

What our strike is about: An open letter from the Clarios Workers Rank-and-File Committee

26 May 2023

The following statement was issued by a group of Clarios workers in Ohio who have formed the Clarios Workers Rank-and-File Committee. The strike by 525 workers at the Clarios auto battery factory is nearing the end of its third week after workers rejected a second UAW-backed contract.

To contact the Clarios Workers Rank-and-File Committee, email clarios.rfc@gmail.com or text 419-491-7478.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Clarios workers have taken a stand. We have overwhelmingly voted down two contracts brought back by the UAW apparatus. We have stood together and declared that we will not accept a contract that we cannot live with.

Having made clear what we *will not accept*, it is high time that rank-and-file Clarios workers make clear *what we are demanding*. It is not enough to say “No!” and wait and see what management and the UAW will bring back next. We must make clear, first of all among ourselves, *what this strike is really about*.

The Clarios Workers Rank-and-File Committee consists of rank-and-file workers, independent of the UAW apparatus, who have organized to discuss and plan the strategy and tactics of our struggle.

We propose the following as non-negotiable demands that must be included in any contract before we are willing to accept it:

1. No to the 2-2-3 system!

The schedule we currently work is already unacceptable, with its 12-hour and often 16-hour days, hardly time enough to get back home and sleep before we have to return. We will not accept the effort of the company to introduce the 2-2-3 system which will codify 12-hour days at straight time.

In the second contract, UAW Region 2B Director David Green claimed the union put a “box” around the 2-2-3 scheme by limiting it to the TBS line and all new hires. If Clarios continues to bring in new machines, however, we will all be on 2-2-3. Our bottom line is eight-hour days and time-and-a-half after that!

2. A 30 percent wage increase to make up for real wage cuts! Reverse all pay cuts and return piece rates to 2020 levels!

The 3 percent annual raise contained in both contracts we rejected is an insult. At current rates of inflation, this would mean a real wage cut of more than 10 percent over the life of the contract. Our last contract basically froze our wages even as inflation hit the highest levels in four decades. On top of that, the changes to piece rates over the past year have cut our pay even more, by as much as \$15 an hour.

Instead of the bogus signing bonus, we demand a 30 percent raise, plus a Cost-of-Living Allowance (COLA) pegged to the inflation rate, to make up for years of lost income. We all see our increasing grocery bills and know that we cannot go on like this. There would not be a revolving door at the plant if workers were paid good wages. But no one is going to work here for \$13 an hour if they can get more at a McDonald’s with safer conditions.

3. Hazard pay, paid sick days and the right to retire after 25 years with full pension and health benefits!

Working in a battery plant is dangerous work, and it is an outrage that we do not receive paid sick days. So many of our brothers and sisters are dying a few short years after retiring. This must end. Workers should have the right to retire after 25 years and should not have to pay anything for health care necessary due to

the conditions in which we work.

Instead of getting points for calling in sick, workers should have seven days of paid sick leave and seven paid personal days a year, so that we can recover and spend time with our families.

Moreover, it is bad enough to have to work under hazardous conditions, but doing so in the blistering heat of summer is intolerable and extremely dangerous. Johnson Controls promised air conditioning back in 1981, but the company never delivered. We demand the air conditioning of the full facility.

These are our non-negotiable demands. We are not animals! We are men and women who deserve to be paid a living wage, work reasonable hours and not kill ourselves pumping out profits for the company.

UAW officials claim they will negotiate for better pay and conditions in three years. But in three years, Clarios can have us all working on the 2-2-3 schedule. No, the time to fight is now! With Clarios pulling in \$1.6 billion in profits last year, no one can tell us there is no money to pay us what we need. Instead of giving billionaire investors and corporate executives huge payouts, the money should go to the workers whose blood, sweat and tears make the profits.

To the UAW officials, we are serving notice that we will not accept a contract that does not meet these conditions. You took us for fools in the last contract, trying to present it as a great victory when it was really the same as the one that we already rejected.

And you had the gall to tell us that we're not "educated" enough to understand the full contract. We only received the "highlights" and were expected to vote the same day. Before any future vote, we demand the *full contract*, with at least three days to study it before rendering our verdict.

UAW President Shawn Fain claims the union leadership is 100% behind our strike: Let them put their money where their mouths are. The UAW is sitting on an \$825 million strike fund, paid for with workers' dues. Workers on strike at Clarios and Constellium should get \$1,000 a week in strike pay to prove to the companies that we are prepared to wage a real battle now, and when the contracts for GM, Ford and Stellantis workers expire in September.

To our brothers and sisters at Clarios, we say: Workers have enormous power. At the beginning of the strike many of us didn't realize how essential we were

to the entire auto industry. But there are already reports that Ford is running out of batteries and will have to cut back on production. At the same time, we are getting reports from Toledo Jeep, Warren Truck and the GM Flint Assembly Plant that workers do not want to handle scab batteries on their assembly lines.

We also know that we are not only fighting for ourselves. We are fighting for all auto workers and all workers. If Clarios can get its foot in the door with 12-hour shifts and no overtime after eight, GM, Ford and Stellantis will make similar demands when the Big Three contracts come up in September.

We have put our demands in writing. This is what we must have to agree to any contract. If the UAW negotiators will not fight for this, then we will have to fight for it ourselves. At the same time, we are going to spread the word about what we are fighting for to all auto workers so we can fight for this together. Our fight is their fight, their fight is ours!



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