

Clarios workers call for joint action to defeat strikebreaking by auto battery company: “All UAW members should be on strike”

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Clarios workers in Holland, Ohio, have arrived at a decisive juncture in their battle against the world’s largest auto battery manufacturer. For five weeks, 525 workers at the Toledo-area factory have been on strike against the company’s demands for a sweeping rollback of wages and working conditions, including the imposition of 12-hour workdays without overtime payments.

Striking workers at the plant have formed a rank-and-file committee, which has outlined their demands and called for all United Auto Workers members to impose a ban on batteries being produced by scab labor at the Ohio plant.

Under these conditions, there are growing signs that the company is desperately seeking to prevent support for the strike from spreading.

Workers on the picket lines in Ohio, as well as at a Clarios plant in St. Joseph, Missouri, which is not on strike, told the *World Socialist Web Site* that Clarios was mislabeling batteries to conceal that they were being manufactured by strikebreakers. According to still unconfirmed reports, they said, plastic castings with barcodes from the St. Joseph plant were being sent to Toledo to be finished before being shipped to the auto plants.

“We heard they are getting their days’ codes on the batteries from St. Joe,” one striker told the WSW. “They’re bringing in battery casings and bar codes from Missouri and building the batteries here,” he said.

The Big Three auto companies are actively backing Clarios. With the contracts of 173,000 autoworkers in the US and Canada expiring in mid-September, the last thing the auto executives want is for the Clarios workers to beat back concessions that they have planned for all autoworkers.

The same thing is true for the UAW bureaucracy, which has tried to impose not one but two pro-company contracts

on workers, which workers overwhelmingly defeated. As a result, UAW President Shawn Fain and the union apparatus are deliberately isolating the defiant workers, stringing them out on \$500 a week in strike pay and trying to starve them into submission. At the same time, Fain has sanctioned the use of scab batteries by the Big Three automakers.

When confronted by rank-and-file autoworkers at the GM Flint Assembly Plant last week, UAW Local 598 officials said the order to continue using scab batteries had come directly from the UAW International.

Automotive News also reported last week that Clarios was shifting some production from the Holland, Ohio, plant to its factory in St. Joseph, Missouri, near Kansas City. According to the industry publication, the move was approved by the union at the plant, IUE-CWA Local 86116. The union was not asked by the UAW to reject the extra production, even though UAW Region 2B Director David Green has been in close contact with them since the beginning of the strike. Management at the St. Joseph plant claimed the increased production was “unrelated” to the strike.

A worker at the St. Joseph plant provided further detail on how the batteries are labeled. “When you get a car battery, different plants mark them in different ways to show what plant it came from. AGM [the absorbent glass-mat] batteries—they’re the hot thing everybody’s buying now—are different. They have a bar code. During their downtime, the TBS line was allegedly being told to take containers, run them through part of the process, and they’re sent to Toledo. The end result is batteries come out of Toledo with a St. Joe barcode.”

About the company’s claims that increased production at St. Joseph is unrelated to the strike, he continued: “I don’t think anybody believes that. I think both the company and union would piss on us and tell us it’s raining. St. Joe might be unique, we already have a weekend shift, A and B shift, which are 12-hour shifts. They work 24 hours during the weekend, and during the week they can be forced in twice

for eight hours. So why are they now forcing those who work during the week to do weekend overtime?"

The worker also referred to a 1997 strike at Johnson Controls, when the UAW was forced due to enormous sentiment among workers to threaten Ford assembly plants with pickets. As a result, Ford refused to accept scab-made parts. Johnson Controls would later sell off its battery division to the private equity firm Brookfield Business Partners, which renamed it Clarios in 2018.

"In the past, when Johnson Controls owned and made car interiors years ago, Johnson Controls was a seating supplier for Ford. There was a plant that went on strike then, and Ford made an unusual move of refusing to accept materials made by scabs from that plant. I think the company is currently afraid that's going to happen again."

"All UAW members should be on strike"

Clarios workers in Ohio denounced the strikebreaking by the company and the UAW bureaucracy. "I am sickened to see fellow UAW accepting scab batteries. These greedy ass corporations need a wakeup call! UAW breaking against UAW, it's sad! We're supposed to be UAW strong! Not UAW divided! I say all UAW workers across the board should just walk away now or all strike at contract and join the strike against greedy corporations!"

Another striking worker on the picket line told the WSWS, "They're treating us like we're replaceable. It's bullying tactics to get us to cave in. All UAW members should be on strike. It's got to happen simultaneously. If that happened, we'd win our strike in a flash.

"You're supposed to use the power of the union in a fight like this. The Big Three workers' contracts are coming up too. If they stopped using scab batteries from Clarios this would be over tomorrow.

"If Clarios gets a contract passed with 2-2-3, this is what it's going to look like for all the autoworkers. Now the UAW is not supporting us because we rejected their contracts twice. We're not just fighting for ourselves but for Ford, GM and all the autoworkers.

"This company is making billions, but they're bitching over a few bucks. They'd rather pay hundreds of dollars to hire, house and feed a scab to do our job. We hear they're doubling up and paying two men to do the job of every worker they're replacing. It's corporate greed. This plant hasn't had a strike in 40 years. But in the last two years they've cut our pay twice. If they get 2-2-3 and eliminate overtime, it will cost me at least \$35,000 in pay a year.

"In this place, they knowingly are putting lead in our bodies. I've known so many workers who have died from cancer. All the lead is in the air, and we breathe it and get it onto our skin."

A Ford worker from the Kentucky Truck Plant told the WSWS, "We support our UAW brothers and sisters. We here at KTP don't have all the information about Clarios, but I'm happy to share it and help in any way we can." Referring to the UAW accepting the use of scab batteries, she added, "I don't think it's right. Shame on the UAW. Shame on Ford. Why can't we come to an agreement with these workers—what's the hold up?"

WSWS reporters have also recently spoken to Clarios workers at the plants in Florence, Kentucky, and Kernsville, North Carolina.

In the Kentucky plant, which employs 100 workers, the United Steelworkers union rammed through a concessions contract about two months ago, after workers voted down the first tentative agreement, a worker told the WSWS. "The second passed with a 3 percent annual wage increase and nothing else of substance. They dangled a one-time signing bonus to workers that amounted to a one-time paycheck and a lot of the younger workers took the bait." The worker added, "About three weeks ago," there was talk of layoffs but that didn't happen. She couldn't be sure but thought that the reason might be that some of the production from the Ohio plant was being sent to Florence.

At the North Carolina plant, where several hundred members of Teamsters Local 391 are employed, workers are outraged by forced overtime and punitive attendance programs, which include no days off for the first year of employment. Workers who spoke to the WSWS knew very little about the Ohio strike but expressed their support for the striking workers. "Keep your heads up, we hope that your demands are won," one worker declared.

The outcome of the Clarios strike will have decisive impact for all autoworkers. In every factory, workers should organize rank-and-file strike solidarity committees to demand a halt to the handling of scab batteries and to prepare joint action by all Clarios and all Big Three workers to win the first battle in the contract struggle this year.

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