

Workers on Clarios picket line speak out against new UAW-backed deal: “Basically, it’s the same agreement we voted down”

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14 June 2023

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On the picket line in front of the Clarios auto battery plant in Holland, Ohio, striking workers on Wednesday afternoon discussed the new tentative agreement announced by the United Auto Workers (UAW) the night before. After five weeks on strike, the general sentiment was disgust that the UAW bureaucracy was trying to get them to swallow another pro-company deal, which differed little from the two previous ones they had decisively rejected.

After the second proposal was defeated by 76 percent on May 22, the company suspended any further talks for three weeks. After formal negotiations allegedly resumed Monday, the UAW suddenly announced it had reached a new agreement, which UAW Region 2B Director David Green claimed had addressed a “key issue that the membership has been asking for,” according to a report in the *Toledo Blade* Tuesday.

Company officials praised the “third fully endorsed agreement” with the UAW, adding that they were “hopeful our employees will vote to approve what we see as a fair and reasonable approach.”

The contract includes an insulting 3 percent annual raise, which does nothing to make up for two pay cuts workers have suffered since 2021—which has cost some up to \$15 an hour—and the impact of inflation. From the beginning of the struggle, however, the central issue for workers has been their determined opposition to the company’s plans for a “2-2-3” schedule (two days on, two days off, three days on, etc.) that includes 12-hour

workdays without overtime payments after eight hours.

The new deal allows the introduction of this brutal schedule in the TBS department, where workers operate new battery manufacturing machinery built by UK-based TBS Engineering. The contract summary also reveals numerous loopholes by which the company may be able to expand the schedule, however, including to “other areas, departments, by mutual agreement” between Clarios and the UAW.

“Basically, it’s the same agreement we voted down,” a worker with six years at the company told the WSW. “The company did not budge. The UAW conceded the 2-2-3 schedule but said they ‘limited’ it.” The worker added sarcastically, “They got the company’s word they wouldn’t add new machinery to the TBS line. But all the new hires are being sent to that line, and they have no choice but to work 12-hour days with no overtime. There’s already a high turnover rate there and this is only going to make it worse.”

“If we take this, our strike was for nothing,” another worker said. “There aren’t any changes in the new agreement. We’ve been out for five weeks, sacrificing, and this is not what we fought for.”

Another worker added: “The union says they are going to limit the new schedule. But the company is slick, and they will word it so they can expand it through the back door. They say they’re waiting for the ‘future’ to expand the 2-2-3, but the future could be tomorrow.

“The bureaucrats in the unions are corrupted. [UAW President Shawn] Fain hasn’t even showed up on the picket lines even though he’s just an hour away in Detroit. They’re basically saying, ‘Shut up and go back to work. You’re nothing but slaves.’

“The corporations are milking us, just taking and taking. To them, we’re nothing but their economic slaves who can’t even get the crumbs off their tables. If we want something, then all union workers, all workers have to stand up and fight for it.”

“We should be working eight, not 12-hour workdays,” another worker added. “The first unions were built to fight for the eight-hour day. Workers were shot and killed on the picket lines fighting for that right.”

“We build 18,000 batteries a day in that plant. They cut our pay twice when inflation was 9 percent. We asked our plant manager why the executives weren’t getting a pay cut too. He said we picked the wrong profession. People are dying here from the lead and cancer, and they don’t care.”

“Five weeks, a lot of us are hurting,” another worker said. “But what we get is going to set the tone for all autoworkers. If they push through concessions that’s what GM, Ford and Stellantis are going to demand. If we win, we’ll lift everyone up. Right now, there’s nothing but the rich and the poor in the US.”

“They say there’s some cap on the 2-2-3 but that’s nonsense,” said another worker. “We went on strike for five weeks to take it off the table, but it’s still there. If they get 12-hour shifts with no overtime, even in one department, it is going to trickle down to everywhere.”

“If we accept a bad contract it is going to mess up our union brothers whose contracts are coming right after us,” a veteran worker on the picket line said. “The union is asking us to vote for the same thing that we voted down before. Nothing has changed. That’s why the workers have lost faith in the union.”

“When I first came to Toledo in the 1970s, the old-timers at Jeep and other plants would say the UAW is not what it used to be. Years later you’re watching the news and the UAW officials are being arrested and thrown in jail for corruption. Workers don’t trust the companies, they don’t trust the unions, they don’t trust either side. The only ones we can trust are each other.”

“I wish everybody in the country went out on strike, not just autoworkers, but the post office, dockworkers, nurses, everyone. That would send a serious message to the government.”

After viewing the WSWs video with a Clarios worker in Germany, he continued, “If the companies are international, why shouldn’t the people be too? The Clarios workers in Germany, Mexico and other

countries are my brothers. International solidarity can go a long way.”

The UAW bureaucracy is trying to shut down the strike and impose this deal because the courageous stand of the Clarios workers is serving as a powerful example to the 150,000 GM, Ford and Stellantis workers who face their own contract battle in September.

Rank-and-file workers should demand the release of the full contract and a week to study it before any contract vote. At the same time, a committee of trusted rank-and-file workers must oversee the casting and counting of ballots to prevent any falsification of results.

Above all, the workers in the Big Three auto plants must break the UAW bureaucracy’s isolation of the strike by forming rank-and-file strike support committees to enforce a ban on the handling of scab batteries until the demands of the Clarios workers are won.

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