Samsic’s global operations: A lucrative business based on government deregulation and risking workers’ lives

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At a meeting on October 6, aviation workers from across Canada voted to establish the Aviation Workers Rank-and-File Committee and to launch an independent workers’ inquiry into the death of Oscar Robayo. Robayo, 39, a ramp agent employed by Samsic Assistance Canada, was crushed by the nose gear of a French Bee Airbus A350 during a routine pushback on 24 August at Montreal Airport.

Based on interviews with Samsic employees, and the report of a whistleblower, the *World Socialist Web Site* established that Robayo was forced to work without the extension cable that would have kept him at a safe distance from the aircraft; that the equipment on the ramp was in a state of generalized disrepair; and that the workers had repeatedly raised complaints that were ignored by Samsic and government regulators.

The death at Montréal-Trudeau Airport was treated as an isolated tragedy by the media, the International Association of Machinists (IAM) union, and the authorities. But only six weeks earlier, on July 13, Hafida Drici, 53, a CGT (French General Confederation of Trade Unions) delegate with twenty years’ service, was crushed by a runaway bus on the tarmac at Paris-Charles-de-Gaulle. She worked for Samsic Assistance Shuttle, another subsidiary of the same group.

Drici reportedly got out of the stationary bus to greet a colleague, but the vehicle suddenly began to move and crushed her against another bus. *L’Humanité* reported the bus was a 2008 vehicle from the company’s retired fleet, returned to service after newer buses broke down. Brake defects had been reported to the Drieets, the French labour inspectorate, during a month-long strike in April 2026. The same brake warning later appeared on the bus she was using.

As Samsic’s global operations make clear, the deaths of Robayo and Drici were not accidents. They are an integral part of a global business strategy that calculates worker deaths as a cost of doing business, facilitated by government-spearheaded deregulation and the ruthless pursuit of corporate profit.

What is Samsic?

Samsic is a family-owned group founded in 1986 in Brittany by Christian Roulleau. It is headquartered in Cesson-Sévigné, near Rennes. In January 2019, Roulleau handed direction to his son-in-law, Thierry Geffroy. The group reported €4.1 billion in revenue in 2025 and 155,000 employees in 27 countries.

Its core business is facility management: cleaning, security, green spaces, maintenance, logistics, reception, temporary staffing. It describes itself as the second-largest cleaning company in France, the seventh-largest security company and the eighth-largest staffing company. Its airport division, Samsic Airport, is a smaller but strategically important vertical: roughly 8,000 employees, €460 million in revenue, and 33 stations.

Samsic’s airport division is established in Paris-CDG, Paris-Orly, Le Bourget, Lyon, Nice, Nantes, Toulouse, Rennes, Brest, Caen, Dinard, Mulhouse, Cherbourg; Brussels-Zaventem, Charleroi, Liège; Montréal-Trudeau, Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton; Chicago O’Hare, San Francisco; Pointe-à-Pitre, Fort-de-France, Cayenne; Sainte-Marie, Réunion; Santo Domingo, Puerto Plata; Lisbon, Zagreb, Belgrade and Doha. North America accounts for more than 30 percent of Samsic Assistance’s revenue. The division’s revenue has grown by roughly 250 percent since 2021, and the group targets a 35 to 40 percent North American share by the end of 2027.

Through the Roulleau family holding company called F.F.R., Samsic borrowed aggressively in the form of bonds and loans to finance rapid expansion by buying up competitors.

Samsic’s entry into the Canadian market exemplifies its business model. The company seized on the downturn of airport employment during the early stages of the pandemic and favourable federal government regulatory reforms to rapidly expand its presence at most of the country’s main airports.

In February 2023, an Aéroports de Montréal (ADM) committee of airline representatives re-awarded the ground-handling licences at Montréal-Trudeau. Swissport was dropped, with roughly 195 jobs eliminated. The licences went to two newcomers, Menzies Aviation and Samsic Assistance, plus a renewal for the incumbent TSAS, a subsidiary of Avjet. Workers had to reapply for their jobs at lower wages, losing seniority and benefits. Samsic began operations at the airport in May 2023.

The ability of subcontractors like Samsic to ratchet up the exploitation of low-paid workers is directly bound up with the semi-privatization of Canada’s major airports in the 1990s, when the Liberal government allowed nonprofit airport authorities to take over operations and subcontract ground services to third parties.

After years of complaints about deteriorating working conditions and safety concerns from trade unions and workers, Justin Trudeau’s Liberal government announced a reform to section 47.3 of the Canada Labour Code that was touted as a move designed to protect workers from low wages.

The 2021 reform nominally introduced a provision requiring a subcontractor to pay the same remuneration to employees as its predecessor after a service contract changed hands, a process referred to as “contract flipping.” However, the rule was made all but irrelevant by the government’s conscious refusal to order a new subcontractor to

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respect seniority rights or the previous collective agreement.

As a result, subcontractors could simply hire new workers with no seniority to cut labour costs, or change job titles to reduce wages. This was precisely how Samsic secured the Montreal contract in 2023.

In 2025, Samsic bought the assets of Avjet TSAS at Montréal-Trudeau: 320 employees, some 700 pieces of ground-support equipment, a maintenance shop, a warehouse and a charging zone. Mirela Rusu, formerly vice-president of operations at Avjet, became chief executive of Samsic Assistance Canada; Stefano Sciotti is president.

The same logic operates in France, where Samsic took over the Air France crew-transport contract at Roissy from Keolis in 2023. The CFDT delegate Mourad Zemmouri described the sequence: Samsic won the contract in January 2023 by proposing a cut-rate offer; it was due to take over in March of that year; and workers had to go on strike to prevent the elimination of bonuses, leave and working-time protections.

Canada's trade union bureaucracies have facilitated deregulation and subcontracting throughout the airline industry. They view themselves as partners of the Liberal government and have systematically sabotaged all opposition to austerity, privatization and concessionary contracts from the working class for over four decades.

The role of the IAM at Montreal Airport is exemplary in this regard. After denouncing Samsic's initial contract victory in 2023 as "devastating" for workers, the IAM quickly came to terms with Samsic and reached a collective agreement in November 2024 that excluded workers from the protections offered by union membership for their first three months of employment.

In August 2025, the IAM's Local 2309 hosted a meet-and-greet with Samsic management at the airport Marriott. The union's own release boasted of a "strong partnership" and claimed that the deal had brought about "the complete elimination of non-unionized companies from Montréal-Trudeau Airport." Tsoukalas praised "collaboration between companies and unions" as essential "for the health and safety" of workers.

After Oscar Robayo's death, the IAM issued a token 120-word statement labelling the fatal incident a "tragic accident" and leaving the investigation up to the very government-sponsored regulators that repeatedly ignored workers' warnings about the dangerous conditions they were being forced to labour under.

Repeated reports of safety problems were ignored

Prior to the deaths of the Samsic workers in Canada and France, concerns were raised about dangerous working conditions, but regulators did nothing.

In March 2025, the occupational-health service ACMS, the leading service of its kind in the Paris region, carried out a risk assessment at Samsic Assistance Shuttle. The report found daily noise exposure of 83.3 decibels, above the 80-decibel threshold that triggers preventive action; a cab that overheated constantly because of the engine; restricted visibility that forced the driver to lower the right seat to see the right mirror and to contort to see to the left; exhaust smells in the cab; and a windscreen soiled with black particles.

"The new coaches present frequent failures and maintenance is not always carried out quickly," the report concluded.

In April 2026, the drivers of Airport Shuttle One, the Samsic subsidiary that runs terminal-to-terminal transfers at Roissy, struck for a month. Roughly 100 workers demanded higher wages—the company had offered 1 percent—and denounced "buses in very bad condition, broken seats, under-inflated tyres, and brake defects."

Mustapha Assailal, a driver and delegate of the STAAAP union, wrote to the Drieets during the strike. He reported a brake-wear warning light, a fire-sensor fault and bald tyres, with photographs and emails. He later told *L'Humanité* that the same brake warning was present on the bus Drici was using on 13 July. The bus was a 2008 vehicle from the retired fleet, pressed back into service after newer buses broke down.

The strike did not produce a published settlement. Samsic used its temporary-work arm to replace strikers with interim staff. The Drieets complaint did not produce a public injunction, a stop-work order or a prosecution. The union ended the strike after about a month. No agreement was made public, and such union-aligned organizations as Lutte Ouvrière and Révolution Permanente, which initially covered the strike, fell completely silent until Drici's death. No lessons were drawn, not even an explanation provided of what happened. The fleet stayed on the road.

Included in the reports were emergency-exit windows that had been replaced with Plexiglas, which cannot be broken in an evacuation. The gendarmerie des transports aériens photographed the vehicles. He reported red warning lights that require the immediate withdrawal of a vehicle, but the buses continued to run. He reported a passenger door that detached during a turn. The unions filed "dangers graves et imminents" reports covering the lack of visibility, the absence of a handbrake alarm, excessive noise, a coolant leak, and pollution from the new buses. The union demanded the immediate closure of the fuel station where the accident occurred. Samsic did not respond to *L'Humanité*'s questions.

The CGT's statements after Drici's death contained demands addressed to the state and the employer, but no strategy for the workers to enforce safety themselves.

In Canada, workers likewise repeatedly raised concerns about Samsic. A former Samsic worker who spoke to the WSWS provided information about a complaint filed to the federal Labour Program in the spring of 2024 drawing attention to broken equipment and damaged tractors that produced no response.

The same defective equipment appeared at both airports: brakes, doors, missing parts, deferred maintenance, and a workforce under time pressure to ensure that airlines and ground handling subcontractors can turn a profit at their expense. He said:

> Every time we went to go push back a plane, we had to read these cards. That was like a checklist for us before we pushed out the plane to make sure that it was safe, that we had all the necessary equipment to push out this plane safely, you know...
>
> They took over. … But the thing that's crazy is they never focused on safety. They were all about get your plane out on time. Get it out. Get it out. Get it out. And during the beginning stages of Samsic, a lot of us old ATS employees try to fight and implement safety with these cards. You know, hey, let's get a checklist going because the previous company used to do this and you know, used to have a checklist before we pushed out these planes. … They told us that it was too expensive to get all the employees cuz Samsic was a big company. It was too expensive to laminate all the cards for the company. Come on. What a joke…

The worker provided the WSWS with a copy of his report to the Labour Program in May 2024, where he wrote, "The equipment at Samsic is deemed unsafe as I have tried to report this to managers but it goes ignored and say they need the equipment and to leave it alone...When you drive some gas tractors, the passenger door has no door handle so they tie a string. And you're supposed to hold it so it don't fly open."

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Rank-and-file workers must take control of workplace safety, mobilize to end corporate profiteering in airline industry

The deaths of Hafida Drici and Oscar Robayo were not the result of a single defective bus or missing cable. Rather, they took place due to the disastrous state of workplace safety produced by decades of government-imposed deregulation and rampant corporate profiteering in which the trade union bureaucracies are fully complicit.

The Aviation Workers Rank-and-File Committee voted to launch an independent workers' inquiry into Robayo's death based on the understanding that the only way to safeguard workers' lives and reduce workplace injuries is for democratic workers' control over safety.

The mobilization of workers in the air, on the ground, and in airport terminals to uncover the criminal practices of the globally operating corporations that put their lives at risk, and advance non-negotiable demands that workers must fight to impose, will be major steps forward in the struggle to prioritize workplace safety over capitalist profit.

We urge all workers with experience in the airline industry, whether in Canada, France, or around the world, to come forward with testimony to the workers' inquiry. Experts in the aviation industry who can shed light on the disregard of basic safety procedures and the consequences this can bring should also speak out.

The AWRFC will ensure anonymity for workers who fear retaliation for raising their voice in protest at a system that sooner rather than later will claim its next victim. Email aviationworkersrfc@gmail.com or fill out the form below.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

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