

“They are trying to strong-arm us”: Clarios workers call for support as company steps up strikebreaking campaign

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1 June 2023

For nearly four weeks, 525 workers at the Clarios plant in the Toledo suburb of Holland, Ohio have waged a defiant strike against demands by the world’s largest auto battery manufacturer for sweeping wage concessions and exhausting and dangerous work schedules.

The workers, who have been on strike since May 8, are fighting a two-front war. They are battling billionaire private equity investors from Brookfield Partners, who bought the former battery division of Johnson Controls in 2019 and are trying to maximize its value before selling it off. At the same time, the workers are fighting the sabotage of the United Auto Workers (UAW) bureaucracy, which has tried to ram not one but two pro-company contracts down their throats.

On May 22, rank-and-file Clarios workers voted by 76 percent to reject a three-year contract offer that included an insulting 3 percent annual wage increase and opened the door to 12-hour workdays without overtime payments after eight hours. The proposed contract was simply a rehash of a previous deal brought back by UAW Local 12 and International UAW officials, which workers rejected by 98 percent on April 27.

In the 10 days since workers rejected the second deal, management has gone on the offensive. The company has refused to resume negotiations, stepped up its efforts to recruit strikebreakers at the Holland plant and mailed letters to strikers’ homes urging them to cross the picket lines.

In one letter from the company’s human resources department dated May 24, company executives expressed their anger over the “disappointing margin”

by which workers voted down their second offer despite the “full, unanimous and written endorsement of the UAW Local 12 bargaining committee.”

The letter continued, “At this time, no additional dates for negotiations have been set. While the Company remains committed to good faith negotiations with the Union, no one can predict how long this work stoppage might last.” Claiming that some employees have asked about returning to work, the letter said anyone who crossed the picket lines would have their medical benefits reinstated and be paid wages in line with the expired contract.

The day before, management sent out a May 23 letter, signed by top executives in charge of the company’s US and Canadian operations, which declared that “Clarios workers from other facilities, and new workers, are onsite and will continue to arrive to expand operations at the facility. We have engaged Clarios facilities from around the globe to ensure we make our customer deliveries.”

Job openings for the Holland plant continue to be posted on all the major job listing web sites. Earlier this week, Toledo Director Rick Petrowski made a Facebook post stating, “We are Growing and Hiring! ... If you are looking for a career with growth potential, working alongside high performers that have fun, then this is for you! ... Ready for the right career change, Message or call me!”

“The company says they are committed to bargain in good faith and then they say they are committed to run the plant without us,” a striking worker told the WSW. “For them, it’s a waiting game. They know with us getting \$500 a week in strike pay that we’re struggling, and they’re hoping that we’re going to beg

for our jobs back.”

Another worker added, “They’re trying to strong-arm us. But we’re standing firm. We can’t accept a 3 percent increase when inflation is higher than that and we took pay cuts of anywhere from \$8 to \$15 an hour when they changed the piece rate quotas.”

In the face of these provocations, the UAW bureaucracy is deliberately isolating the strike and allowing GM, Ford and Stellantis to continue production with scab batteries produced by Clarios at the Holland plant and other facilities. At its much publicized online “town hall meeting” on the upcoming Big Three contract struggle, neither UAW President Shawn Fain nor any of the other members of the UAW International Executive Board said a single word about the Clarios strike.

But the outcome of this strike will have immense implications for all autoworkers who are fighting the plans of Big Three automakers to force workers to bear the cost of the transition to electric vehicle production through the destruction of jobs, wages and working conditions.

Even though the UAW International is sitting on a strike fund worth \$825 million, UAW officials are only paying Clarios workers \$500 a week in strike benefits in a transparent effort to starve them into submission. In a slap in the face to striking workers, UAW Local 12 officials announced this week that workers and their families could get food, household goods and toiletries at a “strike pantry” set up in the union hall. Also available are letters “that can be used for loan/credit deferments when applicable.”

Clarios workers are determined to fight. Late last week, a group of workers formed a rank-and-file committee and issued an open letter outlining the nonnegotiable demands strikers are fighting for. This included the elimination of the 2-2-3 system, which would codify 12-hour workdays with no overtime payments, and a 30 percent raise plus cost-of-living (COLA) protection, to make up for past pay cuts and inflation.

They also demanded that workers on strike at Clarios and Constellium 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.”

The statement added, “We also know that we are not

only fighting for ourselves. We are fighting for all autoworkers 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.”

A striking worker told the WSWS, “I agree 100 percent with the statement of the Clarios Rank-and-File Committee. I’ve got family members working in non-union plants and they get treated better than we do at Clarios with a union.

“People in the Big Three need to know about our struggle. Jeep workers from the Toledo plant have come to the picket lines and CSX railroad workers in the Teamsters union have too. We all have to unite.”

A young worker with three years in the plant added, “I like everything I read in the statement of the rank-and-file committee. We need everything back that we had before they cut our rates in 2021 and right before the contract, and more.

“We produce batteries for the Ram trucks, for Ford and GM. If the union stepped in and said, ‘Workers in the Big Three plants are not going to handle Clarios batteries,’ the company would be begging us to return. And, if we got \$1,000 a week instead of \$500 in strike pay the company would know we could stay out longer.

“If we can win, the workers in the Big Three will win too. If we don’t, the workers at GM, Ford and Stellantis will lose too. Everybody is fighting inflation and the high cost of living. The executives and owners of these companies are giving us scraps off their table while they’re eating at five-star restaurants.

“It’s like the union doesn’t want the union to be strong. It’s not fun for us to have to stand up to them too, but we have to do what we have to do.”

For more information on joining the Clarios Workers Rank-and-File Committees, fill out the form below. Also, text AUTO to (866) 847-1086 to sign up for text updates from the Autoworker Rank-and-File Network or to discuss forming a rank-and-file strike support committee at your plant.



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