

UAW, CWA move to sabotage Clarios strike, allowing company to increase production at Missouri factory

Marcus Day
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Global automotive battery maker Clarios is attempting to offset a strike by 525 workers in Ohio by increasing production at its factory in St. Joseph, Missouri, north of Kansas City, according to a report in *Automotive News* Monday.

Workers at the Holland, Ohio, Clarios plant near Toledo have been on strike since May 8, having overwhelmingly rejected two concessionary agreements negotiated and endorsed by the United Auto Workers union.

Fearing that the defiant stand of Clarios workers will trigger a broader rebellion by autoworkers, the UAW apparatus has escalated its efforts to isolate and sabotage the struggle in recent days, working in close coordination with the other pro-corporate union bureaucracies in the AFL-CIO.

The union local at the St. Joseph plant, IUE-CWA (the International Union of Electrical Workers - Communications Workers of America) Local 86116, has agreed to allow the company to ramp up production, according to *Automotive News*.

This blatant effort to undermine the strike was met with the tacit approval of the UAW leadership, with a Local 86116 official telling the publication that “the UAW has not asked the IUE-CWA to reject the shifted production.” This is despite the UAW having been in communication with the IUE-CWA “since day one,” according to UAW Region 2B Director Dave Green, who is overseeing the contract talks.

A Clarios worker at the St. Joseph plant called the

move to shift production there to offset the strike “disgusting” and told the WSWs that the company was implementing mandatory overtime this weekend. Contrary to the claim of *Automotive News* that “[u]nion members there plan to accept the work,” the worker said they had not been consulted and the decision was “news to production workers,” who were angered by the announcement.

There is no time to lose: Rank-and-file workers at the St. Joseph and other Clarios plants should organize immediately to oppose the company-union attempts to increase production and defeat the strike. Rank-and-file strike solidarity committees should be formed to coordinate common action with the Clarios Workers Rank-and-File Committee in Ohio and prepare to countermand any orders that are aimed at undermining the struggle.

If the company succeeds in imposing its concessions in Ohio—including the 2-2-3 schedule and below-inflation pay increases—then it will use it as a springboard to go on the offensive at all its plants. The traditional slogan of the labor movement, “an injury to one is an injury to all,” must be revived.

Like the Holland facility, the St. Joseph plant is one of the few Clarios plants equipped to produce absorbent glass mat (AGM) batteries. Other Clarios plants would require at least 30-60 days to retool to produce AGMs, a union official told *Automotive News*. The St. Joseph factory employs over 800 workers and also produces lead-acid batteries, typically supplying Ford and Toyota, as well as the aftermarket.

Clarios’ director of communications, Chris Sherman, told *Automotive News* about the move to increase production at St. Joseph, “We have brought in team

members and are using resources across our manufacturing network to ensure we are fulfilling our customer commitments.”

It is increasingly clear that the UAW bureaucracy, under the self-declared “reform” administration of President Shawn Fain, is working to deliberately torpedo the strike and enforce the company’s demands. The UAW International and Local 12 negotiated and unanimously endorsed two sellout contracts widely hated by workers, with the first voted down by a stunning 98 percent and the second by 76 percent.

Responding to these rebukes with growing hostility and nervousness, the UAW International is attempting to force its members at the Big Three automakers to handle scab batteries, despite broad sentiment among workers to refuse to do so. Over the weekend, a local UAW official at the General Motors Flint Assembly plant informed workers that the UAW International had ordered the local to continue handling batteries produced from the strikebound Clarios factory in Ohio.

Meanwhile, rank-and-file workers at Clarios and throughout the UAW are being kept in the dark about the discussions between the company and union officials, despite the declarations by Fain and his lieutenants that they are implementing a new era of “transparency” in the UAW. Contract talks between Clarios and the UAW bargaining team resumed on Monday, *Automotive News* reported.

anymore,’ but we know it’s going to be pushed again eventually.

“Our last contract was absolute trash, too. The pay increases were around 2.5 percent to 3 percent. They gave us a \$1,000 signing bonus. It was right before inflation started hammering down. The wages haven’t kept up with the increases of prices of everything. Our insurance is also absolutely terrible. We have an \$8,000 deductible.”

“Nobody’s really happy with the union,” he continued, referring to the CWA. “The union always says we fought for eight-hour days, fought for FMLA, and other things. Now they want to back down, go to 12-hour days, no overtime. They just want to give in for really no reason.”

Addressing himself to his striking brothers and sisters in Ohio, he concluded, “We’re facing the same things, and we know we’re going to be where they are. They’ve got our support, and we’re 100 percent behind them.”

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“We’re 100 percent behind them”

Despite the efforts by the union bureaucracies to isolate the strike, it has widespread support among workers at the Big Three and other Clarios plants.

Workers at the St. Joseph plant are closely following the strike and discussing it every day, the worker quoted above told the WSWS. “As far as their 2-2-3 schedule, we went down that same road last year,” he said, referring to the schedule which would cement 12-hour days without overtime over eight hours. “I do believe the company wants to really push that 2-2-3 production. We tried it on one line last year, and it didn’t work, the production numbers were so terrible. They said, ‘We’re not going to bother with that