

After rejecting contract by 98%, Clarios workers ask: “Why aren’t we striking?”

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Hundreds of autoworkers at the Clarios battery plant in Holland, Ohio voted to reject a sellout tentative agreement brought to them by the UAW bureaucracy last week. Workers report that 98 percent voted “no,” in a sign of growing momentum among the rank-and-file for a united struggle against the auto corporations.

At Clarios, the nearly unanimous vote reflects a widespread desire to win back all that has been lost through concession after concession in recent years. Workers say management has used legal loopholes to cut worker pay twice, but publicly available financial reports show Clarios made \$1.6 billion in profits in 2022. This is the situation workers confront not only at Clarios but at companies like Dana, DMS, Metalsa, and the Big Three (GM, Ford and Stellantis), where contracts for 140,000 workers expire in September.

But even though Clarios workers recently voted 99% to authorize a strike last month, the plant’s UAW officials have not called a strike or even issued a warning that one is planned. Instead, they tell workers they are going “back to the negotiating table” but have not presented workers with information as to what is taking place.

One worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “The union had meetings last weekend. We expressed our concerns and asked, ‘Why aren’t we striking?’ The company is just using stall tactics. We are tired of talking. The majority of us are tired of talking. The UAW says we’ve got to go through the procedure first, but they didn’t say what that procedure was. They said, ‘We have bosses, too,’” referring to the UAW bureaucrats in Detroit led by new president Shawn Fain.

Workers occupy an extremely powerful position, since Clarios claims to produce batteries used in one third of the vehicles on the road in the United States

and internationally. However, for the UAW to extend the old contract means workers are producing batteries right now that the company is stockpiling to fill orders in case of a strike.

The worker said, “That’s the thing, I don’t know why we are still running parts? Some people are trying to slow down, though. The union leaders got frustrated when one guy at the meeting said ‘We shouldn’t wait to strike.’ We voted to strike, what are we waiting on? They can’t answer.”

Last week, the UAW provided workers with a “highlights” packet that tried to put lipstick on a pig. The highlights say the contract includes only a “3% wage increase each year of the contract.” It is an insult that workers were even asked to vote on such garbage.

Inflation is officially 5 percent but the real cost of necessities like rent, food and gas is even higher. The US government is waging a war against Russia in Ukraine which is driving up food costs and the costs of all basic goods for workers around the world. If US inflation stays the same, at the end of three years everything will cost 15-20 percent more, but Clarios workers’ wages will only have increased 12 percent, meaning they will be hit with a substantial decline in real wages. This is actually *worse* than the pay cuts and freezes of recent years, since every year workers will see their purchasing power steadily decline.

The “highlights” also did not address workers’ concerns over major changes to corporate scheduling. The company has a plan to reduce wages by eliminating overtime by switching to a new schedule of 12-hour shifts. Workers know by now that Clarios is skilled at getting workers to sign on the dotted line before they know what’s in the contract, and then notifying them later that the contract says they must accept cuts to pay. Workers have the right to review

and closely read the full contract before voting.

As for the \$1,500 signing bonus, that comes out to more like \$800 after taxes, which only covers a couple of trips to the grocery store. And there is no indication it will go to temporary workers, even though they perform the same work as full-time workers.

Workers want to know what to do to stop this sellout. It would be the greatest danger to believe the UAW bureaucracy is going “back to the negotiating table” to bring back a better deal. In recent years, the UAW has often forced workers to vote over and over again on the same contract until workers are broken down. This is how the apparatus broke the powerful strikes by autoworkers at Caterpillar in 2022 and Volvo in 2021.

Instead, workers must get together, at work, in the breakroom, on social media and on the phone, and democratically discuss what they want in the contract. At a minimum, this should include:

- Massive pay increases, to make-up for past pay freezes and cuts!
- Cost of Living adjustments to make up for inflation!
- No change to schedules or any other tricks!

Last month Dana workers at the Toledo Driveline plant formed a rank-and-file committee to give power to the workers on the shop floor and fight against corporate exploitation. Since its initiation, the rank-and-file committee has expanded to include workers at the Jeep plant and has linked with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) to join with a global wave of social struggles taking place across the world. Strikes and protests of a historic character are taking place against inequality on every continent, including countries like France, Sri Lanka, Germany, Brazil and elsewhere.

Many workers want to know, what is a rank-and-file committee? A rank-and-file committee is a worker-controlled organization run democratically to discuss demands, share information and get every worker on every shift and production line on the same page to carry out common action wherever it is needed to carry out a change.

The Dana workers’ rank-and-file committee mission statement explains:

The Dana workers’ rank-and-file committee will educate our fellow workers to treat one

another as we would our own family. We will respect one another, learn from one another, confide in one another and fight toward a much bigger purpose: equality at the workplace and in society as a whole. This is a movement of the entire working class. If you work at another auto company, we want you to join this movement, because we cannot win our fight at just one plant. We are not just numbers, we are workers and we have immense power. It is time we recognize that and fight for change.

Now is the time for Clarios workers to join the committee and link their struggle to the growing movement of the working class in Toledo and beyond.

For more information on building rank-and-file committees, fill out the form below.



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