

Republic Windows and Door workers speak on their struggle

Tom Eley
10 December 2008

A team of *World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke with workers at Republic Windows and Doors. About 250 workers have occupied their factory since being abruptly laid off last week. (See “Workers occupy Chicago factory for fifth day”)

Raul Flores, who has worked at the company for eight years—since he graduated from high school—said that when workers returned to work on Monday, December 1, they noticed that “a whole line of production was gone, equipment and everything.” The company then laid off 39 people.

After the full closure of the plant was announced later in the week, workers immediately made the decision to occupy the plant, Flores explained. “We said, ‘Hey, if they take everything out of here, how are they going to pay us?’ We’re taking care of the machines and windows in there, because that’s our future, that’s our money.”

Flores noted that Republic said it was forced to close its doors after Bank of America cut off the company’s credit line. With regard to the bailout of Wall Street, which has reached upwards of \$7 trillion, some \$25 billion of which has gone to Bank of America, Flores expressed a sentiment no doubt shared by many US workers. “The federal government gave this money to Bank of America. You paid your taxes. I paid my taxes. Everybody paid their taxes. So basically we’re paying them to get us fired.”



Ricardo Caceres

When asked what workers will do once a settlement is reached, Ricardo Caceres, who has worked for Republic for 15 years, expressed both fear and resolve. “It’s going to be hard, but I’ve got a family to support. I’ve got to go look for a job.” Ricardo explained, “It’s too close to Christmas. You have your kid asking you, ‘Dad you don’t have a job?’ It’s too hard for everybody here, on the families.”

Asked what they would say to workers in other cities and countries, Ricardo said, “This is a big starting point here in Chicago.” He added, “It’s time for workers to put their heads up. It’s time for workers to open their eyes. This is not just happening here, it’s happening in all over the world. When we get out of here, we’re getting out with our heads up.”

Ricardo said that 75 percent of the workforce is from Latin America, and most of the rest are African-American. The Latinos come from a number of different countries. Raul quickly added, “That doesn’t matter now. We’re just one now. It doesn’t matter where you come from, or who you are. We’re one person now, with all the people out there too. If we win this, it’s not just for us.”

Manuel Cordova is a Republic worker with 14 years experience. He explained that he viewed the central opponent in the struggle to be the owners of Republic. Cordova, like many Republic workers, does not believe

that the plant was in desperate financial straits. Rather, he said, the company seized the opportunity of the financial crisis to lay off their Chicago workforce and relocate to employ cheaper labor.

Luis Lira, a worker with 16 years at Republic as a maintenance technician, echoed these sentiments. He said that two weeks before the announced closure the company had “moved out a complete production line from the factory.”

Luis is demanding his five weeks paid vacation time, along with 60 days severance, which would amount to about \$4,000. He said that supporters have been bringing food and making donations from Chicago and the rest of the US.

Reginald Pope was laid off on October 16, in anticipation of the company’s full closure. Pope said that he was there to support the workers inside.

There were a number of supporters present, as well. Among them were workers from Chicago. Ayinde Murphy, a member of United Taxi Drivers Council, said that he was there because everybody is concerned about this issue, “because you, me, we, could be next.”

Layoffs are a big problem in Chicago, Ayinde explained. “We are offended that the tax money of the US citizen was just given to the banks, to bail them out, to inject liquidity, so that they would give out loans, and now they won’t give it,” Murphy said. “[US Treasury Secretary Henry] Paulson had the nerve to come up with a two-and-a-half page document, shorter than a student loan form, and demand \$700 billion of taxpayer money to bail out the very banks that now won’t give out loans.”

Murphy said that he hoped the example of the Republic workers would be followed by autoworkers in Detroit. “All of my family lives in Detroit—autoworkers,” he said. “I know that they’re agreeing to make some concessions so that the auto companies, the Big Three, can stay in business and get a loan. I don’t have such a big problem with that, so much that the banks don’t have to go through this process. It’s impossible to ignore the fact that the reason that we have this housing crisis, this mortgage

crisis, economic crisis is because the banks have been mismanaged for years. It’s hypocrisy at its highest.”

Kelvin Harris and Floyd Bell are day laborers who were holding a banner for an organization of day laborers in Chicago. “This right here is senseless,” Floyd said. “People have been working here 10, 15 years ... and you just get thrown out ... They have children at home, it’s getting close to the holidays.”

Kelvin was also there because he is the victim of a layoff. Until 2003, he was employed at Unilever. “They picked up and left us out to dry,” he said. Referring to the bailout, he said, “I want to know where all this money is going. Bailout? We need to be bailed out. We need to be bailed out right now. Come on, you work 15 years and you can’t get severance pay?”

Tony Caldera, a worker and member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, was there to support the Republic workers because he said he too had been the victim of a sudden layoff. He said a lot of people he knows are in the same position, and expressed anger over the bailout of the Wall Street banks. “It’s the low classes who pay the consequences,” he said. “It’s a situation where people lose. They take your money both ways.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact