

## **Obama Backs Workers Staging Sit-In**

Congressman Says Company Will Meet With Bank, Union Officials

By RUPA SHENOY

CHICAGO (Dec. 8) - Representatives of the company whose laid-off employees are staging a sit-in at the shuttered factory where they worked will meet Monday with union and bank officials, a congressman said.

Some 200 workers who abruptly lost their jobs last week have said they won't leave the Republic Windows and Doors plant until they get assurances they will receive their severance and vacation pay. Their demonstration has drawn support from President-elect Barack Obama and others. President-elect Barack Obama, here in Chicago on Sunday, said he supports hundreds of union workers who are staging a sit-in at a shuttered factory in order to get severance and vacation pay. The employees abruptly lost their jobs last week when the Republic Windows and Doors plant was shut down.

Rep. Luis Gutierrez said early Monday that a meeting arranged for late afternoon would address the workers' concerns.

The Chicago Democrat said officials of the now-closed Republic Windows and Doors would meet with representatives of the workers' union, the United Electrical Workers, and of the bank that has canceled its financing of the company.

Company representatives have not commented since the sit-in began on Friday, and have not responded to calls and e-mails.

Gutierrez said Republic officials had signed a waiver permitting the opening of its financial records at the meeting. Republic Windows and Doors told the workers on Dec. 2 that they would be out of work by the end of the week.

Leah Fried, an organizer for the United Electrical Workers, said the company told the union that Bank of America had canceled its financing. The bank had said in a statement that it wasn't responsible for Republic's financial obligations to its employees.

The announcement of the meeting comes after a wave of publicity about the sit-in and appearances by the Rev. Jesse Jackson and Obama, who said Sunday that the company should honor its commitments to the 200 workers.

"The workers who are asking for the benefits and payments that they have earned, I think they're absolutely right and understand that what's happening to them is reflective of what's happening across this economy," Obama said at a news conference Sunday.

To their amazement, the workers have become a national symbol for thousands of employees laid off nationwide as the economy sours.

"We never expected this," said factory employee Melvin Maclin, vice president of the union local that represents the workers. "We expected to go to jail."

One of the factory's workers, Silvia Mazon, said in Spanish that she needs the money owed to her for an \$1,800 monthly house payment. The 40-year-old Cicero resident said she has enough money saved to survive for one month. "We're making history," she said.

Associated Press writer Philip Elliott in Chicago contributed to this report.  
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