

Mass workplace shooting at Milwaukee, Wisconsin brewery leaves six dead including gunman

Jacob Crosse
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Six workers, including the gunman, are dead following a workplace shooting Wednesday at the sprawling Molson Coors Beverage Company brewery in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

In an update posted Thursday afternoon by the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* the shooter was identified as Anthony N. Ferrill, 51. Ferrill was a licensed industrial journeyman electrician for over twenty years, the last seventeen of which he was employed at Molson Coors. Ferrill was a member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 494 in Milwaukee and had enlisted in the US Coast Guard from 1987 thru 1991, before being honorably discharged.

An unnamed coworker in the article cited a hostile work environment as a possible motive, stating that he thought Ferrill, who was African-American, might have felt as if he was being harassed and “discriminated against” while at work. The unnamed worker mentioned that Ferrill frequently accused coworkers of stealing his tools or rearranging his workstation.

However several other former and current coworkers and neighbors of Ferrill were shocked to learn that the husband and father they had known for decades was capable of such a violent act. Keith Giese, a fellow coworker who spoke to Ferrill, “a couple of days ago” told the *Journal Sentinel* he thought his co-worker “seemed fine to me.” Geise added that he had “no idea that there was a problem, that somebody could snap like that.”

Phillip Rauch Sr., who had worked with Ferrill for 15 years before recently retiring, “couldn’t say anything bad about the guy,” telling the *Journal Sentinel* that he was “a very good electrician, a good worker” and that “every time I worked with him he was always in a good mood.”

Elizabeth LaPine, a neighbor of the Ferrills for 11 years in an interview with the *Journal Sentinel* confirmed that Ferrill was “interested in guns” but that she “would never believe it ... that he could do something like that.”

Ferrill was confirmed to have been an employee of Molson Coors by the Milwaukee Police Department and Molson Coors CEO Gavin Hattersley. It also appears the pistols that were used in the shooting were legally purchased and registered to Ferrill.

Initial media reports indicated that Ferrill had been fired earlier in the day and had returned to the facility and began opening fire. However, this was contradicted by an email from Molson Coors which noted that he had been an “active brewery employee.”

According to *USA Today*, Wednesday’s massacre is the third mass shooting in the US since the beginning of 2020. A mass shooting is defined as an incident which results in three or more casualties; this is the eleventh such event in Wisconsin since 2004.

The Molson Coors multinational conglomerate was formed in 2006 with the merger of the Canadian Molson and the American Coors companies. A 2016 expansion involving Anheuser-Busch InBev and SABMiller resulted in Molson Coors becoming the third largest brewer in the world.

In October of last year, Molson Coors, using the pretext of slumping sales, announced that it would be closing its Denver, Colorado headquarters, eliminating three hundred jobs. Another “100-200 jobs” were also being cut as part of “downsizing” effort.

As part of the downsizing effort, employees who were not discarded were told they would have to relocate to Milwaukee. The city was an ideal spot for the multinational, according to a November report in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* because it offered “a public financing package that was richer than what Colorado offered and office buildings with a lot of empty space.”

The public financing package included \$2 million for the company to use to renovate its empty office buildings. According to *macrotrends.net*, Molson Coors Brewing’s annual gross profit for 2019 was \$4.201 billion, an increase of .39 percent from the previous year.

Reports of a mass casualty situation at the long-running Miller brewery, located in the Miller Valley, and which has

been in operation since 1855, prompted a massive response from state and federal agencies. The first emergency call was received by local services at 2:11 p.m. At 2:19 p.m. an internal company email was sent to the over 1,000 employees working at the time of the shooting. The email advised that an “active shooter was in or near the second-floor stairwell of Building 4.”

By 3:00 p.m. local time, Milwaukee Police, in addition to the Sheriff's department and federal agents from the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms and the FBI with the assistance of dozens of police cruisers, fire ladders and urban assault vehicles, instituted a militarized lockdown, cordoning off the factory and the surrounding blocks, preventing any employees from leaving or entering the facility.

It is unclear as of this writing if any police or federal agents ever directly engaged Ferrill or fired any rounds during the incident.

Schools near the complex, including Marquette University High School, Woodlands School and the Story Elementary School, were also put into a lockdown status. Students looking out of their windows witnessed a military-style operation with hundreds of SWAT officers armed with automatic rifles, pistols, tasers and the occasional German Shepherd. The lockdown remained in effect for nearly two hours until 4 p.m. Once the school lockdown was lifted, students were only allowed to leave if they were being transported by bus or picked up by their parents.

In a 6:30 p.m. press conference, Milwaukee Police Chief Alonso Morales refused to provide details about the shooter or any names of the victims, advising that families were still being notified. The police chief confirmed that even though “the target is down,” it was still a “fluid situation.” After a reporter questioned whether employees on site were being allowed to leave, Morales responded in the negative, adding that the police still had more than “twenty buildings to secure, we have checkpoints that we are checking off, each employee, one by one, that will take several hours to do.”

In addition to a 160-year-old brewery, the grounds include corporate offices, an outdoor beer garden, underground caves and lodging at a Bavarian-style inn. In a later 9:45 p.m. press conference, Morales confirmed that all employees had been cleared from the building, nearly eight hours after the shooting concluded. Morales refused to take questions and did not provide updates on the circumstances surrounding the shooting.

The 6:30 p.m. press conference was followed by less than five minutes' worth of platitudes from the Democratic political leadership in Wisconsin, including Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett, Lt. Governor Mandela Barnes and Governor Tony Evers.

All three expressed their condolences at the “senseless tragedy” that had occurred while refusing to postulate a possible motive or cause for the shooting. Before uttering some variance of the word “tragedy” five times, Mayor Barrett ended his speech by thanking, in order, “the Milwaukee Police

Department, Milwaukee Fire Department, Sheriff's office, FBI and the District Attorney.”

Governor Evers concluded the press conference with a “short moment of silence” before repeating his own version of “thoughts and prayers” stating that his “role here tonight is to bring as many prayers as I can carry and hearts to the people of Wisconsin for the losses that have occurred.”

As usual, the crocodile tears and less than useless prayers offered up by capitalist politicians cannot hide the fact that neither party has any solutions for stopping the scourge of mass shootings, which happen more frequently in the US than in any other leading economy.

The identification of Ferrill as the shooter raises more questions as to the circumstances that would drive a seemingly devoted worker, husband and father to commit such an anti-social act. While the media and company will seek to characterize this as an isolated event, the fact is millions of workers are trapped in potentially hazardous or hostile work environments with no recourse or avenue to have their grievances heard.

The trade unions which were created in bitter struggles of the 20th century to protect workers from capitalist insults and attacks, have betrayed their members for decade after decade, transforming into arms of management which have overseen the destruction of countless jobs, the degradation of working conditions and have isolated workers workplace by workplace as well as from their fellow brothers and sisters internationally during crucial struggles.

While at this time it is unclear what immediate motives or factors might have prompted Ferrill's rampage in Milwaukee, the fact remains that the capitalist system and the historic levels of social inequality that prevail in American society are producing mass killings with frightening regularity.

The gap between the top ten percent and the bottom ninety percent has continued to widen over the Bush, Obama and now Trump administrations. The responses of each successive administration have been to increase military spending and wage war abroad while militarizing police at home. This has coincided with the slashing of social services for the poor and taxes for the rich. It is impossible to end mass violence as long as the capitalist system continues to exist.



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