

UAW International orders GM Flint plant to handle scab batteries from Clarios, according to local official

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The United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 598 shop chairman at the General Motors Flint Assembly Plant has instructed local union members to continue to unload and install batteries built by scabs hired to replace Clarios workers who have been on strike at the Holland, Ohio, auto battery plant for more than four weeks. The official added that the order to carry out this despicable stab in the back of the striking UAW Local 12 members at Clarios has come directly from the UAW International Union, headed by new president Shawn Fain.

The June 4 comments by UAW Local 598 Shop Chairman Eric Welter came in response to questions about the strike from several rank-and-file members on the local union's internal communications app. The workers questioned UAW L. 598 officials after reading the open letter from the Clarios Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which was distributed at the plant by supporters of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) late last week.

The workers asked the following questions:

Scabs are now making the batteries at Clarios. If these batteries come into our plant, what do we do?

So with scabs building our batteries now shouldn't we stand with them and refuse to use any batteries built by scabs otherwise what's the point of the strike?

Are we using scab batteries from the battery plant that is on strike? If so, are we condoning scab labor?

Clearly handling scab batteries - you should feel bad

Welter responded by saying he had to "do some research and discuss with the international union." This suggests his response was not a personal opinion but an official one from the national UAW leadership.

At first, Welter tried to dodge the question of whether the UAW was condoning the use of scab parts by claiming that the batteries delivered to the Flint assembly plant were manufactured before the May 8 strike began. "[W]e are still working off pre-strike inventory as they only make gas engine batteries for us," he claimed.

This is hardly believable. Clarios workers have been on strike for more than four weeks. Given the standard practice of just-in-time deliveries to assembly plants, which stockpile few if any components, no one should believe these batteries were built more than a month ago. It is far more likely that the current batteries being installed by GM workers were manufactured by scab labor.

However, regardless of whether or not the batteries being handled in Flint are pre-strike inventory or not, handling any Clarios batteries only strengthens the strikebreaking company and undermines the efforts of the Clarios workers. It also undermines the unity of all autoworkers in the run-up to the contract battle this summer where workers will face similar concessions demands from GM and the other Big Three automakers.

In an effort to justify what amounts to a strikebreaking operation by the UAW bureaucracy, Welter claimed union officials have no choice but to help Clarios because putting a ban on the handling of scab batteries would be a violation of the National Labor Relations Act. "The National Labor Relations Act is clear under 'hot cargo' that we have to continue to unload, and this is the direction from the international union."

Here, Welter is pointing to the reactionary Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 and other pro-management amendments to the National Labor Relations Act (1935) as a cowardly excuse to help Clarios smash the strike. Nothing could be clearer. The

misnamed-Solidarity House leadership is declaring they are directing workers to handle scab batteries.

This proves that Fain was posturing as a militant reformer at the UAW Special Bargaining Convention in March this year when he said, “This week I’ve heard some talk about what we can’t do, about what the law says. And the law has its place. But the UAW wasn’t founded by asking for permission.”

True enough, but Fain and his accomplices are not even questioning the laws, let alone challenging them. They have no right to invoke the history and traditions of the people who founded the UAW, many of whom were socialists and left-wing militants. Those workers led the Flint Sit-Down Strike, Toledo General Strike, and other mass struggles in the 1930s to build the UAW in a fight against company-controlled judges, injunctions and the violence of company thugs, police and the National Guard.

The final exchange on the app between Welter and another worker provides a telling picture of the willingness of the union to not only capitulate but to collude with the corporations, the Supreme Court and government.

A worker commented, “Very recently, the supreme court ruled 8-1 in favor of a corporation’s right to sue unions in order to recoup money lost during a strike. This is probably REALLY good news for us, right?”

Welter, missing the sarcasm, responded, “It’s good and bad, it confirmed that companies can sue unions for damages when striking, but also confirmed that the timing of a strike is the union’s. I would say overall it’s good because we were expecting the conservative court to rule wholly against the union and harm our ability to strike which they surprisingly did not.”

In fact, the recent Supreme Court decision is a sweeping attack on the right to strike, which, taken to its logical conclusion, would make any strike illegal if it causes any harm to the company’s profits. The one dissenting judge suggested that the issue at stake in the case was whether workers were legally free or “indentured servants,” who can be prohibited by law from putting down their tools.

Insofar as union bureaucrats like Welter point to the “positive” side of this reactionary ruling, it is only because it will provide the UAW bureaucracy with a further pretext not to call any strikes. The UAW officials will say to workers that “if you go on strike, the company will sue us and you’ll lose your job. You’ll have to accept whatever sellout contract and concessions are presented and continue to work.”

If forced by the rank and file to call a strike, the UAW bureaucracy will make sure it does no damage to GM or any other employer. In other words, they will be short, impotent “Hollywood” strikes that undermine the very purpose of a

work stoppage: the exerting of as much economic pressure on the corporations as possible.

No matter what the excuse they use, the bottom line is the UAW bureaucracy is aiding Clarios and the automakers like GM which want to deliver a crushing defeat to these courageous striking workers, in order to set a precedent for similar concession demands when contracts expire at GM, Ford and Stellantis in September.

The UAW bureaucracy has the same considerations. The Clarios workers have rejected not one but two sellout contracts pushed by UAW International and Local 12 officials, which included an insulting 3 percent raise and a 12-hour workday with no overtime payments after eight hours. Because Fain & Co. fear that the revolt of the Clarios workers will inspire Big Three workers to follow their lead, the UAW bureaucracy is deliberately isolating their strike and working towards its defeat.

Workers at Flint Assembly, Ford Rouge and Stellantis plants in Detroit and other UAW workers knew nothing about the Clarios strike until supporters of the IWA-RFC distributed the open letter and statement of the Steering Committee of the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committees calling for GM, Ford and Stellantis workers to enforce a ban on scab batteries.

Everything must be done to break the UAW’s isolation of the strike and broaden the struggle, the outcome of which will have decisive consequences for all autoworkers.

As a member of the GM Flint Rank-and-File Committee told the WSWS: “Workers at Flint GM, Ford and Stellantis should not be handling scab batteries. Our brothers and sisters are about to be walked all over and as soon as they are, the same thing is going to happen to us when the contract ends in September. If this struggle is won, however, it will greatly strengthen us. But this will not happen if matters are left in the hands of the UAW bureaucracy. That is why I urge all workers to join and build the network of autoworkers’ rank-and-file committees and set up strike support committees to stand with the Clarios workers.”

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