

Module 06: "Which Side Are You On?" The Flint Sit-Down Strike, 1936-37

Evidence 11: Untitled Strike Song by Walter H. Frost, 1937

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Introduction

(Sung to the tune of "It Ain't Gonna Rain No More.")

The song transcribed below, written shortly after the strike ended, celebrated the UAW's victory over GM. The first two verses urged auto workers to head down to the local union office to join the UAW. Other verses praised the organization's leadership, including its president Homer Martin, CIO leader John L. Lewis (who helped negotiate the final agreement with GM), and the Reuther brothers — Walter, Victor, and Roy, the latter of whom had performed a variety of important functions during the sit-down strike.

Victor Reuther, for example, manned a sound car directing striking workers during a violent confrontation with authorities on January 11, 1937. When company officials tried to stop food deliveries at Fisher Two, striking workers demanded the keys to the factory. Outnumbered GM security guards quickly retreated into the plant's ladies' room. Police arrived, stormed the plant entrance, and began firing tear gas into the crowd. Workers responded with a barrage of nuts, bolts, car-door hinges, and water from the plant's fire hoses, which they rained down from the roof and upper windows of the factory. The police returned fire with more tear gas, bullets, and buckshot but were eventually forced to withdraw. The sight of "bulls" retreating from the scene provided the idea for the derisive name given to the event: the Battle of Running Bulls. The widely heralded episode left 13 strikers and 11 police wounded.

One final reference in the song also deserves additional explanation. "The Journal" refers to the *Flint Journal*, which was generally sympathetic to GM.

Question to Consider

- How effective do you think the song may have been in UAW recruiting

efforts?

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Come all you auto workers
Wherever you may be
Come join the ranks of labor
With the UAWA.

Come down to Third and Harrison
On the third floor is the hall
And nothing now should hinder you
From making us a call.

Our president Homer Martin
Is always on the spot
With the helping hand of Lewis
They'll get us what we want

We all know they are fighters
There isn't any doubt
The thugs and scabs of GMC
Can never scare us out.

The Reuther boys are scrappers too
Their task they've always done
They helped to win a victory
In the battle of Bulls Run.

The cops would like to drive them out
But they will not back down
We're going to stick together till
We organize this town.

These men are auto workers
The same as you and I
The Journal calls them agitators
But that is a lie.

Now the strike is over
And our song is nearly through

So is George E. Boysen
And the Flint Alliance too.

Source:

Henry Kraus Collection, Archive of Labor and Urban Affairs, Personal Collections, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University. Also available in Timothy P. Lynch, *Strike Songs of the Great Depression* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 119-20.