

Police escort scab trucks through pickets at Constellium Automotive in Michigan

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Police were called to the picket line at Constellium Automotive in Van Buren Township, Michigan last Thursday morning to escort trucks transporting scab parts through the picket line. Workers were reportedly making each vehicle wait 15 minutes before allowing it through.

But instead of mobilizing solidarity action from Ford workers and other autoworkers who handle the scab parts, the union, United Auto Workers (UAW) local 174, reportedly instructed its members to allow the scab trucks to enter and exit without delay.

A picket described the incident to the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* on Thursday evening. “Day shift wasn’t letting trucks in or out,” he said. “They would hold them 15 minutes... then they’d make the next one wait. When the company called the police, the union said we had to let them through.” A co-worker added, “If the Ford workers would say, ‘We are not taking your scab parts,’ we would be back to work tomorrow.”

The 160 workers at the plant are approaching their third week on strike. They are fighting for wage increases to compensate for the soaring cost of living, safe working conditions and an end to management’s punishing attendance points system.

A team leader on the picket line denounced the abusive points system for disciplining workers at the least infraction of lateness or absenteeism. “If you get 10 points you are fired,” he said. “If you call in you get 2 points. No call in and no show, you get 4 points. If you are one minute late, you get 1/2 a point. If you stay for 5 hours and leave early you get 1 point. If you leave before 5 hours you get 2 points.”

Team leaders are responsible for training new hires, and the high turnover at the plant imposes extra work on them. The policy tends to exacerbate an already

hazardous work environment. “They have tarps all over the plant catching rain water and directing it into a hose that goes into a trash barrel,” he added.

The union bureaucracy collaborates with management to enforce speedup. Very often, one person is made to feed a machine that was designed for two operators. New hires are often forced to work seven days a week, 12 hours a day.

The factory is unique in the region as a key supplier of aluminum engine rails and crash control systems to Ford Motor Company’s six flagship assembly plants which make the F-150, F-150 Lightning, Explorer and Super Duty F-Series trucks. Hence, the scab parts produced in this supplier factory are obvious and identifiable on the shop floor of the assembly plants.

On Tuesday, May 16, the day before the strike began, the union allowed the company to bring in some 40 workers from a temp agency to be trained as scabs. Moreover, management personnel who are not qualified and not licensed or certified are operating hi-los and other heavy equipment as part of the ongoing scabbing operation. When the strike started, a Constellium spokesperson told the press, “We do not anticipate any disruption to our production and will work closely with our customers to ensure continuity of operations.”

The Paris, France-based corporation employs more than 12,000 workers internationally. The global producer of aluminum rolled products, extruded products and structural auto parts had revenue of \$8.73 billion in 2022, including \$1.9 billion in sales to automakers. It had a net profit of \$332 million last year, up from \$282 million in 2021. CEO Jean-Marc Germain pocketed nearly \$9 million last year.

The strike in Van Buren is part of a growing wave of struggles by autoworkers against plans by the global

automakers to force workers to pay for their transition to electric vehicles. In Holland, Ohio, just 40 miles south, 525 UAW members have been on strike for more than three weeks against the world's largest auto battery manufacturer, Clarios. Just days after a judge granted the company an injunction to limit picketing at the Toledo-area factory, Clarios began bringing in strikebreakers at that factory to continue the production of batteries for Ford, GM, Stellantis and other automakers.

Both companies are working with the UAW bureaucracy to push wage settlements below the rate of inflation to impose effective pay cuts on the work force and the imposition of mandatory overtime schedules at straight-time pay. The trend represents a serious threat to the more than 170,000 workers at the Big Three auto plants in the US and Canada who face upcoming contract struggles in the fall.

The raft of concessions and layoffs introduced over the past four decades in the auto industry—from plant closures to pay cuts, the use of temporary part-time workers, the elimination of Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA) and the elimination of personal days—most of these attacks began in the parts plants that were spun off from the Big Three.

After rejecting a second UAW-backed contract proposal containing compulsory overtime at straight-time pay and a miserable pay offer, Clarios workers launched a Rank-and-File Committee as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees to clarify their demands and link up with other sections of workers.

In a statement dated May 26 entitled, “What our strike is about: An open letter from the Clarios Workers Rank-and-File Committee,” they wrote: “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 letter concludes: “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 \$800 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.”

These are the same issues that Constellium workers confront. They should reach out to the Clarios Workers Rank-and-File Committee to link up their struggles and build support for both strikes. In spite of the efforts of the UAW apparatus to isolate these strikes, rank-and-file workers from other plants are joining the picket lines. The widespread sentiment of support in the working class must be informed, organized and expanded.

“A lot of companies are on strike,” another picket told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworkers Newsletter*. “I saw it on the union web site. Everything keeps going up and wages stay the same. It’s bad enough now. You have to work 40 hours before you get any overtime. If you work a 10-hour shift, you should get two hours overtime. We are picketing 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The maintenance workers and temps are all scabbing around the clock.”

Constellium workers should reach out to their brothers and sisters in the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees at Clarios and Dana, for example, to prepare their own strategy to fight back.



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