30-year-old CPKC conductor killed at Port of Montreal by moving train

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30-year-old conductor Luc Massie died Saturday, September 12 after being struck by a train at the Port of Montreal, near the Jacques-Cartier Bridge. He was working on the tracks when the train began moving, according to Montreal police.

Massie worked for Canadian Pacific Kansas City (CPKC) and was a member of the Teamsters.

In response to Massie's death, the company issued a lying statement. "The safety and well-being of our railroaders remains our highest priority," said CPKC communications director André Hannoush. As every rail worker knows, the "highest priority" for CPKC, which controls a continent-wide railroad network stretching from the Canadian Arctic to tropical Mexico, is to maximize corporate profits.

The union's response was equally familiar. "The exact circumstances of this tragedy remain unclear," said Teamsters Canada spokesperson Christopher Monette. "We will press both the government and the rail companies for answers." The Teamsters, like the entire union bureaucracy, would never propose any action that risks their partnerships with "the government" and "rail companies," a corporatist alliance developed over the past four decades on the basis of escalating worker exploitation, deregulation, the gutting of safety provisions, and rampant corporate profiteering.

The circumstances are not unclear. A worker was fatally struck by a moving train—the preventable outcome of an industry and system that prioritizes profit over the most basic safeguards of human life. The death toll will continue to rise as long as production is subordinated to profit—that is, until workers take control of production, and the question of safety, into their own hands.

A death trap by design

The Port of Montreal is one of the busiest and most congested shipping hubs in North America—a dense intermodal operation where the railway, the port authority, the terminal operators and the trucking and shipping firms must coordinate the movement of multi-thousand-ton cargo and machines through tight spaces. The railways break down massive incoming trains and assemble new ones in a compact, high-velocity sorting yard. Conductors and switchmen throw track switches by hand and ride the sides of moving railcars, while truck corridors and gantry cranes operate in the same space, under blinding lights, with multiple employers' machinery moving at once.

Massie's death is the latest in a spate of worker fatalities at the port. In the spring of 2024, three workers died there: two truck drivers run over at the Viau and Cast terminals, and a warehouse worker crushed when an unstable load of stone slabs tipped over inside a container.

Just two weeks before Massie's death, Oscar Robayo—a 39-year-old ramp worker—was crushed to death by a reversing Airbus at Montréal-Trudeau Airport. As the World Socialist Web Site reported, Robayo's death was "the tragic product of systematic deregulation of airport operations by the federal government and rampant profiteering throughout the air travel sector." His employer, the subcontractor Samsic, won the airport's ground-handling contract through a "contract flip" engineered to slash labor costs. A former Samsic ramp supervisor subsequently exposed the deadly conditions under which workers have been forced to labour for years.

Massie and Robayo's deaths are interlinked, the outcome of the same system of subcontracting and deregulation, speed-up and understaffing, under which profit is placed above the most basic safeguards of human life. Acute traumatic injuries and fatalities are rising sharply, concentrated in logistics and transport. Transport accidents now account for more than a third of all workplace injury deaths nationwide—more than 1,000 workers died of work-related causes in Canada in 2024 alone, roughly three every day. The true toll is likely far higher, as the deaths of precarious, gig-economy and immigrant logistics workers often go uncounted.

CPKC's record of criminal negligence in workplace deaths

The specific circumstances of Massie's death have not been released, but it follows a dangerous pattern. Between 2010 and 2019, the Transportation Safety Board (TSB) recorded 189 "unplanned and uncontrolled movements" of trains. The railroads have refused to install safeguards against this problem, including inexpensive automatic parking brakes that have been available for over two decades.

The corporation Massie worked for—CPKC, the merged successor of Canadian Pacific and Kansas City Southern—is a self-policing monopoly that runs one of the largest rail networks in North America and generates billions a year. CP was the corporation whose negligence the TSB found responsible for the deaths of three rail workers at Field, British Columbia, in February 2019, when a train began to creep and ran uncontrolled down a mountain grade. The day before he died, engineer Andrew Dockrell had filed a hazard report on the same stretch of track. A paper copy was later found on his body.

The Field tragedy was the product of systematic safety neglect. The TSB found that failing brakes in cold weather had been "normalized," that CP had abandoned without explanation its rule against descending Field Hill below -25°C, and that years of crew hazard reports had produced no risk assessment and no corrective action.

On the night of the derailment, the train's air brakes leaked pressure in the cold while the relief crew was brought in—and the hand brakes that would have held the train were never applied, on management's directive, because setting them would have slowed the operation. This is the "safety culture" of precision-scheduled railroading (PSR), longer, heavier trains with inadequate brake systems. These are the conditions Massie worked under at the Port of Montreal, where speed-up and congestion put workers on foot in the path of moving trains.

No one was charged for the negligence and indifference to workers' lives that led to the fatalities at Field. When the TSB's lead investigator sought to refer the Field derailment to the RCMP for criminal charges, CP threatened the board with a lawsuit; the investigator was removed and the chair issued a grovelling apology to the company. The TSB has no power to enforce a single recommendation, and the Liberal government ultimately allowed CP to essentially write its own safety rules following the report.

Under the Westray Law, enacted in 2004, no Class 1 railway executive has ever been successfully prosecuted for a railway accident or worker death. When criminal blame is assigned, it falls on frontline workers: after the Lac-Mégantic disaster, which killed 47 people in 2013, the state charged the train engineer and two other operations staff—not the executives who ran the company. The corporations are instead handled through paltry regulatory fines, a fraction of their billions in profit.

Government and union complicity in railroad worker deaths

While issuing its customary condolences for his death, Robayo's union, the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM), had earlier sanctioned the very subcontracting regime that killed him, pushing through a collective agreement with Samsic that it hailed as "a victorious turn of events."

The same is true on the railways. When the TSB issued its damning report on Field, the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference—the same union now promising to "press for answers"—responded with a declaration of "trust" that its recommendations "will be adopted."

As the WSWS wrote at the time, the Teamsters' statement was "a miserable display of its subservience to CP Rail's corporate dictates."

The dangerous working conditions across Canada's transportation sector have produced numerous class battles over recent years. In July 2023, when 7,400 dockworkers shut down Canada's West Coast ports over wages, safety, injury and fatigue, the Trudeau Liberal government, with the complicity of the International Longshoremen and Warehouse Union (ILWU) top brass, repeatedly intervened to illegalize worker job action and impose a concessionary contract. The same government criminalized the Montreal dockers' strike in 2021, and the CUPE bureaucracy shut down a 12-day strike the year before.

The state is now moving to expand its strikebreaking powers. Since August 2024, Liberal labour ministers have repeatedly invoked a cooked-up "reinterpretation" of Section 107 of the Canada Labour Code to criminalize strikes and impose binding arbitration, including against dockworkers in British Columbia and Quebec, railroaders at both national railways, Canada Post workers and airline flight attendants, without even a parliamentary vote.

On Monday, in response to the demands of the rail, airline and port corporations, the Carney Liberal government introduced legislation to strengthen the powers of the government to illegalize worker job action. The aim is to strip federally regulated transport and logistics workers of what remains of their right to strike, precisely as the government readies a five-percent-of-GDP war budget and demands that workers make "sacrifices" in "Team Canada" to protect the profits of big business in the trade war with the US.

The next confrontations are already on the calendar. The contract covering some 6,000 locomotive engineers, conductors and yard coordinators at CN expires December 31, 2026, and the agreement covering more than 7,400 longshore workers at the West Coast ports of Vancouver and Prince Rupert expires March 31, 2027, with negotiations set to begin in November. CPKC's own agreement with the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference runs to December 31, 2027. When those contracts expire, the same bureaucracies that have surrendered every previous fight will once again capitulate.

Workers must take control of safety on the job

The corporations will not prioritize safety. The regulators will not compel them. The unions will not fight. The only force capable of putting an end to Canada's industrial slaughterhouse is the workers themselves.

Workers must form independent rank-and-file safety committees with the unconditional power to halt any train movement, any port operation, any flight maneuver that threatens a worker's life. This was the demand advanced on the Canadian railways after Field by the CP Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which called for worker control over safety and the right to halt dangerous operations. The committee's founding appeal in March 2022—to build "a multi-national worker-led counter-offensive" against the rail monopolies that sacrifice workers' lives to profit—remains just as urgent today.

In Hamilton, Ontario, more than 1,200 workers at National Steel Car have been on strike since August 12, after rejecting the company's "last, best and final offer." At the centre of their fight is the abolition of the plant's "incentive program"—a piecework system in all but name—which the National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee has documented as the cause of three deaths between 2020 and 2022: the quota cannot be met at a regular pace, only by cutting corners, skipping safety checks and driving the body to its limit. A worker who stops the line to address a hazard forfeits a quarter of their pay.

The piecework system at National Steel Car has the same logic as precision-scheduled railroading on the tracks, whose normalization of brake failures killed three men at Field; the same logic as the subcontracting "flip" that killed Oscar Robayo; and the same as the known danger—trains moving on workers—that took Massie's life at the Port of Montreal. It is the logic of production for profit, which treats human life as disposable. As one striking National Steel Car worker told the WSWS, addressing the ramp workers at Trudeau airport, "regardless of industry, or language, we face the same day-to-day issues with just coming home at the end of the day with our limbs still intact."

That is the system the Teamsters, the USW, the IAM and the rest of the union bureaucracy exist to protect. The United Steelworkers negotiated the very letter of understanding that makes the piecework rates non-grievable, then pointed to its own handiwork as the reason "nothing can be done." In the current strike it has abandoned the demand for abolition and offered instead to administer the incentive program to do the company's dirty work for it.

CPKC is a cross-border corporation, the product of the 2023 merger of Canadian Pacific and Kansas City Southern; the same company that killed three men at Field and a conductor in Montreal runs trains through both countries, and the same unions police its workers on both sides of the border. The railroaders at the Port of Montreal, the ramp workers at Trudeau airport and the dockers of Vancouver belong in a network of rank-and-file committees—as advocated by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) building a single, cross-border struggle against the profit system that sacrifices their lives.

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