

The strike that can't be spoken of: Pseudo-left groups maintain blackout on Clarios strike as UAW steps up efforts to isolate workers

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With the strike by 525 Clarios auto parts workers in Holland, Ohio, near Toledo, now over one-month old, the silence of the Democratic Socialists of America, the affiliated *Jacobin* magazine and other pseudo-left groups on the struggle has been deafening.

The Clarios workers are involved in a fight with critical implications for all workers. With the assistance of the *World Socialist Web Site*, workers at the plant have formed a rank-and-file committee that has sought to break the isolation being imposed by the United Auto Workers bureaucracy. Where they have learned about it, Big Three autoworkers have responded with enthusiasm to the rebellion of Clarios workers and voiced growing support for the demand to ban the handling of scab-made batteries.

The fight pits workers at the Toledo area plant against the transnational auto and auto parts supplier industry, which is seeking to crush the strike. Giving critical assistance to the employers is the pro-company UAW apparatus, which has already tried to push through two sellout contracts—overwhelmingly voted down by workers—and is now trying to starve out the defiant workers by dragging out the strike and deliberately isolating them.

The UAW has made no serious effort to alert its 1.1 million active and retired members or the working class more broadly to the significance of the strike, let alone stop the handling of scab batteries in Ford, GM or Stellantis assembly plants. Indeed, the UAW International has ordered workers at the GM Flint Assembly Plant to install scab-produced Clarios batteries, despite opposition from the rank and file.

In seeking to isolate and betray the strike by Clarios workers, the UAW apparatus is employing all of the methods it has used in previous struggles, such as at Volvo Trucks, John Deere and CNH. This includes pushing snap contract ratification votes, misinformation, outright lies and intimidation.

The determination of the UAW to isolate and crush the strike is underscored by the revelation that the union bureaucracy is collaborating in shifting production from the Ohio plant to a plant in St. Joseph, Missouri.

An overriding concern of the UAW apparatus is that a victory by Clarios workers in winning significant, inflation-busting wage increases and restoring the eight-hour day would raise the

expectations of autoworkers in the upcoming contract negotiations this September with Ford, GM and Stellantis.

DSA, Jacobin join media blackout of Clarios strike

The deeply discredited UAW bureaucracy is drawing on the critical assistance of pseudo-left organizations such as *Jacobin Magazine*, the semi-official organ of the Democratic Socialists of America, and *Labor Notes* to isolate the struggle. Given the growing integration of these forces into the upper echelons of the UAW apparatus itself, they can hardly beg ignorance of the strike.

The DSA and *Labor Notes* in particular were heavily involved in promoting the supposed reformist credentials of UAW President Shawn Fain in the 2022 national union elections, conveniently overlooking the fact that he is a long-time bureaucrat deeply implicated in the betrayals of the Solidarity House gang, including the 2009 imposition of the tier system, when Fain was on the UAW-Chrysler National Negotiating Committee. They hailed the election of Fain as the victory of some sort of insurgent rebellion, despite the fact that Fain was elected with the vote of about 3 percent of rank-and-file UAW members in an election tainted by massive and deliberate voter suppression on the part of the union apparatus, as detailed in a challenge to the election filed by Mack Trucks worker and socialist candidate for UAW president Will Lehman.

In the meantime, these organizations have written virtually nothing on the Clarios strike, enforcing the isolation imposed by the UAW and acting as de facto accomplices of management strikebreaking. The silence includes Democratic politicians self-described as socialists such as Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders and New York Congresswoman Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez.

The WSWWS previously noted the silence of virtually all the pseudo-left groups as well as the corporate media on the courageous strike by Volvo Trucks workers in New River Valley, Virginia, in 2021. The same observations made at that time apply

with full force to the struggle at Clarios.

Any genuine working-class organization would welcome and encourage the courageous stand being taken by Clarios workers. They would endorse the call to broaden the strike and stop the use of scab batteries. The silence of the pseudo-left groups on this critical struggle speaks volumes about their social orientation, which is fundamentally hostile to the working class.

One of the few mentions of the Clarios strike by these groups is the exception that proves the rule, a throwaway, one-paragraph reference at the end of a report on the strike by 160 Constellium parts workers in Van Buren Township, Michigan, published on June 1, 2023 by *Labor Notes* ["Ford Parts Workers Strike over Money, Safety, Discipline"].

Like the strike at Clarios, the strike by Constellium workers is being isolated and betrayed by the UAW International, which has not lifted a finger to halt management's massive strikebreaking operation. Reporting nervously on the sentiment on the picket line at Constellium, the article reports, "Newer members wondered why their fellow members weren't refusing to handle scab parts."

The author, DSA member Jane Slaughter, does not bother to point out that the UAW International, not rank-and-file workers, bears responsibility for allowing scab parts into auto plants. This omission is not accidental. The entire thrust of the article is to promote the supposedly new and reformed UAW leadership under Shawn Fain, by suggesting it is leading a genuine fight.

At the very end of the article, Slaughter has three sentences on the Clarios strike. It concludes: "The members of UAW Local 12 voted down a tentative agreement last week by 75.8 percent." Slaughter does not say that this pro-company proposal and the previous one rejected by 98 percent on April 27, were recommended and pushed by the UAW apparatus, including Fain's point man, Region 2B Director David Green.

A central reason for the blackout on reporting of the Clarios strike by pseudo-left publications is the role being played by the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party in defending the Clarios workers, explaining the broader significance of their struggle and encouraging the initiative of the rank and file in opposition to the sabotage of their fight by the pro-company UAW apparatus. They view with alarm the growing support for the WSWS and the perspective of socialism in the working class.

The orientation of pseudo-left groups to the corrupt, pro-company UAW apparatus is bound up with the material interests of the privileged, upper-middle class layers these organizations speak for. The incomes of these affluent layers are tied up with the continual rise of the stock market, and they are therefore unnerved by the growing interest of workers in socialism and their strivings to break free from the shackles of the corrupt union apparatuses and capitalist political parties.

Further, leading members of the DSA and *Labor Notes* are being increasingly integrated into top positions in the union apparatuses, as well as to positions in the Democratic Party, to provide a "progressive" veneer to these discredited and increasingly despised institutions.

This is highlighted by the case of DSA member, former *Labor Notes* staff writer and Democratic Party operative Jonah Furman, who as UAW communications director receives a six-figure salary.

The most recently published salary figure for the post was \$161,364 a year plus expenses.

Another former *Labor Notes* writer and DSA member, Chris Brooks, was selected to head Fain's transition team. Brooks drafted a since-leaked strategy document warning the UAW under Fain would have to overcome workers' "unrealistic expectations" in the 2023 contract negotiations.

Jacobin, the DSA, *Labor Notes* and others have all lined up behind the campaign of the Biden administration to promote the unions, more specifically the corrupt union apparatus, as a means not to advance the struggles of workers, but to suppress and sabotage any fight back. The utterly hostile attitude of these pseudo-left groups to the working class was demonstrated by their open or tacit support for the Biden administration outlawing a strike by railroad workers last fall and imposing a pro-management contract.

The American ruling class sees the strengthening of the union apparatus as vital, not just to suppress strikes in the interest of maintaining profits, but to line workers up behind the war against Russia and preparations for war with China. For their part, the pseudo-left groups have all but unanimously signed on as cheerleaders for the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and for provocations against China.

As the class struggle intensifies, the role of these organizations as defenders of the trade union bureaucracies and the capitalist system as a whole is becoming ever clearer to workers. The task of genuine socialists is to educate workers on what these groups really represent in the course of building truly independent and representative organizations of class struggle. Above all this means building the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).



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