

Clarios hiring strikebreakers after court injunction limits picketing at Toledo, Ohio battery plant

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Clarios management has begun bringing strikebreakers into its Holland, Ohio, battery manufacturing plant, where 525 United Auto Workers members have been on strike since May 8. The move came three days after a Lucas County judge granted the company's request for an injunction to restrict picketing at the Toledo-area plant to five union members at each entrance.

Workers on the picket line sent photos to the WSWS of red school buses filled with strikebreakers being driven in and out of the plant Monday. The company has put out ads for general labor positions paying \$19 an hour for first and second shifts and \$20 an hour for the third shift.

At the same time, Lucas County Sheriff's deputies are escorting the buses and trucks carrying stockpiled batteries through the picket lines so they can be delivered to auto plants in Ohio, Michigan and other states. Private security guards are also taking videos and photographs of pickets for evidence of any violation of the judge's injunction.

The decision to use strikebreakers is the most provocative action against striking workers in the Toledo area since auto supplier AP Parts used hundreds of scabs against 450 members of United Auto Workers Local 14 in 1984-1985. Although thousands of Toledo-area workers defied company and police violence to defend the AP Parts strikers, the UAW bureaucracy isolated the struggle and after 10 months forced the workers to accept a pay cut of \$2 an hour (the equivalent of \$5.75 an hour in today's dollars) for new hires--in a foreshadowing of the two-tier wage system the UAW would later accept.

In the current situation, the UAW bureaucracy, headed by new President Shawn Fain, has done nothing to mobilize the tens of thousands of UAW members in the region to stop Clarios' strikebreaking operation. Although there is widespread support among rank-and-file workers at nearby Ford, Stellantis and General Motors plants for a ban on handling batteries from the strikebound factory, the UAW bureaucracy is making sure there is no disruption to

production and the profits of the Big Three automakers.

The walkout at Clarios is the first strike in the 42-year history of plant, which was previously owned by Johnson Controls until the tier-one parts supplier spun off its battery division to a group of private investors in 2019. Clarios, the world's largest auto battery manufacturer, is pressing for major concessions, including the introduction of a so-called "2-2-3 schedule," which would force workers to work 12-hour shifts without any overtime payments after eight hours. The company has also cut workers' wages by \$10 or more an hour by increasing quotas in its piece rate system.

When UAW Local 12 and UAW International officials came back with a tentative agreement that included the new schedule, plus an insulting 3 percent pay increase for production workers and nothing for maintenance workers, rank-and-file workers rejected it by 98 percent on April 27. After this stunning rebuke, UAW officials tried to defy the near-unanimous vote for strike action and came up with another deal they could sell to members, but they were forced by workers to finally call the strike 11 days later.

"We are not going back on management's terms, we're going back on ours," a striking worker told the WSWS. "We don't care if the UAW comes back with another deal, we're not going to take it if it includes the new schedule. Unions were built so the working man didn't have to work over eight hours and was paid time-and-a-half for more. We also didn't get any pay increases over the previous four-year contract the UAW signed, and we want a good raise and cost-of-living protections against inflation."

Commenting on the cut-off of medical insurance by the company on May 13 and the use of scabs, he continued, "The company is not messing around. I can't even go to the picket line until it's my time because the judge's injunction won't allow it. Now, they're bringing scabs. Two busloads isn't enough to replace us. We're skilled and we know how to fix machines and put out the batteries. But the 15 billionaires who own this company are calling the shots and

they want to make an example of us.

“Back in the day, the UAW would put a ban on all these batteries until we won the strike. They’re not doing that. I appreciate the support that we are getting from UAW members, and if we can stick together, we can win.”

A maintenance worker picketing on Sunday told the WSWS, “This company has seen its market value go up five times since the private equity firm [Brookfield Business Partners] took it over. Johnson Controls had a market capitalization of \$60 billion. For Clarios, it’s \$350 billion. If they jump ship and sell off the company, the big investors will pocket millions. We’re in the trenches, doing all the work and we are the ones who will say what is a good contract and what isn’t.”

Another maintenance worker added, “Fifty percent of what we build goes to Ford. This strike is going to hit all the auto companies. This place is dangerous. In the few years I’ve been here, I know five people who died of cancer and some of them didn’t even make it to retirement. One died last Tuesday. The judge said we were making it ‘unsafe.’ But every day we’re in there the company threatens our safety.”

“The union is supposed to be back at the table with the company, but we haven’t heard anything,” another striker said. “We know that in the UAW we’re fighting a well-organized machine, but it’s only been a week and we are determined to hold out. Hopefully, we can get together with Dana and Jeep workers and get a real working-class movement going, one that shows how much workers matter, and build up real momentum. If we can win, it will be good not only for us but for every autoworker and the future generations.”

The fight can only be won if workers at Clarios and throughout the Big Three auto plants take the conduct of the struggle into their own hands by expanding the network of worker-controlled rank-and-file committees.

Workers at Clarios should organize a rank-and-file strike committee to outline their own non-negotiable demands, insist on rank-and-file oversight over all negotiations and the release of the full contract and a full week to study it before any ratification vote. The full pay and medical benefits of workers must be covered by the UAW’s \$800-million-plus strike fund.

At the same time, autoworkers at the Toledo Jeep assembly complex, Dana and other factories should organize their own rank-and-file strike solidarity committees to invite Clarios workers to hold joint informational pickets at their plants, demonstrations and other actions to support their strike.

There is no doubt that Clarios is digging in a for a long fight. But workers can win by expanding their struggle. The company’s major clients—Ford, GM and Stellantis—are

running out of batteries, and behind the scenes they are demanding a quick and decisive defeat of the strike. The Big Three auto bosses and their Wall Street backers hope a defeat at Clarios will set the precedent for taking on the 150,000 autoworkers in the US and 20,000 more in Canada whose contracts expire in four months.

The automakers are counting on the support of Fain and the rest of the UAW apparatus. Behind their call for a “just transition” to electric vehicles, the UAW bureaucracy is offering its services to suppress the resistance of autoworkers to the destruction of tens of thousands of jobs and the creation of even-lower paid tiers at EV factories.

After more than a week of silence, the UAW bureaucracy issued its first official statement on the strike Tuesday. It reported that Clarios workers rejected the “company’s latest offer by an overwhelming 98 percent,” without noting that the sellout deal was recommended by the UAW. Instead of calling for the mobilization of all UAW members to oppose the company and court strikebreaking, the statement praised Democratic Senator Sherrod Brown and Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur for supposedly supporting the strikers. But these big business politicians are proven enemies of the working class. Both Democrats voted to outlaw a strike by 120,000 railroad workers last year and impose a contract workers had previously rejected.

The UAW’s statement concluded by quoting new UAW Region 2B Director Dave Green, who said, “Clarios doesn’t need a judge to help them end this dispute—they need to come back to the bargaining table with a serious offer that our members can accept.”

Green himself is a veteran of pushing through pro-company contracts. In 2018, as president of UAW Local 1112 he helped impose massive concessions on GM workers at the company’s Lordstown, Ohio, assembly plant. In the name of “saving the plant,” local UAW officials agreed to what GM called a “Super Competitive Operating Agreement,” which allowed GM to lay off thousands of workers and bring in contractors, temps and other lower-wage staff employed by subsidiary GM Subsystems. This did not stop GM shutting the plant, which was agreed to by the UAW bureaucracy in its 2019 contract with the company.

Are you a Clarios striker? Fill out the form below for more information on building a rank-and-file strike committee.



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