across North America.

In an initial report and a detailed interview with a co-worker of the deceased, the *World Socialist Web Site* exposed how Oscar was forced by the absence of an extension cable to stand close by the front wheel of the massive jet while it was towed into its departure position by a tractor. He was run over by the jet as the tractor driver tried to manoeuvre the plane away from a remote port. The co-worker reviewed a litany of violated safety procedures, broken equipment and corner-cutting by Samsic that contributed to the extremely dangerous working environment that claimed Oscar’s life.

“I used to work with Oscar and met him at Samsic when I started. He was a great friend, great at his job, a smart and happy person with such an amazing personality,” the worker wrote. “Accepted people for who they were and such a kind heart.”

The outpouring of sympathy and anger following Oscar’s death has found expression in a broad readership for the WSWs’s coverage of the tragedy, as well as numerous comments on articles posted to social

media. In our initial analysis, we stressed the necessity of airport workers taking the struggle for workplace safety and improved conditions into their own hands by establishing a rank-and-file committee.

The deregulation of airport operations, triggering a race to the bottom in conditions for workers, has been spearheaded by the Liberal government. The trade unions have facilitated this process with their support for the collective bargaining framework, through which they have partnered with ruthless subcontractors like Samsic.

This underlines the need for workers to mobilize independently in a political struggle to end the dominance of corporate profit over basic services like air travel, and the safety and well-being of workers responsible for providing them. They should expect no redress from the official federal and provincial investigations launched into Oscar’s death.

The urgency of workers taking up this fight is demonstrated by the following tribute to Oscar, which reveals the harrowing conditions that his colleagues continue to be exposed to on a daily basis. We urge workers who knew Oscar or work in the highly exploitative airport operations and service sector internationally to contact us with your reports on working conditions, and help build a mass, working-class movement to place workplace safety and the running of social life under democratic, workers’ control.

I want to start off by saying I used to work with Oscar and met him at Samsic when I started. He was a great friend, great at his job, a smart and happy person with such an amazing personality. Accepted people for who they were and such a kind heart.

We would spend time together when we didn't have flights. And when I would be done with my flight, I would go help him, and the two other men we always worked with. We were always together the four of us and we would always talk about how dangerous and stupid the procedures at Samsic were.

People are overworked and the older staff has to do a lot of overtime to cover the rest. On the first day of our training, we were already outside on the tarmac and in the bag room being shown everything before we even sat down, and went through the rules and safety. I worked for Swissport years back, and we didn't get on the tarmac for two-four weeks before they showed us all the dangers and stuff like that.

At Samsic, we would have lots of broken equipment. I once had to move a bunch of cans and bring them to a plane on the tarmac without a license. I was working on an Air France flight and had to bring the max amount of carts, which is five, and they made me go alone as no one was there. I was told "The flight needs to leave now, it's already late." It was 6:07 and it was scheduled for six...seven minutes for a possible fatal accident to happen because we are low staffed and rushed. I was so nervous doing that knowing I didn't have the proper license to be driving alone and could put myself in trouble. But I did it because I was scared of saying no. I called my coworker when I got there and asked him to come back and get me when I arrived at the plane as I was not even allowed to be driving, but my supervisor told me "GO GO GO! Doesn't matter."

There are not enough people working there and there were countless times I was left to do a whole Porter flight alone or an Air France flight with someone who wasn't capable of doing the job, or didn't show up but was punched in. Countless times I was alone and told my supervisors that I had seen that person upstairs in the airport and they just never come downstairs to do their job. It was never looked at or checked. It's a free for all.

I told my company countless times that some workers were not fit to do the job or would get hurt. They still kept them. I once also had to drive a cart where the seat

was flying back and forth as I drove because the latches to hold the seat were broken.

While in the bag room, they will also start pulling cans and scream to each other to warn they are about to move. There are no radios to communicate better, it's all just yelling and hope for the best.

Accidents happen everyday, even in places we know best.

I think it's important for the company to take some type of accountability, and willingly knowing they don't follow the right procedures and just want people there right away to start because they are short on staff. Just because people apply to a job doesn't mean they are qualified, but they will take anyone to get the job "done."

I loved working there but it was because of the people like Oscar, they are the only reason I stayed there. It was a pleasure working with you Oscar, we love you forever buddy.



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