

Three dead, including gunman, in Alabama fire hydrant factory shooting

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16 June 2021

A fire hydrant factory worker, identified as 34-year-old Andreas Horton, opened fire on co-workers at the Mueller Company fire hydrant factory in Albertville, Alabama early Tuesday morning, killing two and wounding two others before turning the gun on himself, according to police.

Horton entered the facility with a handgun and began to shoot his fellow workers around 2:30 a.m. Police identified the victims as Michael Lee Dobbins and David Lee Horton (no relation). The two wounded employees, Casey Sampson and Isaac Byrd, were transported to a nearby hospital and soon after transported to a hospital in Chattanooga, Tennessee. As of this writing, their condition remains unknown.

Police said Horton fled the scene in a maroon Jeep, but was later found, just minutes before 6:00 a.m., in Guntersville, approximately 15 miles from Albertville, with a self-inflicted gunshot wound. A cache of weapons was retrieved from Horton's vehicle.

"At this time officers are still at the shooting scene at the Mueller Company processing for any additional evidence," Albertville Police Chief Jamie Smith told reporters Tuesday. Smith said it is not clear what prompted the shooting, but it appeared to be "completely unprovoked."

Horton was a 10-year veteran at the plant. Mueller Co., based in Cleveland, Tennessee, and a subsidiary of Atlanta-based Mueller Water Products Inc., employs more than 400 people at the plant in Albertville. Built in 1975, the plant in northern Alabama, dubbed the "Fire Hydrant Capital of the World," produces 700 metal hydrants a day.

The Mueller Co. shooting is the latest in a disturbing trend of workplace shootings, no doubt amplified by deteriorating social conditions and austerity measures, aided by the cutting of funding for social welfare

programs by the Democrats and Republicans over recent decades, particularly in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, which sparked the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, as millions of workers were laid off or saw their wages and hours cut. More than 34 million Americans have been infected and over 600,000 have died as a result of a bipartisan "herd immunity" policy that allowed the virus to spread, placing profits above the lives of workers.

Earlier this month, a Los Angeles County firefighter fatally shot a colleague and severely wounded another before turning the gun on himself. Last month, a San Jose, California transit worker shot and killed nine co-workers at a rail yard for commuter trains of the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority. In April, Larry Bollin killed one person and wounded five others in an ambush at Kent Moore Cabinets in Bryan, Texas. The same month, Brandon Scott, a 19-year-old former employee of a FedEx facility in Indianapolis fatally shot eight workers before committing suicide.

With the full support of the trade unions, the working class is being ushered back into factories, warehouses, and mines with COVID-19 unrestrained and less than half of the American population fully vaccinated. Under the pressure of rising inflation and demands for ever greater profits, conditions are ripe for the continued eruption of workplace violence.

Over the course of 2020, the Gun Violence Archive aggregated and reported a record high of 610 mass shootings. More than 20,000 people have perished from gun-related violence so far this year, according to the Gun Violence Archive. More than 9,000 murders, 11,000 suicides, and 277 mass shootings have taken place this year alone. Across the United States, more than 33,000 gun-violence-related deaths are recorded

each year on average. Two-thirds of these deaths are ruled as suicides, an epidemic among the more impoverished layers of the working class.

The threat of unemployment is linked to an increase of suicides, according to a study conducted by the Alcohol Research Group (ARG), a program of the Public Health Institute, in collaboration with the University of Los Angeles, California (UCLA) Luskin School of Public Affairs, Oregon Health and Science University, Prevention Research Center, and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto, Ontario.

The study, which analyzed data over a six-year period from 2005 to 2011, including the 2008/09 financial crash, found that “the consequences of unemployment were more important than being unemployed during this period,” said ARG senior scientist and lead author William C. Kerr, “These results are consistent with what we see in countries that have strong unemployment support systems—where being out of a job doesn’t increase your risk for suicide.”

“The analysis also draws attention to the importance of targeting suicide prevention efforts in economically disadvantaged communities and incorporating alcohol control policies, abuse prevention and treatment for alcohol misuse into such efforts,” UCLA professor and co-author Mark S. Kaplan noted.

Of the recent sites of workplace shootings, Los Angeles, California has a poverty rate of 20.4 percent, or one out of every 4.9 residents, with a median income of \$28,072; Santa Clara, California has a poverty rate of 7.92 percent, 150,000 out of 1.89 million people, with a median income of \$50,677; Bryan, Texas has a poverty rate of 23.6 percent, or one out of every 4.2 residents, according to WelfareInfo.org, with a median income of \$25,753; lastly, Indianapolis, Indiana, has a poverty rate of 20.1 percent, or 167,666 of 835,405 people, with a median income of \$29,167.



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