

Worker Protest: The Chicago Factory Occupation and The Economic Crisis

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A rare defining moment in social class relations occurred a few days ago in Chicago, U.S.A.: In the wake of the economic chaos unleashed by the financial crisis, class struggle of the working class was reborn in America with a full-force factory occupation by workers.

Workers at 'Republic Windows and Doors' in Chicago, Illinois, U.S. have assembled vinyl windows and sliding doors for many years; now, told that they are to be laid off with only three days notice, they have refused to leave the plant and have barricaded themselves inside until money and benefits owed to them are provided. Large numbers of people, and community organizations, are backing them, bringing food and other support items to the factory.

To understand the Chicago occupations importance, an analogy is useful. In the mid-1960's every U.S. male was required to carry a 'draft card' bearing a number which would be used by the U.S. government to induct or force them into the U.S. Army if the government chose to do so.

As the imperialist Vietnam war expanded, the government required ever-more soldiers, and one day around 1965 a group of young men publicly burned their draft cards together in California to symbolize their refusal to enter the U.S. Army if they should be ordered to do so.

What looked at the time like a lone and perhaps hopelessly quixotic act of a few unusual individuals was in fact very far-sighted. Over time, as literally millions of men were ordered into the army over the next 10 years, hundreds of thousands refused service, following on the example of this first set by the brave initial card burners. In retrospect, the timing of the draft-card burners was perfect; it was a perfect preparation of American males to resist the massive war of occupation and aggression by the U.S. in Vietnam.

Similarly, the auto industry workers occupation today is also a case of perfect timing.

Their example will – almost without doubt – inspire large numbers of other workers in America, also faced by factory closures, mortgage foreclosures, and the like, to act militantly – as members of the working class – to secure their livelihoods and futures.

It's important to understand that the standard method of worker protest, recognized by U.S. law, is the strike, in which workers refuse to work and perhaps picket outside a workplace.

Occupation or seizure of control of the workplace is a much rarer and more serious matter, as it directly threatens the control of production and of property by the owners of capital, and points, in the limit case, to worker control of the economy.

The Chicago occupation indicates both the severity of the economic crisis, and the kinds of working class actions which are now on the horizon.

Below is a first report in the NY Times, followed by a link to a more detailed account of the support effort for these workers.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/08/us/08chicago.html?em>

<http://www.fightbacknews.org/2008/12/support-grows-for-republic-window-occupation.htm>

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