

Clarios, Dana and Stellantis workers call for joint action to win strike at battery plant in Toledo, Ohio

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9 May 2023

Are you a striking Clarios worker? Fill out the form at the end of this article to get more information about joining the movement for rank-and-file committees.

Today is the third day of the strike by more than 520 Clarios workers at the battery manufacturing plant in Holland, Ohio, just outside of Toledo. The United Auto Workers union was forced to call the strike after workers rejected a UAW-backed concessions contract in a near unanimous vote a week-and-a-half ago and demanded that union officials stop extending the contract, which expired on April 19.

Clarios is the world's largest acid-lead battery manufacturer and the main supplier to GM, Ford, Stellantis (Chrysler) and other automakers. The company, which purchased Johnson Controls' battery division in 2019, pulled in \$1.6 billion in profits last year. Executives told investors last week that they plan to increase profits to over \$2 billion by cutting costs and expanding into the highly profitable electric vehicle battery market.

The outcome of this strike will have major consequences for the 170,000 autoworkers in the US and Canada whose contracts expire this summer. The automakers, counting on the collusion of the UAW bureaucracy and its new president Shawn Fain, are planning a massive attack on jobs as they transition to EV production and the expansion of EV battery joint ventures, where UAW members will be paid substandard wages and benefits.

But rank-and-file workers at GM, Ford and Stellantis, like their counterparts at Clarios, are determined to win inflation-busting wage increases, end exhausting and brutal working conditions, and overturn years of UAW-backed concessions. In advance of this year's contract battle, workers are forming and expanding the network of rank-and-file committees, which are fighting to transfer decision-making and power from the pro-company UAW apparatus to the workers on the shop floor.

One Clarios worker with seven years in the plant compared the struggle to the uprising of workers in France against the increase in retirement ages by the Macron government. "We used to be scared to fight against greater powers. But look what's happening in France, we're starting to do the same

thing, to fight against the businesses and the gangsters. The UAW reps," he added, "say they work for us, but they work for the company."

Another striking worker with four years told the WSW, "The union wanted us to accept a 3 percent wage increase after we've already lost \$10 an hour in the last two pay cuts. There is no way we were going to take that with groceries and the cost of living constantly going up. We also get no compensation for working in an unhealthy environment that causes retirees to get cancer and die a few years after they leave this place.

"This investment corporation, Brookfield Partners, took over and all they care about is money, not whether we die or live tomorrow.

"This is one of the world's largest battery plants. We've got 10 different lines in there, and the machines on each one can run 800 to 1,000 batteries per shift. They've got a new line that can put out 1,500 to 2,000 a shift."

Base pay starts at \$12 an hour and goes up to \$20 or more, he said, depending on how long a worker has been there. Describing the piece rate system at the plant, he said, "We used to get 200 percent of our pay if we produced 800 batteries in a day. They increased that to 900, and now it's 1,000. They tell these new workers they can make \$100,000 a year if they work hard but a lot of them are barely getting \$13 an hour.

"We build the batteries for Stellantis, Ford, GM and aftermarket sales. We just put different stickers on them [DieHard, Interstate, Duralast, AC Delco, Costco's Kirkland and more than 20 other brands] before they go out the door. They sell for \$300 in the stores, and they are paying us peanuts. The company is greedy as hell, and we're lucky if we get \$1,000 in profit-sharing a year."

Describing the intolerable working conditions, he said, "When it is 80 degrees outside it's 120 in here, because we are dealing with hot lead. We have to shower twice a day. We use special lead soap because it sticks to our hair. That's why we can't have facial hair. We take blood tests every month to check our lead levels but there is no safe level of lead in your blood. There should be a better air flow system in the plant, but they won't invest in that. Instead, they'd rather pay for more

machines to put out more batteries.”

He also said workers were opposed to plans to implement a “3-2-3” schedule. “We would work three days in a row, on 12-hour shifts with no overtime pay, before getting two days off, and then working three days straight again. People are really upset about this.”

He continued, “We are tired of the way we are treated. If we don’t stick together and speak up, and I mean all autoworkers, we are always going to be the low man, making their money, and always getting crapped on. The UAW is always saying this is the best you’re going to get, if you reject it, they’ll move the plant to Mexico. But if we take another bad contract, they’re only going to take more and more.

“We were united in our plant. We voted it down and we were ready to strike, not keep making batteries so the company could stockpile them for a strike. But the UAW officials wanted to prolong this and keep extending the contract, so the company could get us to produce months’ worth of batteries. If we let them, we’d still be making batteries in there. But we didn’t. It was the workers who caused this strike.”

“We don’t care what [Local 12 President] Bruce Baumhower or the UAW International wants, we pay them. We’re the ones who are going to decide, and we’re not going to accept a contract unless we like it.”

He concluded with an appeal to autoworkers in the Big Three plants. “We build 1,500 batteries a day just for the Ram 1500s at the Warren Truck plant. I would say to those workers stop putting batteries into those trucks. We all got to stick together. We should all go out at once.”

Fearing that the strike could be expanded to the Big Three plants, the UAW bureaucracy is doing everything to isolate the struggle and has not even bothered to report the walkout on its web site. Far from organizing joint action to defend the Clarios workers, UAW officials paraded a Democratic Party politician on the picket line Tuesday morning.

US Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur appeared for a photo op with local and regional UAW officials and urged workers to look to President Biden to support their struggle. What the union officials did not tell workers is that Kaptur was one of the 211 Democrats who voted in Congress last November to outlaw a strike by 120,000 railroad workers and impose a pro-company contract on them, which they previously rejected. Biden then signed this strikebreaking act into law.

Even as Kaptur spoke, her fellow Democrats in Lucas County—including Peter Gerken, a long-time UAW Local 12 and national UAW executive and current county commissioner—are still sending sheriff’s deputies to escort scab trucks through the Clarios workers’ picket lines so batteries could be delivered to the auto plants.

The Democrats are no more the “friends of labor” than Trump and the Republicans. Both corporate-controlled parties want to crush resistance to their plans to make the working class pay for the inflationary crisis, endless bank bailouts and

the reckless military confrontation against Russia and China that could trigger World War III.

But Clarios strikers will win powerful support from rank-and-file autoworkers for a common struggle. On Tuesday, members of the Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee visited the picket lines to discuss joint action between striking Clarios workers and the workers fighting unjust firings and management abuse at the nearby Dana Driveline Plant.

After learning about their strike through the WSWs, a Stellantis worker and member of the Warren Truck Rank-and-File Committee said, “I checked, and we get batteries from Clarios. We have to do everything we can to back their strike and stop handling these scab parts.

“These workers are going through modern-day slavery. Working 19 days in a row, 12 hours a day, with only two days off. They are literally being worked into an early grave. Then they are being threatened with arrest for striking.

“We all have to stick together because the UAW is not working for us, they’re working for the companies. We have to stand up for what is right for us, across the globe. We’re all sick and tired of being bullied by companies who could not make anything without our labor. We can’t sit back anymore and watch them strip everything from us. They’re taking away our money, our medical care and working us like dogs. It is time to speak up and fight for what workers need. By joining and building rank-and-file committees workers can talk together and organize. We can learn what we’re really fighting against.

“The UAW bureaucracy is fighting against us every day, and we have to fight fire with fire. They’ve been getting away with it for years. But this year is when it stops. Instead of letting them make us fight each other, we’ve got to channel all our energy to do something better for all of us.”



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