Laid-off worker opens fire and kills at least five in Aurora, Illinois manufacturing plant

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On Friday afternoon, a laid-off worker opened fire inside a manufacturing warehouse facility in the city of Aurora, Illinois, 45 miles west of Chicago. At least five people were killed and multiple people injured.

The shooter, identified as 45-year-old Gary Martin, was employed as an assembly worker at the Henry Pratt Company plant where he opened fire and killed five of his coworkers.

Nearby schools and businesses were put into a total lockdown as a massive police force and SWAT team descended on the facility and shot and killed Martin in an exchange of gunfire. At least five police officers were wounded.

According to *CBS Chicago*, Martin was employed at the facility for fifteen years and was to be laid off and terminated on Friday. His mother, speaking to the *Chicago Sun-Times*, said Martin was "way too stressed out" by the layoff.

She added, "We are mourning for the victims and we are mourning for our families. We need peace. We're worried about the other people who were killed and hurt. Our family has to mourn too because we lost one too."

Martin worked on the line producing large valves at the 29,000-square-foot Henry Pratt warehouse, which makes industrial valves for water supply systems such as drinking water, wastewater and other industrial projects. The company, which is the subsidiary of the Georgia-based Mueller Water Products Inc., is located in the middle of a large industrial zone in Aurora.

Martin showed up for work at the facility at 7 a.m. Friday morning like normal. According to the police, the situation took a deadly turn after the lunch break as Martin began shooting in the warehouse with a Smith and Wesson handgun. John Probst, an employee at Henry Pratt told *ABC Chicago*, "One of the guys was up in the office, he said this person was shooting, and, he come running down and he was bleeding pretty bad, and the next thing you know he was walking back and forth, I heard more shots, and we just left the building."

In what has become all too common in American social life following mass shootings, politicians such as the billionaire Democratic Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker have issued hypocritical laments about the tragedy and "evil" without examining any of the underlying reasons for mass violence.

Pritzker praised the massive law-enforcement and near-military police response. "There are no words for the kind of evil that robs our neighbors of their hopes, their dreams and their futures," he intoned. "There are no words to express our gratitude to the families of the officers who were injured in the line of duty as they responded within moments to the gravest kind of danger that they can face."

Billionaire president Donald Trump, for his part, had nothing but platitudes and praise for the police force. He tweeted, "Great job by law enforcement in Aurora, Illinois. Heartfelt condolences to all of the victims and their families. America is with you!"

Already in 2019, there have been 38 mass shootings in the United States, according to the Gun Violence Archive. The shooting takes place one year after the devastating Parkland massacre in Florida. There have been nearly 2,000 mass shootings since the Sandy Hook elementary school shooting in 2012. The only response of the political establishment to these repeated outbursts of violence is to call for more heavily armed police, increased surveillance or new gun control measures, initiatives which will only intensify the repressive apparatus of the state.

The rise of mass shootings cannot be explained as mere senseless acts of "evil" or a lack of policing. The

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fact that such shootings occur with regularity points to a crisis-ridden society plagued by massive social inequality, police violence and endless wars abroad. In the absence of a mass social movement of the working class, the destruction of jobs and living standards for workers like Martin can only produce explosions of violence in one of the most unequal countries in the world.

Conditions of life for workers in Aurora, with a population of 200,000 people, have grown increasingly difficult. The city is marked by sharp contrasts of wealth and extreme poverty. As in large parts of the United States, cities like Aurora have seen better-paying manufacturing jobs for workers disappear with lower-wage jobs taking their place. Since the 1980s, warehouses and distribution centers have replaced better-paying manufacturing jobs.

Amazon is one such company that has gotten more $82.7 million in tax credits from the state of Illinois to bring in poverty-wage jobs in cities like Aurora and Joliet, Illinois. Temporary jobs and low-wage warehouse jobs with brutal working conditions are all too common in many parts of the Chicago suburbs. A lawsuit was recently brought against Amazon by the spouse of an Amazon worker who alleged that the company was responsible for his death.

In 2017, Caterpillar, one of the largest employers in the Aurora area, announced that it would close its Aurora plant and lay off over 800 workers, without any opposition from the corrupt United Auto Workers union that bargains on behalf of those workers. The plant will continue to operate in 2019, but the layoffs and closure will have a devastating impact on the region.

While 26 billionaires control more than half the wealth on this planet, the compounding effects of the economic crisis on the working class and the strangling of working-class opposition to the growth of social inequality by the political establishment and the trade unions, create intense social pressures on individuals that result in such tragic events as Friday’s mass shooting in Aurora.

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