



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Chicago workers sit-in, gain benefits after factory shutdown, 2008 (Republic Windows and Doors)

5 December

2008

to: 10 December

2008

Country: United States

Location City/State/Province: *Chicago, Illinois*

Goals:

After Republic Windows and Doors was shut down with little notice, factory workers organized a sit-in to receive their severance package, extended health care, and any accrued and unused vacation time.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 173. Nonviolent occupation
- 181. Reverse strike

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 173. Nonviolent occupation
- 181. Reverse strike

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 173. Nonviolent occupation
- 181. Reverse strike

Methods in 4th segment:

- 173. Nonviolent occupation
- 181. Reverse strike

Methods in 5th segment:

- 173. Nonviolent occupation
- 181. Reverse strike

Methods in 6th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

- 181. Reverse strike

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 162. Sit-in
- 182. Stay-in strike

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- Union Workers

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Local 1110 of the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America (Union at the Republic Windows and Doors)

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

Chicago Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)

Involvement of social elites:

President Barack Obama, Reverend Jesse Jackson, Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich, local government officials

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Union Workers

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

Social elites merely spoke out in support, though they never actually joined the workers. The Chicago Industrial Workers of the World spoke out in favor of the workers and provided them with food, as well as organized the Day of Action.

Segment Length: 1 Day

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Bank of America, Republic Windows and Doors Chief Executive Officer Richard Gillman

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

Not known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

In 2006 Richard Gillman gained control of Republic Windows and Doors in Chicago, Illinois, as he assumed the position of Chief Executive Officer. The company produced windows and doors for building homes and offices. Soon after, there were a series of layoffs and Gillman reduced the number of workers in the factory from 500 to nearly 240.

The 2008 fiscal crisis seriously hurt Republic Windows and Doors due to the failing housing market and Chicago's increased production costs. In the middle of October of 2008, Republic Windows and Doors had completely used their \$5 million line of credit from Bank of America and was forced to file for bankruptcy. By the middle of November, employees had noticed that machinery was missing and began to discuss courses of action if the plant were to shut down.

On Tuesday 2 December 2008, officials informed the 300 workers of Republic Windows and Doors that the company would be shutting down in three days. Employees would not receive severance pay or accrued vacation pay. On Friday morning ownership also informed workers that they would be immediately cut off from their health insurance providers.

Two hundred and forty union members (Local 1110 of the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America) voted to have a sit-in later on Friday. The sit-in participants carefully organized and orchestrated the action, dividing into three groups to manage and clean the factory equipment, provide security, and communicate with the media and supporters.

The sit-in began on Friday, December 5, 2008. There were sit-in shifts, approximating the previous work schedule, from 6:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., from 2:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m., and from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. The workers had legal grounds upon which to act. According to the federal Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act, workers must be given 60 days' notice before any large-scale layoff, as well as full compensation for wages and vacation time.

Republic Windows and Doors responded to the workers' demands by first blaming the 80% decline in sales due to the fiscal crisis, and then proceeding to blame Bank of America for their "unwillingness to continue funding."

Bank of America responded by stating that they "continued to honor all of [their] agreements with the company and have provided the maximum amount of funding [they] can under the terms of our agreement."

CEO of Republic Windows and Doors Richard Gillman requested that any further loans from the bank to aid employees also help him in paying the lease of multiple cars he held under the company name and compensation for eight weeks of his salary, which totaled \$225,000 a year. Gillman retracted this request as it prevented any sort of settlement from being reached and further angered union employees.

Throughout their sit-in, the workers found support in members of the community. The International Workers of the World formed the UE Workers of Solidarity Committee and provided those in the factory with food, water, media work, and outreach. They encouraged other IWW chapters to participate in protests at their local Bank of America branches in a National Day of Protest on Wednesday December 10.

On the Day of Protest they made and promoted the making of banners and signs crying "No More Bailouts for the Ruling Class!" In addition they met hundreds of people on Chicago's Goose Island to lend vocal support to the workers.

President Barack Obama gave his support to the workers in a television address, stating, "I think these workers, if they have earned their benefits and their pay, then these companies need to follow through on those commitments."

Reverend Jesse Jackson came to the factory to show his support and speak to the media, and Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich spoke to the media at the factory as well. Blagojevich promised to cut ties with Bank of America until the situation had been fixed and pledged to address federal courts if need be to enforce the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act laws. Local politicians further aided the workers by preventing police from arresting the workers.

Union officials met with representatives from Bank of America to negotiate. Late Wednesday night, on the sixth day of the sit-in, JP Morgan Chase and Bank of America made a joint agreement to provide a 1.75 million dollar package to the workers. The package would include eight weeks of pay they were owed under the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act, two months of continual health care, and pay for all accrued and unused vacation time.

The company came under new ownership and all of the employees were able to retain their jobs.

Research Notes

Influences:

On May 30, 2012 the same workers involved in the campaign took over the factory from its new owners when they were facing economic hardships and formed a workers' co-operative. They quickly began raising the funds to start the cooperative and begin production, and began making windows within three months. (2)

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