

UAW rams through sellout deal, shuts down 40-day Clarios strike

Jerry White
16 June 2023

Text AUTO to (866) 847-1086 to sign up for text updates from the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Network or to discuss forming a rank-and-file strike support committee. You can also fill out the form at the end of the article.

United Auto Workers Local 12 officials announced Friday evening that the tentative agreement they reached with Clarios management was ratified by the membership and that the union would outline a return-to-work plan at a meeting Saturday. UAW officials claimed that the deal passed by a margin of 77.8 to 22.2 percent, but did not give any vote totals.

Nothing the UAW bureaucracy says about the vote can be taken at face value, especially since rank-and-file workers were not permitted to oversee the vote count. However, assuming the vote count is accurate, it is not an endorsement of the new three-year contract, which is widely hated for its insulting 3 percent raises and for opening the door to 12-hour workdays with no overtime pay.

More than 500 Clarios workers in Holland, Ohio waged a courageous 40-day strike against the world's largest auto battery manufacturer and rejected two UAW-backed sellout agreements. They continued their fight even though the company cut off medical insurance, obtained court injunctions that threatened picketers with arrest and mobilized its global operations to continue the flow of batteries to the Big Three and other automakers. Because of this, Clarios workers won the admiration and support of autoworkers and other workers across the US and internationally.

But the Clarios workers also face the disloyal and treacherous UAW bureaucracy, which employed every dirty trick in its book to wear down the defiant workers and push through a pro-company contract. The UAW International, headed by President Shawn Fain,

deliberately isolated the strike, kept workers on starvation rations of \$500 a week in strike pay and forced them to vote three times on essentially the same contract, until the Clarios workers “got it right.”

The Fain administration defied the calls by rank-and-file GM, Ford and Stellantis workers to ban the handling of batteries made by scab labor at the Clarios plant and allowed the automakers to keep producing vehicles using them. For all their rhetoric about a “new, fighting UAW,” Fain & Co. acted as strikebreakers and conspired with Clarios and the Big Three automakers to impose a contract that will set the precedent for even bigger attacks on Big Three workers when their contracts expire in less than three months.

Kris Sherman, the Clarios director of communications for the US and Canada, said the company was “pleased” the deal passed and cynically claimed it “increases wages and provides work-life balance,” through the introduction of a “modern, flexible work schedule.” In comments to the *Toledo Blade*, Local 12 President Bruce Baumhower lied about the deal, claiming that only workers who volunteered for the 12-hour shift would have to work it.

In fact, the new “2–2–3 schedule” (two days on, two days off, three days on, etc.), will be imposed on all workers on the new TBS automated lines, and can be expanded to any area or department with the agreement of the UAW, or if the company shifts to “continuous operations.”

Clarios workers did not feel defeated, but betrayed after the results of the vote were announced. “I am proud of my UAW brothers and sisters who have stood so strong, but upset to see how this turned out in more than one way,” one worker told the WWS. “I am highly upset that the UAW didn’t support us. Telling the Big Three that they could handle scab batteries! If

they are willing to throw us under the bus, who says they won't throw anyone else under the bus?

“As long as greedy corporations are here and all about their money, there will never be humanity for workers. Greedy corporations are inhumane, unethical and want people to become slave workers! Remember BIG THREE, you are workers, human workers! You are NOT machines, robots and slaves to these companies who just look at us as numbers!”

“Nobody was sold on this contract,” another Clarios worker told the WSWS. “That’s why the union officials were using intimidation to ram this through. There was also nobody watching the counting, and that worries me. If things were done in a righteous way, workers would have been in the hall watching the whole vote count until it was done. The union officials wanted this passed no matter what.

“Those workers who voted for this are not the problem. The union and the company were banking on us running out of money and feeling the pressure to go back to work. Many workers didn’t read the fine print in this contract because they never let us see the whole contract.”

Another worker said, “I voted ‘no.’ A lot of workers were going broke, and they dangled this \$3,500 signing bonus to get them to go back to work. The UAW got them to watch the right hand while they were being robbed by the left. It was the same contract we voted down twice before. They only put more money in the bonus to implement what workers don’t want. Both the company and the union treat us like dirt.

“The ball was in our court, especially with the contracts expiring soon at the Big Three. If the workers at Jeep and the other plants refused to handle these scab parts, we would have won everything we wanted.

“Now we’re going back to work, and the company is going to fire people for anything. Everybody’s job is going to be in jeopardy. I remember when everybody wanted to work here. After Clarios took over from Johnson Controls, it’s become a revolving door and a lot more guys are going to quit after this strike.

“This is already one of the toughest factories to work in. It’s physically demanding, we’re breathing in lead and literally poisoning our bodies to make a paycheck. The least thing the company could do is treat us right. But the company cut our pay by 15 percent over the last two years. The 9 percent over three years we get in this

contract will still leave us with a pay cut, on top of what we’re losing to inflation.

“My wife took the contract into Jeep, and everyone laughed at it and said we weren’t getting anything. We were the only ones on strike, and that didn’t make any sense because this affects all of us. Jeep, Chrysler, Ford, GM, everybody needs to walk out of the buildings together. We need these rank-and-file committees because the UAW is in the company’s pocket, and the people need to use the power we have.”

During the course of this struggle, Clarios workers organized their own rank-and-file committee to outline their demands and appeal for joint action with Clarios workers across the US and internationally, and for autoworkers to ban the use of scab batteries.

The sellout of the strike is a warning to all workers of what is being prepared by the UAW apparatus for the upcoming contract battle. That is why the network of autoworker rank-and-file committees, operating under the direction of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) must be expanded now. That is the central lesson of the Clarios strike.

Text AUTO to (866) 847-1086 to sign up for text updates from the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Network or to discuss forming a rank-and-file strike support committee. You can also fill out the form below.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact