

Hundreds mourn death of young Ford worker in Detroit

Jerry White

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Hundreds of workers and young people, including scores of autoworkers, packed into an east side Detroit church Saturday morning to attend funeral services for 21-year-old Jacoby Marquis Hennings. The young man, a 2014 high school graduate and a temporary part-time employee at both Ford and Fiat Chrysler, died on October 20, from what police say was a self-inflicted gunshot wound at Ford's Woodhaven Stamping plant, just outside of Detroit.

The hundreds who filled the seats at the New Greater Zion Hill Missionary Baptist Church came to express their sympathy and solidarity with the grieving family and friends of a young man who they affectionately called "Coby." In comments to the *World Socialist Web Site* after the services, many autoworkers expressed anger over the cruel conditions young workers like Jacoby face, particularly if they are low-paid and essentially disposable Temporary Part-Time (TPT) employees.

According to his obituary, Jacoby was born on December 27, 1995. His parents, Shemeeka and Bernard Jr. Hennings, are both Chrysler workers. The young man, who was athletic and loved sports, lived in the Detroit suburb of Harper Woods, graduated from East Detroit High School in 2014 and then attended Western Michigan University. "He had a loving and caring spirit," was "always upbeat" and "would turn any serious situation into a laughing matter just to ensure everyone was happy," the obituary read.

According to coworkers, Jacoby was a hard-working young man who wanted to be hired into a full-time position. He had worked at the Ford Stamping plant for nearly eight months, while holding down another part-time job at Fiat Chrysler's Warren Truck Assembly plant, 37 miles away, only blocks from the church where the funeral was held.

While full details of the incident have still not been revealed, on the day of this death Hennings apparently went to the second-floor office of the United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 387 at the Woodhaven plant looking for help after a supervisor wrote him up for being late and sent him home.

Police say Jacoby locked himself inside the union offices and pulled out a gun, while an unnamed "relative" of the local union's plant chairman, who is listed on the local's web site as Kirk Yancey, told local Channel 4 news that the chairman and others tried to talk him down as he was "waving around his gun." The Woodhaven police, who were one of the four police agencies, including SWAT teams, that responded, claim the distressed young man shot himself when they approached him.

Whether this young man was driven to suicide or his death was the result of still unexplained circumstances, the tragedy is an indictment of the UAW, which long ago abandoned any elemental shop floor representation and protection, and functions as a partner in the exploitation of autoworkers.

As hundreds walked past the open casket the church was filled with an atmosphere of profound sorrow. The silence was pierced by Jacoby's mother who cried inconsolably, "I cannot understand why my son died." Her cry sent a wave of grief among the mourners.

During the remarks from friends and family, several paid tribute to Jacoby's parents for raising such a wonderful child in the difficult economic and social conditions in Detroit. One of the young man's coworkers at Warren Truck Assembly said Jacoby "kept us up" and that "Coby will be missed."

An uncle said, "He was not a crazy man. He was searching for an answer. He was a strong man, and I have to accept the decision he made. I was honored to

be your uncle, and you were like a son to me.”

The pallbearers included a cousin in the military who had been deployed to Afghanistan, and the honorary pallbearers included Jacoby’s uncles, Tommy Hammonds, Sr. and Sivad Thomas, Sr. who work at Chrysler and GM. The casket was lifted into a hearse driven by two black horses.

Outside the funeral several autoworkers stopped to speak to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*. Several expressed their appreciation to the WSWS for seeking to bring out the truth about Jacoby’s death, while the news media has dropped any coverage and has written off the young man as a “disgruntled employee” in yet another supposedly inexplicable workplace shooting.

Ann, a Warren Truck worker who has worked for Chrysler for nearly two decades, said, “I came today because I understand what this young man was going through. The two-tier system is totally unfair. He was working just as hard as everyone else and getting half the pay. I know what it is like because I experienced some of the same conditions.

“In my case I was working at Warren Truck as a full-time worker before the bankruptcy and got laid off. After the bankruptcy in 2009, I was called back but at half the wage. When I came back they cut our benefits. I’m still working my way up to a full wage. Our medical plan is Obamacare. After all those years they only count the last seven after the bankruptcy towards my seniority.

“The union said they would fight for us but they did nothing. They are working for the company. I don’t believe they care at all. I know what that young man was going through. They treat you like you are nothing.”

When the WSWS reporter raised that the shooting took place in the union office at the Ford plant, Ann responded, “Please find out what happened to that young man. I can tell from the funeral he was a good person.”

Dawn Bennett works with Jacoby’s father, Bernard Hennings, at the MOPAR plant, also owned by Fiat Chrysler. “It’s hard,” stated Dawn. “I work with Bernard and I have a son the same age. Very soon he will be 22.”

At her plant, she said, “We have a lot of people that have been temporary workers for over two years. With this generation of children, it is hard, very hard. I know

that Jacoby was a bright and good young man. It’s tragic. No parent should have to bury their child.

“With the way the economy is going and the person we have as a president we working people need to be able to take care of ourselves.”

“I’m sick of this mess,” said another worker at the funeral who works for the janitorial contracting service Caravan Knight, which workers widely suspect was set up by the late UAW Vice President General Holifield who was later implicated for taking millions in bribes from Fiat Chrysler executives. She said, “There is no job security at Caravan Knight,” which does the work formerly done by higher paid Chrysler employees. “I became homeless after being messed around by this company. I’m 51 and I’ve never been homeless.”



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