

Sentiment for strike grows at Clarios Toledo battery plant as UAW withholds contract details

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On Thursday, hundreds of workers at Clarios's flagship US vehicle battery plant outside Toledo, Ohio, will be voting on a contract that the United Auto Workers union has not allowed them to see.

Anger is mounting among the rank and file who voted 99.9 percent to ratify a strike last week. Workers are upset after the UAW forced them to accept years of pay *freezes*, allowing the company to make massive amounts of money. According to company financial reports, Clarios made \$1.6 billion in profits in 2022. Clarios, formerly Johnson Controls, is the world's largest lead-acid battery producer and reportedly powers one-third of the world's cars and trucks.

At midnight on April 18, when the contract expired, workers told the *World Socialist Web Site* the sentiment among workers on the shop floor was for an immediate strike. At the last minute, the UAW and company told workers a tentative agreement had been reached and called a snap ratification vote for this Thursday at 11:00 a.m.

However, one full week has passed and the UAW has refused to give workers access to the contract. The fact that the company and union bureaucracy are hiding the contents from workers shows it is a massive sellout. The reality is the company told the union what it wanted weeks or months ago, and the two parties have been conspiring against rank-and-file workers ever since. The WSWS called Local 12 for comment at 4:15 p.m. on Tuesday, but an automated voice machine indicated the office closes early each day, at 4:00 p.m.

Yesterday, the WSWS spoke with workers at the plant and informed them that workers at Dana, Stellantis Jeep, Clarios and several other auto parts plants in the Toledo area were building a citywide rank-

and-file committee to unite workers on the shop floor, share information and plan common action. Reporters shared copies of the Toledo rank-and-file committee's mission statement, *A Call to Action to All Autoworkers*, issued by Toledo parts workers in March.

"You know as much [about the tentative agreement] as I do," a younger worker said at the Clarios plant Tuesday. "We haven't been told anything! We are all voting no. Everyone, show up Thursday to vote no!"

Another worker said workers deserve massive pay increases—in the area of 50 percent to 100 percent immediately—since "Clarios made \$9 billion in revenue last year." Workers also need cost-of-living adjustments in any contract, since inflation is growing by 10 percent per year, and the rising cost of food, gas, rent and other necessities is making it next to impossible to get by.

Another Clarios worker with years of experience told the WSWS, "This situation is messed up. The UAW hasn't said anything. That means it's a bad deal. Last Wednesday the UAW had a meeting, and they said they couldn't tell us anything. We asked what they were negotiating over, and the UAW said they couldn't tell us that because they're still talking to the company. So, they'll tell everything to the company but not to us? That doesn't sound good!"

A worker with over 20 years said, "I have seen this happen over and over again. Every time, the UAW tries to force through a sellout. And that's what they're trying to do here. We haven't had a pay raise in years. They are cutting our pay."

WSWS reporters explained that this year things can be different because a network of rank-and-file committees is developing to break the isolation that the

UAW bureaucracy would normally impose on any strike or important workers' struggle.

Wages in the auto parts industry used to be near parity with workers at the Big Three. But after decades of concessions by the UAW apparatus, workers at Clarios now start at as low as \$17 an hour. The UAW and auto companies prey on younger workers, who can be fired from their jobs for any reason without the UAW coming to their defense, thereby driving wages down due to a lack of job security. The WSWS spoke to multiple younger Clarios workers yesterday who said they were fired from other UAW jobs and who received no help from the UAW.

Other workers warned of what is potential in this contract. "Remember, they made us take a pay freeze in the last contract," one worker said. Another worker said, "What I've heard is they want to get rid of the pensions, cut wages to a uniform \$18 an hour and increase insurance costs."

Workers should throw whatever "highlights" the UAW and the company are printing right into the trash where they belong. There is an old saying: "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me." By this point workers know not to trust the "highlights"!

Remember, it would take a 40 percent pay increase over four years to even keep up with inflation. Anything less than that is a pay cut. Cut any signing bonus in half due to taxes. Whatever workers have left will be gone in a few weeks.

The company is terrified of the potentially devastating impact of a strike. Here is what Clarios wrote in its most recent notice to its wealthy investors:

"We employ 16,783 people worldwide. Approximately 64% of these employees are covered by collective bargaining agreements. Although we believe that our relations with the labor unions that represent our employees are generally good [no kidding!] and we have experienced no material strikes or work stoppages recently [thanks to the UAW], no assurances can be made that we will not experience in the future these and other types of conflicts." As a result, "our business may be adversely affected" by any strike.

Now is the time to organize across all production lines and across all shifts to get every worker at Clarios on the same page. Workers know the UAW cannot be trusted, they must take matters into their own hands.

Make no mistake: Telling the UAW to "do it again" won't produce a better result. Experience after experience, including the 2021 strike of UAW members at Volvo Truck in Dublin, Virginia, shows that the UAW bureaucrats will force the same deal over and over again unless workers take independent action and organize themselves.

Across Toledo and across the US, rank-and-file autoworkers support Clarios workers in their struggle for massive pay increases. The contract for 140,000 GM, Stellantis and Ford workers expires in a few months. Workers across the auto industry are joining together in a network of rank-and-file committees, participating in the International Workers' Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). Winning the support of workers in the critical electric vehicle battery industry to this movement would strengthen the struggles of autoworkers everywhere.

If you are a Clarios worker and want to join the rank-and-file committee movement to connect your struggle to the struggle of autoworkers across the US and the world, text 248-602-0936 or fill out this form. We will respect your anonymity.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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