

Anger grows as Clarios imposes terms of sellout agreement

Robert Milkowski
27 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.

It has been just over one week since more than 500 Clarios auto battery workers in Holland, Ohio returned to work after their powerful 40-day strike was shut down by the United Auto Workers union. On June 16, UAW officials rammed through a sell out contract, which was virtually identical to the deal workers overwhelmingly voted down twice before.

UAW President Shawn Fain cynically claimed that Clarios workers won “massive gains” in the UAW-backed deal. In fact, the new three-year agreement includes an insulting 3 percent annual wage increase, which does nothing to address deep paycuts Clarios imposed on workers over the last two years, plus the impact of inflation. The deal also introduces a new 12-hour workday without overtime pay and other concessions that were concealed from workers by the UAW bureaucracy, which never released the full contract before the vote.

Since the return to work, management has used the sellout deal to step up its attack on workers. “There was a clause in the contract that said the company reserves the right to implement whatever schedule they want to fulfill customer needs,” one worker told the WSW. “We only got the ‘highlights’ from the union, so they tried to conceal that.

“Now, they are taking the shift change break from us,” he continued, “If you’re working eight hours and they force you to work 12, you used to get a 20-minute break after eight hours. They’ve taken that away. You had it and now you don’t. It’s basically affecting all the people on the AGM (absorbed glass mat) lines.

“It is commonplace for them to order you to work another four hours. They’re supposed to tell you ‘as soon as possible’ but you can be in the shower, or you could have already punched out, and you have to come back in. So, you are supposed to get a 20-minute break in the morning, a 30-minute lunch break and a 20-minute shift change break if they’re keeping you on. But now they’ve taken that away.”

He continued, “We used to have certain rights. If you had clean equipment that was not running correctly, instead of losing money, pay us 125% of our rate for cleaning. If you had to do maintenance, you got 140%. This was done by your supervisor. Last week, it was announced that that decision could no longer be made by a supervisor on his own, now he has to get the approval of his boss.”

Another worker told the WSW, “The company is bringing back the scabs that worked while we were on strike. They’re expecting us to train them even though the scabs threatened us on the picket line. No one wants to train the scabs, we’re not happy with having to.”

Adding to the indignities, he said that since the return to work, “When we go to clock in it shows we’ve clocked out and when we go to clock out, it shows that we’ve clocked in.” As of this writing there has been no effort made by the company to correct the problem, instead, the worker told us, “[When this happens] the company puts your name up on the board as a missed punch. This has happened to quite a large amount of people,” he said, adding that this could be used to arbitrarily punish workers.

Another worker said, “I’m sick of seeing the prices of everything going up and getting paid less than I was a year ago. We lost 15 percent due to the pay cuts, and got a 3 percent raise in this contract. Workers are just fed up with the company and the union.”

Several workers connected their struggle with General Motors, Stellantis and Ford workers, whose contracts expire on September 14. “I saw that they are putting a bunch of Stellantis plants on ‘critical status,’ where they can work you seven days a week for 90 days, up to 12 hours a day,” one worker told the WSWs. “It’s the same thing as ‘continuous operations’ at Clarios. They can just tear up the contract and do whatever they want and the union lets them.”

“The UAW starved us back to work and rammed through a contract with so many loopholes that they hid from workers. Clarios won’t honor its word about anything. Now they’re talking about taking the TBS line in less than a year and cutting jobs.”

He continued, “I read the WSWs article on the lessons of our strike. It really hit the points. Autoworkers are going to have to be prepared financially for a strike, so they can’t starve you out. You have to organize yourselves to fight because the UAW is not going to treat you any better than they treated us. By standing up, we sent a clear message to all autoworkers that we can fight, but we have to build these rank-and-file committees so our struggle is not sabotaged by Fain and the UAW bureaucracy.”

Despite its rhetoric about a new “member-driven” union, ready to take on the auto companies, the Fain administration used the same dirty tricks as its predecessors to push through the pro-company agreement at Clarios. Fearing that the revolt of Clarios workers would be a catalyst for a broader upheaval of autoworkers against the Big Three auto companies and its stooges in the UAW bureaucracy, Fain and the rest of the UAW International set out to defeat the courageous workers. The UAW deliberately isolated the strikers, starved them back to work with \$500-a-week in strike pay, and bullied them with threats that the company would replace them with strikebreakers if they voted down the deal again.

At the same time, Fain gave the auto companies a green light to continue using batteries built by scab labor at the Holland, Ohio plant, and defied the demands of workers at GM, Ford and Stellantis plants to impose a ban on handling Clarios batteries.

In opposition to this, Clarios workers formed their own rank-and-file committee to outline their demands and join with other autoworkers in a joint struggle

against both the corporations and the UAW bureaucracy.

In a statement published last week, titled, “The Clarios strike and its lessons for the working class,” the WSWs wrote: “The Clarios strike was a strategic experience for the entire working class. The outcome of this struggle can be turned from a negative to a positive if workers draw the fundamental lessons from this fight and build up a powerful rank-and-file movement against the corporatist union bureaucracies and the system of capitalist exploitation which they defend.”

The abusive conditions imposed by Clarios management will provoke new opposition, sooner rather than later. To fight, the Clarios Rank-and-File Committee must be expanded and workers must link with the growing network of autoworkers rank-and-file committees, which operates under the direction of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

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