

Autopsy report refutes claims young Ford worker was on drugs at time of factory shooting

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Almost two months after the tragic death of 21-year-old autoworker Jacoby Hennings, the Wayne County Medical Examiner on Wednesday finally released its autopsy report on the October 20 shooting at Ford's Woodhaven Stamping plant, just outside of Detroit.

According to police and union officials, Hennings took his own life as heavily armed Woodhaven police confronted him shortly after he allegedly waved a gun at United Auto Workers officials in the plant. In statements to the police, UAW Local 387 officials claimed that Hennings appeared “under the influence of drugs or alcohol” at the time.

The autopsy conducted by Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Schmidt found that there were no traces of drugs or alcohol in the young man's body during the autopsy conducted the day after the shooting on October 21. Hennings' blood and urine were tested for 15 separate chemical compounds, including amphetamines, cocaine, cannabinoids, Fentanyl, Oxycodone, barbiturates and opiates. None of these compounds were detected.

The only blood test that produced a positive result was the one for caffeine, which could have come from a cup of coffee, tea or an energy drink.

“Other than the above findings” for caffeine, Dr. Schmidt concluded, the “examination of specimen(s) submitted did not reveal any positive findings of toxicological significance by procedures outlined in the accompanying Analysis Summary.”

These findings contradict the statements that UAW officials, along with a Ford human resource manager at the plant told the police, which were then picked up by local media on the day of the shooting.

The *World Socialist Web Site* was able to obtain the

Woodhaven Police Department report on the October 20 shooting after filing a Freedom of Information request. According to police, Ford Human Resource Manager Martin Hernandez told them Hennings came to his office “seeking advice because he was late for work.” Hernandez told police, “Hennings was talking in circles and appeared to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol.”

Hennings was then taken to the second-floor office of the union, the police report states, where he met with UAW Local 387 officials Arnold Miller and Christopher Pfaff. According to police, “Miller and Pfaff both stated Hennings appeared very paranoid and under the influence of alcohol or drugs.” After a meeting that lasted more than an hour, the union officials claimed, “Hennings pulled a black handgun from his waistband.” After failing to disarm him, they told police, Miller and Pfaff ran from the office and “began yelling to alert other employees of the threat.”

Shortly afterwards, responding to an “active shooter” call, police from at least four departments, including SWAT teams and helicopters, descended on the factory in a typical, heavy-handed, military-style response. As police approached and shouted orders, Hennings, they claim, put a gun to his head and killed himself.

The question is, if the UAW officials and company managers provided misleading statements about Hennings being under the influence of drugs and alcohol, what else about the account of events can be believed?

The fact is very little is known about what happened on October 20. The full witness statements of Miller, Pfaff and another UAW Local 387 Midnights Representative, Bill Jablonski, have not been released,

and the UAW has not said a public word about the case since the perfunctory statement issued by the International union on the day of the shooting.

One thing is for certain: far from deescalating the situation, the UAW could not and did not assure Hennings that the UAW would defend his job and address his other concerns, including over possible harassment and victimization. Whatever was said during the one-hour meeting in the UAW office, it only contributed to the tragic conclusion.

While the medical examiner ruled that the young man died from a “near contact gunshot wound to the right side of the head” and that the “manner of death is suicide,” no ballistic evidence has been released.

The Woodhaven Police report says police took into evidence a .40 caliber spent shell and an unspecified “firearm” from the scene of the shooting. A spokeswoman for the police department said any other ballistic information—the type of gun used, under whose name it was registered, etc. could only be obtained through discovery in a court proceeding.

The UAW’s contention that workers in the Woodhaven plant were facing a threat from a drug- or alcohol-crazed individual was picked up by the media and broadcast widely. Far from challenging this perception, the UAW has continued to peddle this account. The aim is to reinforce the perception that Hennings was simply a “disgruntled employee,” preempt any sympathy for the young worker and his mourning family and stop any further inquiry into what might have driven him to desperation.

Hennings’ parents are both Detroit area Fiat Chrysler workers as are several of his aunts, uncles and cousins. His coworkers at Woodhaven Stamping and at Fiat Chrysler’s Warren Stamping plant, where Hennings worked a second temporary part-time job, said the young man was a hard worker who wanted a full-time position, however, he often looked exhausted and was concerned about losing his job at Warren Truck when production of the Dodge Ram is shifted to a new plant next year.

Under the factory regime overseen by the plant managers and the UAW, temporary part-time workers (TPTs) are treated like pariahs. They have no contractual rights and can be dismissed after four “occurrences,” i.e., late arrivals, absences or even showing up when not scheduled for work. Although the

UAW deducts initiation fees and dues out of these workers’ meager paychecks, the UAW contract explicitly states that the union will not defend TPTs against arbitrary dismissal. In 2015, the UAW agreed to a doubling of the number of TPTs, providing the company with a low-paid, disposable workforce, who can be tossed out of the factories any time production demands decline, while providing the UAW with a constant flow of dues and other kickbacks.

While conditions for TPTs and other workers in the plants have become unbearable, top UAW officials have been living in the lap of luxury. The widow of the late General Holiefield, the UAW Vice President for Chrysler, has been indicted for a multimillion-dollar bribery scheme she and her husband oversaw, which involved Fiat Chrysler executives funneling bribes to union executives laundered through the UAW-Chrysler National Training Center and phony charities. During this time, there were widespread allegations that Holiefield’s top aide, James Hardy, was selling jobs in return for cash kickbacks, leading to his dismissal by the UAW in September 2013. Federal investigators have now spread their probe to labor-management training centers operated by the UAW with Ford and GM.



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