

Two workers killed and one suspect arrested in shooting at NHK Seating plant in Indiana

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20 August 2021

Two auto parts workers were killed in a tragic shooting and attempted abduction in the Plant 1 parking lot of NHK Seating of America at 2298 W. State Road 28 in Frankfort, Indiana on Wednesday afternoon. Both the victims and the suspected shooter were employed at the plant, according to local press reports.

The victims have been identified as Promise Mays, 21, and Pamela Sledd, 62, both of Rossville, Indiana. Sledd is Mays' grandmother, and both were shot as they were about to begin their shift after Sledd drove them to the plant.

Workers at NHK seating and family members of the victims are in shock and grieving the loss of their loved ones. "They were the most fun-loving, caring two people I have ever been blessed to have in my life, and they would have done anything for anybody," Mays' mother and Sledd's daughter, Penny Anes, told WISHTV.com Thursday. "They always gave words of encouragement. Promise lit up the room, and my mom was always happy and positive."

The suspected shooter was identified by plant employees as Gary Cecil Ferrell, 26. They called the Clinton County authorities after the shooting Wednesday afternoon. Ferrell is currently being held without bond in Clinton County, and the Clinton County prosecutor is seeking the death penalty after a probable cause affidavit filed Friday in Clinton County Superior Court.

The affidavit alleges Ferrell "murdered... Mays after he tried to force Mays into the trunk of his car before he shot her" outside of the plant and that he shot Sledd three times after she left the car to intervene in the attempted abduction of her granddaughter, according to WTHR Channel 13 News. The Clinton County Sheriff took Ferrell into custody after his car crashed in a high-speed chase.

Surveillance camera footage from the plant reviewed by police and the court apparently shows the shooting and attempted abduction and Ferrell driving away after the victims were shot. It is not clear if plant security was present or attempted to intervene.

The Clinton County Sheriff's Department is currently carrying out an investigation of the shooting. As of Friday, the motive and relationship of the victims to the suspect are still under investigation.

Fellow workers of the victims and residents of the surrounding community have expressed their grief and condolences for the family members and coworkers of the victims in an outpouring of support. In the days since the shooting took place, hundreds have commented, and thousands reacted to social media posts about the tragedy. Employees created memorials to the two women outside of the plant, including painting the pavement of the parking lot in their memory as well as placing flowers outside the plant.

NHK cancelled production on Thursday, one day after the shooting. But prioritizing profit over the psychological health of its workers, it announced on its Facebook page that "Production will resume as previously scheduled on Friday, August 20, 2021" and that all workers would be expected to report to their scheduled shifts unless "notified otherwise."

The company also vaguely indicated that counseling would be made available and directed workers to the Mental Health America Crisis Line. Regardless, for workers who have experienced shock and trauma after a shooting of their coworkers, and some of whom may have witnessed the killing itself, forcing workers to return to the workplace almost immediately afterward is nothing less than heartless.

At the time of this writing, NHK Seating's website has no mention of the shooting that took place at Plant

1, nor has it made any statements to the press that it is carrying out an investigation into the incident on its property.

Workers at NHK Seating design and manufacture seats exclusively for Subaru's auto assembly plant in nearby Lafayette, Indiana. Subaru recorded annual gross profit of \$448,853,475 from March 2020-2021. Like all auto corporations, Subaru's profits indicate that during the pandemic and in the midst of the global semiconductor chip shortage the corporation has been able to rely on the deepening exploitation of its workforce to maintain profits.

The company's website and social media pages are filled with advertisements for jobs, indicating a high worker turnover rate. One ad for open interviews advertises 12-hour part-time weekend shifts from 6 a.m-6 p.m., and openings for first and second shift manufacturing jobs. Both are advertised at the near poverty rate of up to \$17.50 per hour, meaning that many workers are likely paid even less.

According to a recent study by CNBC, a single person needs to make on average \$27,995 per year at minimum in the state of Indiana to afford food, rent, and basic necessities, meaning that many workers at NHK would not make enough to afford to support themselves and their children or a loved one with one source of income alone.

Workers on social media have described high staff turnover rates and intense speedup in order to satisfy Subaru's demands. These are the working conditions that an increasing number of auto parts workers throughout the US and the world face in order to satisfy the profit interests of the auto corporations. The low wages and pressures of work in the auto parts industry can take an immense toll on workers' family and social lives, exhaust them and break them down mentally and physically.

Some workers and community members commenting on social media have alluded to the growing number of workplace shootings in the US, which includes a shooting that killed eight workers at a FedEx Ground facility in Indianapolis just in April of this year. Commenters made blunt remarks such as "American culture" and "Welcome to the USA." However, these tragedies are a symptom first and foremost of the breakdown of the capitalist system. They are a part of a broader political and social context, directly related to

the pursuit of profit by corporations and deepening exploitation of the working class and rapid acceleration of social inequality in the US.

These social conditions can play a role in pushing workers to a breaking point mentally, especially if other conditions which exacerbate mental health issues exist. Along with the gutting of mental health services nationwide by both Democratic and Republican lawmakers, and a normalization and even glorification of violence that predominates in US politics and culture, the social consequences of these conditions can be deadly.



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