

Detroit area Ford worker dies in apparent suicide at stamping factory

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In another tragic workplace shooting, a young temporary part-time worker at the Ford Woodhaven Stamping Plant south of Detroit apparently killed himself on Friday. At the time of his death the worker was facing disciplinary action for alleged attendance issues, according to press reports.

The victim, Jacoby Hennings, of Harper Woods, was 21 years old and had been working at the plant since March. He had reportedly been written up several times previously for being late. According to eyewitness reports Hennings was sent home by management Friday morning and returned later with a gun.

According to other reports the worker was brought to the union offices in the plant, where he confronted the United Auto Workers local shop chairman.

A police spokesman told Channel 7 Action News, "There was a labor relations issue. At some point, he presented a gun." Police were called and officers said Hennings turned the gun on himself as they approached.

Reports of a possible bomb at the scene later turned out to be false.

Officials of the United Auto Workers Local 387 at the plant have made no public comments. A call by the *World Socialist Web Site* to Local 387 has not been returned.

Leonard, a Woodhaven Stamping worker, told ClickOnDetroit, "This morning I was on the line getting ready to go, and then one of the part-timers came in late ... It looked like he was under the influence or something. They sent him home. They walked him out.

"About an hour-and-a-half later my chairman comes running through. He tells me to drop everything I'm doing. 'Run as fast as you can, there is a shooter in the plant.'

"I have anxiety real bad, my chest is hurting."

The regularity with which workplace shootings take place in the United States is a symptom of deep societal dysfunction. At this time, it is impossible to say what combination of personal, work or family stresses may have triggered the latest tragedy.

According to his Facebook page, Hennings was married. He had attended Southeastern High School in Detroit, located in an area noted for deep poverty produced by decades of factory closings and auto layoffs.

Friends reported on Facebook reported being deeply shocked by Henning's death. Some expressed skepticism of official police accounts that the young worker took his own life.

The Woodhaven Stamping Plant employs about 420 workers and opened in 1964. Over the years employment has been decimated at the plant, which at one time employed 5,000. The facility builds parts such as door panels, hoods, quarter panels, roofs and tailgates. After the shooting management sent day shift workers home, but planned to resume production on the second shift.

While there is much that still needs to be determined, the tragedy is a further indictment of the UAW, which functions as a tool of corporate management. Autoworkers and, in particular, the younger generation of miserably paid and highly exploited second-tier, temporary and part-time workers do not get the slightest shop floor representation from the UAW.

Stamping plants are known for the high number of injuries and even deaths suffered by workers. Over the years, contract safety language has been eroded or ignored by the UAW. Conditions have further eroded under the "Strategic Partnership Agreement" between Ford, the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health

Administration (MIOsha) and the UAW. As part of the arrangement, Ford gets advance notice of MIOsha inspections. The practical effect is to make management and their puppets in the UAW responsible for health and safety conditions with the barest fig leaf of outside monitoring.

Under terms of the 2015 national contract the United Auto Workers agreed to a lower pay scale for second tier workers at Woodhaven Stamping as well as Sterling Axle and Ford's Rawsonville, Michigan facility, arguing this was needed to make the plants “competitive” and forestall closure. Wages for second-tier workers at those facilities top out at \$19.86 an hour, far less than the top pay rate for second-tier workers at other plants.

Further, in exchange for a \$300 million investment at Woodhaven Stamping, the UAW agreed that higher paid “legacy” workers and even second-tier workers would not be eligible for jobs on the new hot metal line. Instead these jobs are essentially a “third tier,” who start at \$9 per hour—fifty cents more than the state’s minimum wage of \$8.50—and top out at \$12 per hour after years of service.

As part of the 2015 agreement, UAW Vice President James Settles signed a memorandum of understanding stating that at Woodhaven and the two other plants “an expeditious transformation to an In-progression non-skilled workforce is desirable and will require various joint efforts.” It went on to pledge that the UAW would help Ford, in essence, drive out older, higher-paid workers in order to transition to an all low-wage workforce.

The 2015 national UAW contract expanded the number of temporary and part-time workers permitted in the auto plants so the auto companies could quickly downsize their workforces if sales fell. These workers have few if any job protections or benefits. Under terms of the 2015 agreement new temporary workers start at \$15.78 per hour and reach a maximum pay rate of \$19.28 after four years.

One worker, commenting on the shooting, posted on Facebook, “The temporary workers at Ford hours are cut, with little benefits, no sick days, no vacation, no holiday pay, no bonuses, less pay, crappier jobs ... I wonder if that had something to do with him snapping.”

It is significant that Henning’s death occurred in the presence of the UAW plant chairman. Clearly the

young man saw UAW officials as adversaries rather than allies. Indeed, the union functions as a bribed agency of management as further evidenced by the ongoing investigation into corruption of UAW officials. According to court documents, Fiat Chrysler executives skimmed millions of dollars from UAW-Fiat Chrysler joint training funds to pay off top union officials in order to keep them “fat, dumb and happy.”

The death of Hennings follows reports of widespread sexual abuse by managers and UAW officials of employees at the Ford Chicago Assembly Plant. A lawyer for workers in a class-action lawsuit has presented evidence that more than 1,500 female workers were subject to sexual abuse and racial harassment by both Ford management and UAW officials from 2012 to 2014.

Ford settled a separate Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) case for \$10.1 million over similar allegations by female autoworkers at the assembly plant and nearby Chicago stamping plant.



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