

Chicago Reader
July 23, 2009

Critic's Choice/Recommended/Free

Kari Lydersen

When: Thursday, July 23, 7 p.m.

"You got bailed out, we got sold out!" was a common rallying cry last year, when the banks and industries that had led us into economic crisis were being floated billions of U.S. tax dollars as thousands of workers were being laid off. Revolt on Goose Island (Melville House), **Kari Lydersen's brisk, compelling account** of the standoff at Chicago's Republic Windows & Doors factory is the tale of the crisis writ small, with plenty of juicy corporate greed (leased Hummers, bonus trips to Vegas). The saga begins during the plant's last days, with Republic brass moving equipment and furnishings out of the plant under cover of darkness, tracked by suspicious employees who were well aware that business hadn't been booming. After the factory's closing, the workers, empowered by a member-driven union, occupied the building, refusing to budge until they were at least granted severance pay. Enter the politicians: aldermen Ricardo Munoz and Scott Waguespack played crucial roles behind the scenes, Congressman Luis Gutierrez virtually acted as the union's spokesman, and opportunists from Jesse Jackson Sr. to the soon-to-be-toast Rod Blagojevich put in appearances. Even Barack Obama spoke out in support of the workers, putting pressure on Republic and its creditors, among them bailout recipient Bank of America, to reach a settlement. **Lydersen, a staff writer at the Washington Post's midwest bureau and a longtime Reader contributor, deftly interweaves her narrative with sketches of union and labor history.** There's even something of a happy ending: last year the green building supply firm Serious Materials purchased the plant and, according to Waguespack, about a quarter of the Republic workers have been rehired. RSVP to rsvp@stopsmilingonline.com. --Kate Schmidt