

Clarios workers in Germany declare support for striking workers in Ohio: “They should get what they demand”

Our reporters
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On Tuesday, *World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke with workers at the Clarios factory in Hanover, Germany, who expressed their support for the courageous strike being carried out by their American colleagues in Toledo, Ohio.

The workers in the US have been defying the company for over two weeks. They recently rejected a second concessions contract agreed by the United Auto Workers, with 76 percent voting “no.” Hanover is home to the company’s European headquarters and the largest battery plant for auto applications in Europe.

WSWS reporters distributed a statement from the International Workers’ Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), which describes the strike at Clarios as a strategic dispute in the global struggle of auto workers. It calls on all workers to form action committees to support and expand the strike.

Michele and Alex work for the Clarios contractor Actemium Cegelec, which installs and maintains industrial equipment. “We are currently building a new line for Clarios and supplying electricity to other parts of the plant,” Michele said. The latest increase in food prices is “quite frankly fatal” for him, he said: “I have two children to support.” The wage increases agreed by the unions are “in the end just a drop in the bucket; they don’t even cover inflation,” Michele noted.

“If you could at least get a raise equivalent to the inflation rate, that would be something. But that’s not the way it is. There’s talk of inflation coming back down, but for the important things—food, heating costs and so on—prices are still way up.

The fact that workers in the US have decided to stand up against the attacks on their purchasing power and living standards “is absolutely understandable in my

opinion,” Michele said. “It’s good they’re fighting for it. They should get what they demand. In the US, some of the conditions are even worse than here.”

A large proportion of the workers at the Hanover site are employed by subcontractors or so-called “outside companies.” Many are long-term temporary workers who work under particularly precarious conditions.

Metin is also a temporary worker. “If I do anything out of place, I will get thrown out immediately,” he says. “This place is full of temporary workers. They do it on purpose so they can keep us down and kick out anyone who doesn’t suit them. The unions haven’t done anything here for years; they just cash in.”

Last week, based on interviews with several temporary workers, the WSWS reported on the dangerous working conditions that can be life-threatening. Workers reported serious accidents at the plant due to poor safety measures and high lead exposure in battery production.

These reports were confirmed by Metin, who described conditions in parts of the factory as “poisoned to the point of no return.” He then declared, “I will put up one of your posters inside.”

A few minutes after this encounter, Christian Riedel (director of communications, Clarios EMEA) came up to the WSWS info table and, speaking on behalf of management, said that they had been “very surprised about the previous article.” Claims about the widespread use of temporary workers and inadequate occupational safety were “misinformation,” Riedel declared, and accused the WSWS reporters of having “no journalistic standards” and “completely distorting things to suit yourselves.”

When asked what the company had to say about lead

exposure at the plant, Riedel claimed that the occupational health and safety measures were in line with the “benchmark in Europe.”

Adam, who works as a driver at the Clarios plant, took several leaflets along with two other colleagues to distribute to others. At the Hanover site, Clarios employs workers from a wide range of nations, which is why the international perspective of the IWA-RFC was of particular interest.

A worker coming out of the factory said, in passing: “It’s the same everywhere: It’s about them ‘up there’ wanting to take everything and give nothing. The unions won’t change that either, because they are just like the politicians. They collect their hefty contributions and promise all kinds of things because they want to be elected. But when they get elected, that’s the end of it. All they care about is looking after themselves.”



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