

A great step forward

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This perspective is available as a PDF leaflet in English and Español.

The occupation of Republic Windows and Doors by 250 workers in Chicago, Illinois is an important step forward and one that deserves the full support of the working class throughout the country and internationally.

For the first time since the onset of the economic crisis, a section of the working class is taking an independent stand and resisting the corporate assault on jobs and living standards, which is claiming thousands of new victims each day.

These workers are displaying enormous courage. They refused to be thrown out of the factory when management moved to shut down the plant last Friday, after giving the workers just three days notice. They have insisted they will not leave the plant until management pays the severance and vacation pay owed to each worker.

This action has a powerful objective meaning. The same conditions that have driven these workers into struggle are affecting millions throughout the US and around the world. Such struggles are going to erupt more and more frequently as the economic crisis compels workers to act collectively to assert their own class interests.

In that sense, this struggle recalls the experience of the Great Depression of the 1930s, when the sit-down strikes by rubber and auto workers sparked a wave of mass industrial struggles throughout the US.

Like working people everywhere, the workers in Chicago are confronting a battle not just against one

employer, but against the entire capitalist economic and political system. Republic was forced to close its doors when Bank of America, one of the largest financial institutions in the world, cut off the company's line of credit. Bank of America was a recipient of more than \$25 billion in the government's multi-trillion-dollar bailout of Wall Street.

For workers losing their jobs, homes and life savings there has been no bailout. But for the banking executives and speculators whose recklessness and greed have brought the entire economy to the brink of collapse, the government has found unlimited resources. This only underscores the class interests defended by both big business parties—the Democrats as well as the Republicans.

Though the workers have shown enormous determination, the struggle has also revealed political limitations. The United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE) has sought to contain the fight to appeals to the Democratic Party and the banks. The union has brought in political figures to smother the struggle, including Jesse Jackson, who has a long history of defusing working class struggles.

Moreover, the demands being raised fall far short of the needs of the workers themselves. What is needed is not just severance pay or longer notice before workers are thrown out of their jobs, but a struggle to stop plant closings and defend the jobs of all working people. Such a struggle requires a direct appeal to the working class throughout Chicago, the US and internationally, and the forging of a new political movement of the working class to fight for an alternative to the capitalist profit system.

The eruption of this struggle has surprised and frightened the government. Cognizant of the growing

social anger over the naked class bias of the Wall Street bailout, the media and politicians have, up to now, professed sympathy for the workers. President-elect Barack Obama and Illinois Governor Blagojevich have issued statements of support to pressure Bank of America and Republic to resolve the crisis before it becomes an example for other embattled workers.

Democratic Party officials helped organize a meeting Monday between Bank of America, Republic, and the UE in an attempt to hash out a quick settlement.

But the proverbial genie has been let out of the bottle and it cannot be put back in. No matter how this struggle is concluded, the example of Chicago is going to give other people ideas.

The plant occupation is a demonstration of the social power of the working class. These 250 workers have shown more resolve than the United Auto Workers union, with its millions of dollars in dues money and billion-dollar strike fund. The UAW has completely capitulated to the job-cutting and concessions demands of the auto companies and Congress, without even the pretense of a fight.

The contrast underscores that the lack of mass resistance to the policies of the corporations and banks is not due to a lack of opposition in the working class, of which there is plenty. Rather, the responsibility lies with the union bureaucracy, which has spent the last thirty years doing everything it can to strangle the initiative and resistance of workers.

All of the skeptics and opportunists who have said it is impossible to fight for socialist consciousness in the working class have been proven wrong again. Workers are once again asserting their own interests in a way that implicitly challenges the system of capitalist private property. As the economic crisis deepens and more and more struggles erupt, the question that will arise in the minds of millions of working people will be: What class should control the factories and financial resources of society and who should make the economic decisions?

Whatever illusions workers may have in the incoming

Obama administration, that will not stop them from fighting. As workers enter into struggle, more and more will come to see the necessity of dispensing with such illusions and seeking a political alternative to the two capitalist parties.

What is now posed is the need for a national and international struggle based on a socialist perspective.

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