

Tragic shooting at Forvia auto parts plant in Highland Park, Michigan

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A shooting left one worker dead at the Forvia auto parts plant in Highland Park, Michigan, on December 14, a day after the French-based multinational announced the closure of the plant's metal framing department and the layoff of 268 workers. The company, formerly Faurecia before its acquisition last year by parts maker Hella, makes seats for the Jeep Wagoneer at the Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly Plant at its Highland Park facility.

The names of both the alleged shooter, age 29, and the victim, age 40, had not been released at the time of this writing. The incident reportedly began in the morning in a dispute over tools. According to a local news report, an argument escalated into a fight, with the alleged shooter assaulted by five co-workers. The fight was broken up by plant security, and police were summoned. However, no one was apparently detained over the incident.

After receiving treatment for his injuries on the scene, the alleged shooter confronted a co-worker involved in the fight in the plant parking lot and shot him multiple times while he was seated in his car alongside his girlfriend. The victim died on his way to the hospital. The woman was not hit. The shooter was then arrested by police, who had remained on the scene after the altercation in the plant. Some workers went home after the shooting, too upset to work, but management attempted to continue production that afternoon with the remaining workforce.

While police and company officials insisted the incident was not related to the layoff announced the previous day, the fact that a conflict over a seemingly petty matter could escalate to a deadly confrontation speaks to enormous social tensions. Last year, a 29-year-old worker at the same factory was arrested for texting bomb threats to a supervisor of temporary workers

saying he was “at the end of his rope” over abuse in the factory.

Highland Park, where the plant is located, is an impoverished enclave of Detroit, with a median household income of just \$25,189, according to the 2021 US Census report, far below the official poverty level for a family of four. The poverty rate in the city is a staggering 40.7 percent. Many workers come from the local area, with temp workers earning near-poverty wages and subject to an intense management regime with no representation or protection by the union.

A former Forvia worker in Highland Park told the *Autoworker Newsletter* that starting pay at the plant was about \$16 an hour. The worker said he left because he could see the handwriting on the wall that the plant was about to close. “The union [the United Auto Workers] isn’t doing their job,” he added.

Forvia, the global auto parts giant, said the announced job cuts were a cost-saving move. A management announcement was sent out Tuesday via email, “To meet our manufacturing and production needs we will be moving some production from Highland Park to another Faurecia facility. Changes like these help us effectively and efficiently leverage our manufacturing footprint, better service our customers and leverage utilization to meet our production requirements.”

The layoffs follow the moves by Stellantis to eliminate the third shift at Warren Truck Assembly Plant (WTAP) in suburban Detroit and to effectively close the Belvidere Assembly Plant in Illinois. It is not known if the layoffs at Forvia were directly related to the third shift elimination at WTAP.

The company claimed most of the workers being impacted were temp workers and would be shifted to open positions if available. In 2019, the company announced the opening of the plant, which originally

employed about 500 workers. The company extracted subsidies from state and local authorities for the investment, including a \$2 million Michigan Business Development program grant.

The union at the plant, United Auto Workers Local 155, responded to the layoffs by promoting anti-Mexican chauvinism, while trying to downplay their impact. In remarks quoted by *Automotive News*, Local 155 Vice President Waymon Halty said production was being shifted to a Forvia facility in Mexico. “We tried our best to keep it here in the United States,” he said. “That department is going to Mexico because it comes with a lot of costs and productivity issues and quality issues.”

He said the “upside” of the announcement was that “only” temp workers were being impacted. He then added, speaking like a mouthpiece for management, “We were better off having the department there, but the cost of it wasn’t making sense.”

The shooting sparked a nervous reaction by Forvia management, which is aware of simmering tensions at all of its facilities. A text message obtained by the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* sent by Forvia management after the Highland Park shooting informed workers at the company’s plant in Saline, Michigan, of “an increased Security and Saline Police Department presence in the area beginning immediately and for the foreseeable future to attempt to reinforce any concerns you may have regarding your personal safety while here at work.

“If you have any questions, please reach out to our HSE or HR teams.”

A worker at the Saline plant told the *Autoworker Newsletter*, “Why didn’t they send a message saying there was a shooting at another plant to explain why there were going to be police in our plant? They did not explain anything.

“What I heard was that he was in a fight. Everybody is under a lot of pressure. One of my co-workers said that unemployment cut his weekly benefit from \$362-\$300 with no explanation. He is making the same pay, but his unemployment benefit was cut.”

The job cuts by Forvia, among the 10 largest auto parts suppliers in world, are part of a global restructuring following its acquisition of Hellas, aimed at preparing the transition to electric vehicles. The company’s business model is based on ruthless cost

cutting.

Since Faurecia was founded in 1999 as a subsidiary of French carmaker PSA, the company has grown from 32,000 to over 114,000 employees, primarily through mergers and acquisitions of other companies financed by massive loans. This has always been followed by ruthless job cuts and wage cuts aimed at the enrichment of the corporate owners.

In a conference call with investors this November, Forvia CEO Patrick Koller told investors the company’s strategy was to prioritize reducing debt and costs. Koller said the plan was to “go fast” with cost cutting.



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