

Injunction against striking Clarios workers in Toledo, Ohio provokes widespread anger

Jerry White, Eric London**12 May 2023**

On Thursday, the transnational battery company Clarios filed a motion demanding that a Lucas County court issue an injunction against workers striking at the company's battery plant in Holland, Ohio, just outside Toledo. Thursday evening, Judge Michael Goulding ruled in favor of Clarios, and the United Auto Workers agreed to limit pickets to five people per entrance.

On May 8, 525 workers walked out, a week and a half after they had overwhelmingly rejected a tentative agreement that had been reached between UAW Local 12 negotiators and the company. The deal included an insulting 3 percent wage increase—after workers had lost thousands of dollars from inflation and recent pay cuts of up to \$10 an hour due to unilateral changes in the plant's piece rate system. The deal also green-lighted a new "flexible" work schedule that includes 12-hour shifts without overtime payments after eight hours.

The injunction is an anti-democratic attack on the right to strike and on workers' First Amendment freedom of speech and assembly. It is a transparent effort by the company and the local government to break the strike and keep Clarios batteries flowing to Ford, GM and other clients. It comes as workers at plants across the region, including at Dana and Stellantis, are calling for a united struggle of all autoworkers against the corporations.

In a legal brief filed by Clarios, the company claims striking workers "have engaged in illegal acts in connection with their strike," saying "those acts will inevitably result in irreparable injury" to the company, accusing workers of engaging in "physical violence." This is a flagrant lie. In fact, several workers have been struck by trucks being escorted through the picket lines by Lucas County Sheriff's deputies, who have threatened workers with arrest.

On Friday, the company also suspended medical and disability benefits for the striking workers. In a letter to workers announcing the cutoff of insurance, Plant Manager Richard Petrowski threatened workers' jobs, saying the strike "could have permanent consequences to the Toledo operation affecting everyone."

Clarios' legal filing makes clear the first days of the strike have had a powerful impact on not just Clarios but on the entire auto industry. The company's lawyers write that the strike has

"made it impossible for Plaintiff to operate its business" and that the striking workers "have created an emergency at Plaintiff's facilities of such a grave and serious nature" as to require legal action. Clarios provides batteries for over a third of all cars on the road today.

Judge Goulding's order granting Clarios' injunction request asserts that the pickets present a "danger" and must be limited to five people. The order further says pickets cannot "place themselves in any way to obstruct in any manner" the entrances to the plant. The judge claims this is necessary "in order to insure the preservation of public peace and property."

Workers on the picket line report that the UAW has limited the total number of workers at the plant to 15, which is beyond what is required to comply with the judge's order. The order does not bar workers from gathering in larger numbers outside the plant so long as they are not "within 100 feet of any entrance."

They reacted with anger to the injunction. "We are all against it!" one striker told the *World Socialist Web Site*. "They have management and scabs working production. They were all there last night."

"The injunction is BS," another worker with seven years at the plant told the WSWS. "The judge is on the side of the company. It's so soon in the strike, but it looks like the company is in it for the long run. We can't back down, and we have to stick together."

"We pushed this strike on the UAW. They never expected us to vote the contract down. If they bring back another one like that, we'll vote it down again. I saw on TikTok that construction workers walked off the job because Florida wants to pass a law to arrest people who help immigrants. There is a collective movement building, and it's not about this or that minority. It's about the whole working class, the blue-collar people. I tell workers: Look what's happening in France. Millions protesting and striking. Now there is a strike by Stellantis workers in Italy. When workers hear about that, they start thinking, we can do it here."

Denouncing the injunction, another worker told the WSWS, "How can they take away our right to strike and limit pickets? It's like what the Congress did to the railroad workers. They're taking away our money, but they don't want the little guy to

have any say-so over it.

“We’re stopping these batteries from going to Stellantis and GM, and it’s hurting them. Our plant manager, Rick, is a military man, and he thinks he can run the plant like it’s the military. Then there’s [Elizabeth] Powers who locked out those steelworkers in Pennsylvania for months. I would not be surprised if we were out for months too.

“We wanted to strike when the company imposed the pay cuts. But the union said the contract prohibited it. We said management does not abide by the contract, why should we? The UAW reps said, ‘File a grievance.’ The UAW lets the company get away with anything.

“All the negotiations have to be public. We need to know what the company and the union are negotiating. We’re sick of UAW reps telling us, ‘If you don’t take it, they’ll close the plant.’ And the strike fund is for us, not the UAW bureaucrats.

“If the rank-and-file workers stick together there is nothing we can’t win. I don’t mean just in the US, but across the world, at Clarios plants in Belgium, in China, and with workers at GM, Ford and Stellantis.”

The UAW bureaucracy, now led by Shawn Fain and his Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD) slate, has done nothing to mobilize UAW members to back the strike. Instead, UAW officials have promoted Democratic politicians like Ohio Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur and Senator Sherrod Brown, who both voted to outlaw a strike by railroad workers last year and impose a pro-company contract on them.

Despite the efforts by the media to promote him, Fain has no support among rank-and-file workers. A UAWD-sponsored meeting Thursday night in Detroit to discuss their “contract campaign” at GM, Ford and Stellantis failed to generate any support among rank-and-file workers. The speakers at the event did not even mention the Clarios strike.

This is in sharp contrast with the militant mood of the rank and file. On Thursday, supporters of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committee (IWA-RFC) went to the Stellantis Toledo Assembly Complex and distributed hundreds of copies of the statement from Will Lehman, Pennsylvania Mack Trucks worker and former candidate for UAW president, calling for the mobilization of all UAW members to defend the striking Clarios workers.

There was overwhelming support for the Clarios workers and widespread concern that they could be forced to handle batteries from the strikebound company. Several workers stopped to speak to WSWS reporters about the strike.

“These guys have been taking pay cuts, and they have to take blood tests and wear respirators because of the lead and other materials,” a young worker told the WSWS. “All that should be respected, and they should be taken care of. They are literally putting their lives on the line to make a wage. The company had \$1.6 billion in profits, and it wants lower wages and more work so it can make \$2 billion. It’s nothing but greed.

“It’s a rolling ball right now. Everyone is affected, and we are all connected. It’s great that the Clarios workers stood up to the company and the UAW. The union is working with the companies. I hate that they aren’t doing anything about the closure of the Belvidere plant and the layoffs. I asked a union rep about the layoffs, and he gave me all this stuff, but in the end it was, ‘The company has the right to do that.’

“If we walked out with the Clarios workers, Stellantis would not be making any money. They say we’ll be making \$31 at the end of the current contract, but with all the years of frozen wages and inflation we’re making the same thing they were in the 1970s. We’re fighting a two-headed monster—the companies and the UAW bureaucrats. But the rank and file is the third monster. I believe we should follow the workers at Dana, GM and other Stellantis plants and start building committees in every plant, across the world.”

A Jeep worker said he had previously worked at the Clarios plant, which he referred to as the “Poison Factory,” because of the exposure to toxic materials. “Workers need better conditions because it is gross there. They are always pushing for numbers.”

After learning that Clarios used a piece rate system at the factory, where workers’ wages were dependent on how many batteries they produced, one worker shouted “that’s slavery,” comparing it to the share-cropping system his grandfather had to work under in the Deep South in the 1920s.

A temporary worker added, “The one common thing I’m hearing from all workers—Clarios, Dana, Warren Truck—is that the union is working for the company, not for us. I feel for those workers, retirees are dying from cancer, it’s the same for us. We have to build these rank-and-file committees to fight.”

For more information about building rank-and-file committees and building support for the Clarios workers, call or text 248-602-0936 or fill out the form below.



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