

Aviation workers vote to establish rank-and-file committee, launch independent workers' inquiry into death of Montreal Airport ramp worker Oscar Robayo

Our reporter
9 October 2026

Are you an aviation industry worker or an expert willing to provide testimony to the independent workers' inquiry into the death of Oscar Robayo? Contact the Aviation Workers Rank-and-File Committee by emailing aviationworkersrfc@gmail.com or filling out the form at the end of this article.

Aviation workers from across Canada resolved at a meeting Tuesday to establish the Aviation Workers Rank-and-File Committee and voted to launch an independent workers' inquiry into the death of Montreal Airport ramp worker Oscar Robayo. Robayo, a 39-year-old employee of the French-based multinational Samsic, was crushed to death by the nose gear of an Airbus A350 at Montréal-Trudeau International Airport on August 24.

The meeting endorsed the following resolution:

For an Independent Workers' Inquiry into the Death of Oscar Robayo!

Oscar Robayo, a ramp agent employed by Samsic Assistance Canada at Montréal-Trudeau International Airport, was crushed to death by the nose gear of an Airbus A350-900 during a routine pushback maneuver on August 24, 2026.

Whereas Samsic, a French multinational, was installed at Montréal-Trudeau in 2023 as the lowest bidder operating with reduced labor costs—a process known to create risks for workers and passengers;

Whereas testimonies from Robayo's colleagues and a former Samsic supervisor have established that Samsic systematically flouts basic safety procedures;

Whereas the federal government has long followed a policy of deregulation, semi-privatization, and the proliferation of subcontracting, which has produced a race to the bottom in safety conditions;

Whereas Transport Canada and the Labour Program ignored a May 2024 report documenting dangerous equipment at Samsic, proving that state regulatory agencies are unable to enforce their own laws;

Whereas the International Association of Machinists (IAM), of which Robayo was a member, facilitated contract flipping and signed a collective agreement with Samsic despite knowing that workers' safety was being systematically ignored;

Whereas the official investigations by the federal Transportation Safety Board and Quebec's CNESST are overseen by the same governments responsible for the deregulation;

Be it resolved that:

The Aviation Workers Rank-and-File Committee, supported by the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS), launches an independent workers' inquiry into the death of Oscar Robayo. The purpose is to collect testimonies from ramp agents, ground staff and all workers in the aviation industry with knowledge of the conditions at Samsic, Montréal-Trudeau Airport, and throughout the air travel sector, and to publish its findings publicly.

The inquiry will be conducted in solidarity with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), in order to place the conditions at Montréal-Trudeau within the broader context of workers' struggles worldwide to stop workplace deaths and for better working conditions in every industry.

Discussion exposes disastrous consequences of government deregulation and "contract flipping"

The meeting was opened by WSWS writer Felix Gauthier, who delivered a report outlining how the conditions that produced Robayo's death resulted from decades of privatization, deregulation and subcontracting overseen by successive Liberal and Conservative federal governments, in which the trade union bureaucracies have been deeply complicit.

Robayo was performing a routine pushback when the missing extension cable that should have let him communicate with the flight crew from a safe distance forced him to stand beside the aircraft's nose gear. The tow truck's rearview cameras were likely broken, preventing the driver from seeing Robayo as they performed the manoeuvre.

Samsic management pressured the crew to rush the flight, which was already one-and-a-half hours late when Robayo and his colleagues began the pushback. Robayo's coworkers described him as "organized, calm and never reckless."

In his report, Gauthier stressed the common experiences of workers around the world in the face of an onslaught by the established political parties on working conditions, public services and social programs. "The death toll of the existing workplace regime is estimated to be around 3 million a year worldwide," he noted. "As an article we published last year showed, the death rate in Canadian workplaces is estimated at three workers per day, whereas in the United States it is estimated at one worker every 99 minutes. The entire ideological and political establishment

considers these figures to be the normal cost of doing business.”

He detailed the background to Robayo’s death. Samsic took over ground handling services in Montreal in 2023 as part of a “contract flip,” a process where a subcontractor underbids an existing contractor by cutting labour costs. This process was facilitated by the federal Liberal government, which in 2021 implemented a reform to section 47.3 of the Canada Labour Code that entrenched “contract flipping.” While the reform ostensibly protected workers’ wages when a new contractor takes over service provision at an airport, the government refused to extend this protection to seniority and collective bargaining rights. In practice, this gave subcontractors the latitude to avoid rehiring higher paid, more senior workers or alter job descriptions to justify pay cuts.

Explaining the significance of an independent workers’ inquiry, Gauthier pointed to the precedent of the independent rank-and-file inquiry carried out by the IWA-RFC into the death of Ronald Adams Sr., a machine repairman crushed by a gantry crane at Stellantis’ Dundee Engine plant in Michigan.

Gauthier called for the formation of an Aviation Workers Rank-and-File Committee, linked to the IWA-RFC, capable of carrying out a similar inquiry: gathering testimony from workers who are afraid to speak, accessing evidence the company is hiding, speaking to industry experts with detailed knowledge of aviation safety issues and publishing the findings—entirely independent of the corporation, the state regulatory bodies and the union apparatus, each of which has an interest in burying the truth.

Speaking in favour of the establishment of the Aviation Workers Rank-and-file Committee and the calling of the workers’ inquiry into Robayo’s death, one attendee declared, “This is the only way as far as I know that we can outflank the system we are in.”

In the discussion that followed, workers drew on decades of experience in the industry to explain how the present “safety” regime actually functions.

A pilot who entered the industry in the early 1990s recalled a period of enormous changes, in which conditions were often such that he was surprised there had not been more accidents than there were. He recounted his own experience outlining the lack of support for pilots’ health. The pressures discouraging pilots from taking care of their health are both a danger to pilots themselves and their passengers.

Another participant pointed to the threat posed by Samsic’s shoddy equipment, which prompted workers in 2024 to file a complaint with the federal Labour Program. The problem, he said, is “money and structure.”

The subsequent discussion stressed the importance of mobilizing the independent industrial and political power of the working class. The more rank-and-file workers get together and make a stand, the more they can bring their social power to bear to force improvements to workplace safety and other conditions, in opposition to the rigged, pro-employer infrastructure of official oversight bodies and the union-backed “collective bargaining” system. These mechanisms are designed to smother the class struggle, while giving employers all the tools they need to impose concessions, gut safety standards and boost corporate profits.

For over four decades, the entire union bureaucracy has connived in sweeping attacks on workers, including wages, conditions, safety rules and public spending. The union bureaucracy’s complicity in producing the conditions that claimed Oscar’s life is summed up by the behaviour of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM), which was celebrating its “partnership” with Samsic management as recently as August 2025. The IAM issued a brief message following Robayo’s death that failed to even mention him by name and labelled the fatal incident a “tragic accident.”

One attendee referred in this context to the report on the 1989 Dryden, Ontario, passenger jet crash which killed 24. He recalled that the crew in

the back of the aircraft—flight attendants and pilots alike—could see the danger of the snow accumulating on the wings and did not speak up.

“Everyone has a responsibility to report a concern,” he said. “Yet front-line workers who see a serious concern cannot speak up with any expectation that it will be addressed.” He added, “That is so wrong that it is frightening, and the bureaucrats have made it happen.”

The attendee also drew a link with the Lac-Mégantic tragedy, when a train derailed and exploded in 2013, claiming the lives of 47 people in the Quebec town. The railways operate under the same Safety Management System as the airlines, he commented.

The inquiry will not restrict its scope to Samsic. The deregulation of the air travel industry, going back to the late 1970s and US President Ronald Reagan’s firing of 11,000 air traffic controllers in 1981, was spearheaded by governments in every country as part of a general onslaught on the wages, working conditions and living standards of the entire working class.

- The trade union bureaucracies, including the IAM, CUPE, Unifor and others in Canada, have facilitated this process by enforcing round after round of sellout contracts on workers and sabotaging worker resistance in the name of upholding “collective bargaining,” and the bureaucrats’ “partnerships” with the bosses and government ministers. Participants therefore agreed the inquiry must examine all parties culpable for the dangerous, life-threatening working conditions that prevail at airports and throughout the industry.

Support the workers’ inquiry into the death of Oscar Robayo! Join the Aviation Workers Rank-and-File Committee!

The founding of the Aviation Workers Rank-and-File Committee gives workers throughout the industry, in Canada and internationally, an independent organ to take up the fight against the workplace conditions that killed Oscar Robayo.

The urgent task now is to expand the AWRFC’s membership throughout the air travel industry. We urge all workers who agree with the need to mobilize the rank and file in opposition to deregulation, speed-up and the collaboration by the trade union bureaucracies with management to join the committee today.

The independent workers’ inquiry into the death of Oscar Robayo can succeed only if it secures strong support from the working class throughout the aviation industry internationally and from other sectors.

We make an urgent appeal to ramp agents, ground staff, pilots, flight attendants and all workers in the aviation industry in Canada and internationally to come forward with testimony about conditions at Samsic, at Montréal-Trudeau and throughout the sector.

The AWRFC will guarantee anonymity to workers who wish to speak freely but are fearful of reprisals from their employer or the union bureaucracies. At the same time, we call on airline industry experts to provide testimony about the consequences for workplace safety and the travelling public of the systematic subordination of air travel to corporate profiteering over the past half-century. Contact the committee at aviationworkersrfc@gmail.com or by filling out the form below.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact