

Autoworkers speak on suicide of young Ford worker at Detroit area plant

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The tragic suicide last Friday of a young Ford autoworker, Jacoby Hennings, has shed light on the deplorable conditions facing temporary and part-time workers in the auto factories.

Hennings, 21, of Harper Woods, Michigan, shot himself after receiving a warning over attendance at the Ford Woodhaven Stamping Plant, south of Detroit. The young worker had been at the facility since March and, according to information received by the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*, he had been despondent over the treatment he received as a part-time, temporary worker.

Woodhaven Stamping makes door panels, roofs, tailgates and other parts. There are 420 workers at the sprawling facility, which at one time employed 5,000. The United Auto Workers (UAW) agreed to substandard conditions at the plant for newly hired workers and lower-paid tier-two workers as part of the 2015 UAW-Ford agreement.

A tier-two worker at the Fiat Chrysler Jefferson Assembly plant who had contact with a relative of Hennings told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, “He was a former part-time worker at [Fiat Chrysler] Warren Truck before he went to Ford. One of his gripes was they were keeping him as part-time instead of moving him to full-time. That was one of the reasons he shot himself.

“He was getting frustrated with the jobs they gave him. That is the life of a part-timer.”

As part of the 2015 national contract deal, the United Auto Workers agreed to expand the number of temporary and part-time workers in the auto factories to allow Ford to quickly downsize its workforce in the event of a sales slowdown. These disposable workers face constant uncertainty and get lower pay and fewer benefits than regular employees. They can work long

hours one week and have few if any the next, even though they have car payments and other regular bills to meet. While in the past such workers might expect to eventually become full-time, the auto companies can keep these workers at part-time status indefinitely, often for years.

“People at Warren Truck said he (Hennings) was a nice guy,” the Jefferson worker said. “But, they like to give the TPTs (Temporary Part Time) the shitty jobs. The UAW says it likes to focus on the full-time employees. They said that right in front of everyone in the plant.

“The life of a part-time worker is hard. They give you the hardest jobs. Sometimes they work harder than the full-timers. The only time a part-time worker gets a good job is if she is sleeping with the supervisor. They can keep part-time workers forever and they can hire unlimited numbers of part-timers and never have to roll them over (to full-time).”

She said part-time employment was a major factor in her decision to oppose the 2015 UAW national contract. “People don’t understand what we voted for [in the 2015 national contract]. They want you to dedicate your whole life to the company. If they call you to come in, and you say ‘no,’ you are fired.

“One part-time worker here had their lights cut off. We had to take up a collection for her. I’ve been there, I know.”

She said she had worked 15 years part-time before coming in as a full-time worker under the lower, second-tier pay scale. “I got food stamps and Section 8 [federal housing voucher] because I didn’t get enough hours.

“He probably wasn’t getting enough hours. It’s all based on favoritism. There is one person who does the scheduling for TPTs. That is why my cousin quit. She was hardly ever getting scheduled and going broke as a

result.

“Back when I started you worked 120 days and were rolled over into full-time. Now they can keep you forever as part-time. I think this needs to be exposed.”

A young tier-two Ford worker, who formerly worked at the Sterling Axle plant north of Detroit, spoke about his experiences. “There are lots of temporary and part-time workers where I work now. Recently they were forced to sign papers saying they would go back to being part-time temps from being full-time temps. Many were dismayed.

“If they did the same thing to that young worker in Woodhaven, he could have been distressed.

“The guy next to me on the line was really upset. He had taken out a car loan and his hours were reduced. It is bad enough that temps are getting less money than full-time workers.

“I know that working on these kinds of jobs can be stressful if you don’t have a strong family at home. If you are dealing with problems at home and facing these types of issues at work it can be volatile. I don’t know if the guy at Woodhaven had his time cut back, but that can compound stresses, at the very least your hairline will start to recede, something has to give.”

He noted that Woodhaven Stamping, along with Sterling Axle, was one of the plants where the UAW agreed to substandard conditions for newly hired workers, whose pay would top out at less than \$20 an hour. As a consequence, management, with the help of the UAW, has been seeking to drive older, better-paid workers out of these factories in order to bring in lower-paid younger workers at the substandard scale.

“I ended up leaving (Sterling Axle) because I wanted to get paid (decently).

“I would like to see equal pay. Now you have someone working for \$15 an hour right next to someone making \$30. Everyone who gets hired now is a temp. That is how a third tier is being created. A lot of them are in constant fear for their jobs.

“I had three kids and a wife and paid \$875 a month in rent. I have sympathy for the temps considering what I had to go through. If you have any family responsibility it is hard to make it on what you are getting paid.”

A Ford worker at the Chicago Assembly Plant said, “I can understand how someone working in these plants might feel they’re better off dead. It saddens me to have to wake up and go in there every day. When it

rains outside, it rains inside the factory. When it snows outside, it snows inside. If it’s hot out, it’s at least 20 degrees hotter inside. They don’t care about us at all. All they care about is how many cars are being produced. You could die; it wouldn’t matter.

“The union is BS. They work with Ford, and they’re against us. They just use their positions to make deals with management. I’ve never worked for a company that’s so disrespectful. I have been struck, had things thrown in my face, been sexually harassed by people in the union, and called racial slurs. When I complain and raise a fuss, I’m the one that’s given time off. What kind of a job has a thing called ‘stress leave,’ and we’re just building cars?”

A second-tier worker at the Ford assembly plant in Dearborn, Michigan also spoke with the WSWS. “The toughest thing is repetitive motion for 10-12 hours a day. You work like a robot for \$15 an hour, or \$300-400 a week in take-home pay. Before, the same job paid \$30 an hour.

“The problem is that all the temps are working under different conditions and a lot of it depends on your boss. They can really give you a hard time.

“They’re designing the system to squeeze everything out of the working class. You will either be very rich or very poor if we don’t stop them. More and more people are opening their eyes to what’s happening. We are going to have to rally together and fight for what we deserve.”



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