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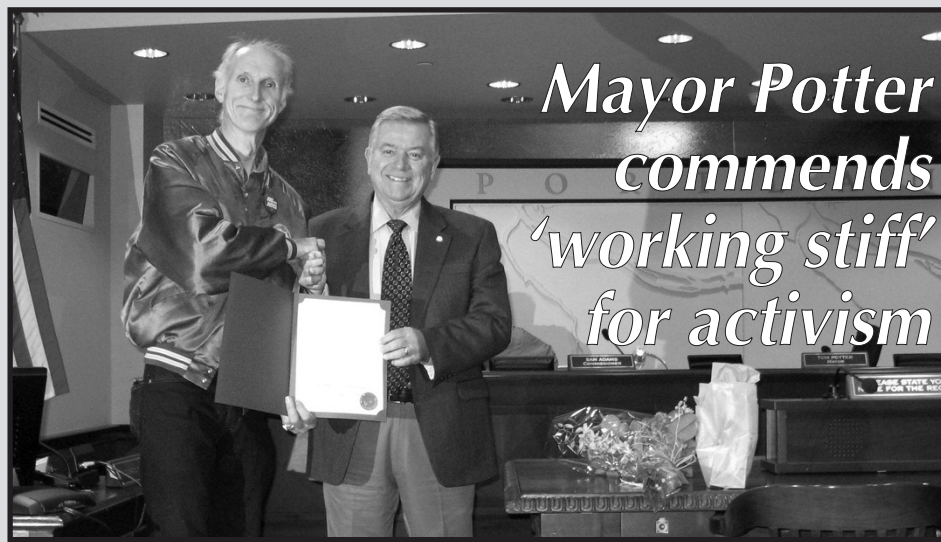
A Portland union activist received a rare honor Dec. 3: a mayoral declaration proclaiming a day of appreciation for his work for social justice.

Jamie Partridge, 59, is an Executive Board member at the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) Branch 82, and a labor and social justice activist with a three-decades-long résumé of community involvement.

"I'm nobody special, just a working stiff," Partridge told City Council upon receiving the honor. "I've worked as a mailman 25 years now, as well as a garbage man, grocery clerk, day care worker, and lab tech."

But Partridge was lucky enough to be a child of the '60s, he said, and develop a sense of outrage about the wrongs of the world. And he had role models who showed him how to knock on doors, organize a meeting, and mobilize people against "money power" in order to win justice for working people.

Partridge, the son of a doctor and a teacher, grew up in Lake Oswego, and first became involved in his 20s, as a phlebotomist at the Portland Veterans Hospital and member of American Federation of Government Employees. Laid off from that job, he went to work at Fred Meyer and Safeway and got active in the Retail Clerks Union (now United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555). Again laid off, he traveled to Nicaragua and helped found a labor committee on Central America.



Letter Carriers Branch 82 member Jamie Partridge (left) receives copy of a declaration from Portland Mayor Tom Potter proclaiming Dec. 3 "a day of appreciation" for Partridge and his efforts in fighting for social justice.

He began delivering what he calls "the people's mail" in 1984. As a member of NALC Branch 82, he became an advocate what he calls "social unionism."

"My concept of unionism has always been broader than labor movement," Partridge told the Labor Press. "We need to see ourselves as part of a working class social movement. We need to reach out to other organizations and hook up with them in coalition."

Partridge certainly practiced that preachment, becoming something like a full-time activist in his off hours.

Partridge has volunteered for innumerable groups, including

Stand For Children, the Community Alliance of Tenants, Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United, Oregon Action, and KBOO Community Radio. Over the years, he's campaigned for immigrant rights, universal single-payer health care, a raise in the minimum wage, and against police racial profiling. In 1988, Partridge threw himself into Jesse Jackson's run for the Democratic presidential nomination, and for years after that he continued to work with Jackson's group, the Rainbow Coalition, to build a progressive alliance with the local black community. In the early 1990s, he helped found the Portland chapter of Jobs With Justice.

Partridge has lived for 20 years in the same inner Northeast Portland neighborhood where he delivers mail, and is an active member of Ainsworth United Church of Christ, which formed two decades ago when a mostly black church and a mostly white church merged. Partridge belongs to the church social justice committee.

At Branch 82, Partridge has been shop steward, legislative liaison, and organizing committee chair. Last year he was elected to the Executive Board and became editor of the newsletter. This year, he took a several month leave from work at the U.S. Postal Service to do local political campaign work for his national union.

Portland Mayor Tom Potter first met Partridge in 1969, when Potter was a Portland police officer practicing an early form of community policing. Potter joined the Brooklyn Neighborhood Action Center, and the two worked together to create a youth center for high school dropouts.

Announcing the declaration Dec. 3, Potter called Partridge "one of the many unsung heroes of the Portland community."

"Jamie," said the mayor, "will always strive to do what is right."

Chicago workers to rest of the country: 'Don't let it die'

Six-day sit-in at manufacturing plant resurrects a tactic once used in the 1930s

By **DAVID BACON**
New America Media

CHICAGO — When the day finally comes that Raul Flores loses his job, he will face a bitter search for another one. "I've got a family to support, so I've got to do whatever it takes," he says. "It's going to be hard. The economic situation is not good, but I can't just wait for something to happen to me."

That puts Flores in the same boat as millions of other U.S. workers. Last month alone 533,000 workers lost their jobs, the highest figure in 34 years. In early December, the heads of the big three auto companies were in Washington, D.C., pleading for loans to keep their companies afloat. As a price, lawmakers and pundits told them they had to become "leaner and meaner," and in response, General Motors announced it would close nine plants and put tens of thousands of workers in the street. Ford and Chrysler described a similar job-elimination strategy.

What makes Flores special? He didn't just accept the elimination of his job. Instead, he sat in for six days

at the Chicago plant where he worked together with 240 other union members at Republic Windows and Doors.

Republic workers were not demanding the reopening of their closed factory. They've been fighting for severance and benefits to help them survive the unemployment they know awaits them. Yet their occupation can't help but raise deeper questions about the right of workers to their jobs. Can a return to the militant tactics of direct action, that produced the greatest gains in union membership, wages and job security in U.S. history, overturn "the inescapable logic of the marketplace?" Can employers, and the banks that hold their credit lines, be forced to keep plants open?

Unlike the auto giants, Republic was not threatening bankruptcy. It makes a "green product," Energy-Star compliant doors and windows that should be one of the bedrock industries for a new, more environmentally sustainable economy. But Bank of America, as it was receiving \$25 billion in federal bailout funds, pulled the company's credit line. Perhaps that alone led President-elect Barack Obama to support the workers. The bank-enforced closure undermines his program for using environmentally sustainable jobs to replace those eliminated in the spiraling recession. He called Republic workers "absolutely right. What's happening to them is reflective of what's happening across this economy."

Federal law requires companies to give employees 60 days notice of a plant closure, or pay them 60 days severance pay, to give them breathing room to find other jobs. Republic workers got three days, and no money. "They knew they'd be out on the street penniless," says Leah Fried, organizer for Local 1110 of the United Electrical Workers. "When the negotiating committee came back to the factory to report that the company didn't even show up to talk with them, the workers were so enraged they voted unanimously not to leave until they got their severance and vacation pay."

While the workers' acted to gain their legally-mandated rights, the plant occupation resurrects a tactic with a radical history. In 1934, auto workers occupied the huge Fisher Body plants in Flint, Michigan, and when the battle was over, the United Auto Workers was born. Sitdown strikes spread across the country like wildfire. Occupying production lines in plant after plant, workers won unions, better wages, and real changes in their lives.

Seventy years later, the workers who have inherited that legacy of

unionization and security are on the brink of losing everything. Just since 2006 the United Auto Workers has lost 119,000 members. The threat of plant closure has been used to cut the wages of new hires in half, to \$14.50, the same wage paid on the window lines at Republic, where the union is only four years old.

Flores certainly hopes that those whose livelihoods are in peril will discover the tactic. "This is the start of something," he urges.

"Don't let it die. Learn something from it." And the sit-down was

...Bank of America, as it was receiving \$25 billion in federal bailout funds, pulled the company's credit line.

successful. After six days sitting-in, and a rally of 1,000 people in front of the bank, JP Morgan, another beneficiary of Federal assistance that owns 40 percent of Republic, put up \$400,000, and Bank of America another \$1.35 million. That was enough to pay the legally-mandated severance, the workers' accrued vacation, and two months of health care. Flores and his co-workers then voted to end the occupation.

Fran Tobin, midwest organizer for Jobs with Justice, a coalition of labor and community groups with chapters around the country, shares Flores' op-

timism. "I think this is not the last time we're going to see American workers occupying American plants, as part of a move to save jobs and turn things around," he says. Organizers for Jobs with Justice are fanning out with a program they call a "Peoples' Bailout." "We need to ask, 'What kind of an economy and recovery do we want?'" Tobin emphasizes. He lists funds for a jobs program, rather than huge loans to banks, a moratorium on home foreclosures, investment in infrastructure repair, and helping local and state governments (and public worker) survive the crisis without massive budget cuts.

Flores, Tobin and Fried all agree that none of those demands can be won without unions and workers willing to fight for them. That makes the Republic plant occupation more than just a local confrontation. "This might not be the right tactic in every situation, but people know we need to be fighting back," Fried says.

Will the unions in auto plants and other workplaces hit by layoffs take up the challenge of the Republic workers? To Flores, they have to do something more than just watch the elimination of their jobs. "We've got to fight for our rights," he emphasizes. "It's not fair that they just kick us out on the street with nothing. Somebody has to respond."

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