

Wisconsin construction worker falls to death while working on Milwaukee Bucks stadium

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A 57-year-old electrician from Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin, fell to his death from an 8-foot ladder while working on the construction site of the new Milwaukee Bucks basketball stadium last Wednesday. The worker complained of severe chest pain before he fell from his ladder and suffered severe traumatic injuries. After the fall, the worker was transported to Froedtert Hospital in Milwaukee, where he died on Saturday.

Results from an autopsy report completed on Monday are still pending. The worker's name and other personal information have yet to be released to the public. It is not known whether or not the worker was a member of a union, or if he was a full-time, part-time or contract worker. A phone call from the WSWS to the Milwaukee Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) office to request more information on the death has not been returned as of the time of this writing.

No details are to be found in the press about the working conditions that caused an 8-foot fall to be fatal, or if and how the worker's complaints of severe chest pain were addressed. The lack of information on the circumstances surrounding the death mirrors the death of Michael Morrison, a 46-year-old electrician and IBEW member who fell 75 feet to his death while working on the Little Caesar's sports arena in Detroit.

The Milwaukee Bucks stadium is contracted by Mortenson Construction, a Minnesota-based privately owned construction firm worth \$3.8 billion, according to Forbes.com. In August 2015, Jeramie Gruber, a 35-year-old roofer working on the Mortenson-contracted billion-dollar Minnesota Vikings US Bank football stadium, also died from a fall. Another roofer working with him fell and was seriously injured. The company was fined only \$34,000 by OSHA after the death and injury were investigated and reported to be

an "accident" on August 26, 2015.

A current employee commented on the company's job review board on indeed.com that the company "preach[es] safety but the bottom line is production" and that "superintendents refer to workers as tools." Many reviewers on the board were temporary workers and complained of frequent layoffs, missing paychecks, and hard labor. Mortenson Construction is scheduled to begin construction on another major stadium project with McCarthy Building Cos. for the Las Vegas Raiders football team on November 13 of this year.

The stadium in Milwaukee where the electrician fell to his death is being constructed as part of an effort to attract the wealthy and bring investment to the city of Milwaukee and to push out poor and working class residents. The city's poverty rate, at 29 percent of the total population in 2014, is the fifth-highest in the nation and is the outcome of the destruction of high-paying manufacturing jobs, layoffs, cuts to social services across the state of Wisconsin, and the growth of low-wage and contract employment touted as "economic recovery" by former president Barack Obama and the Democratic Party establishment.

Peter Feigin, president of the Milwaukee Bucks basketball team, toured the construction site with the press in June of this year to promote the high-end entertainment complex. The stadium will have a state-of-the-art glass exterior and curved roof, a plaza for outdoor concerts and events, and several food and drink venues within the stadium itself. Feigin boasted of a "Panorama Club" to be included in the venue to attract younger, wealthy patrons from cities in the region, like Madison and Chicago.

Feigin has pitched the effort to investors as a highly profitable, cheap-labor hub that will exploit the most vulnerable sections of the working class in Milwaukee,

promising to start service-sector workers in the arena at poverty wages of \$12 per hour with an increase to \$15 in 2023. Feigin has also promised that the arena and facilities will hire union-represented employees and union-signatory subcontractors for these low-wage jobs, pointing to deals with the trade union bureaucracy, which bears as much responsibility as the corporations and the government for the astronomical growth of poverty in the city.

The Milwaukee Bucks' ownership group includes hedge fund billionaires Jamie Dinan, former owner of York Capital; Marc Lasry, a major financial supporter of Hillary Clinton and owner of Avenue Capital Group, which specializes in distressed debt from energy companies; and Wesley Edens, formerly of BlackRock, and who became known as "the new king of subprime lending" after his Fortress Investment Group purchased subprime lender Springleaf Financial Services in 2015.

In 2015, Wisconsin's Republican governor Scott Walker signed legislation that granted \$250 million from taxpayer funds to be spent on construction of the new arena, nearly half of the total construction budget, after he slashed funding for state public education and universities. Walker justified the legislation saying that "the return on investment is 3 to 1 on this, so we think this is a good, solid move ... of the taxpayers' money here in Wisconsin" and that the revenue generated from the Bucks would otherwise leave the city, as investors threatened to move the team if the new stadium was not built.

There is a push for the 714,000 square-foot stadium to be completed on time for the start of the Bucks' 2018 season, which begins in November 2018. So far, it is reported that the \$524 million project is "on schedule and on budget." This has placed enormous pressure on workers to meet production expectations of Mortenson Construction and the Milwaukee Bucks owners and corporate managers. Politicians like Walker no doubt expect a portion of the profits to come their way as a reward for their loyalty to the millionaires and billionaires invested in the project.

The feverish rush to build multimillion-dollar entertainment-sports centers in order to satisfy the profit interests of hedge fund billionaires and contracting companies has deadly consequences for the workers who build these behemoths. Under the capitalist system, workers' health and safety are

sacrificed to production deadlines, bottom lines and profits. These conditions are given a legal cover by both the Democratic and Republican parties, leading to the unnecessary deaths of countless workers.



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