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

Evidence

Staking out Experiencing National
Positions the Strike Coverage
and Broader
Implications

Staking out Positions in the Strike

The documents in this section present the official positions of GM and the UAW during the Flint strike. They include correspondence and communication made public during the dispute between the corporation, union officials, and workers.

1. William Knudsen 2. UAW's Demands to Homer Martin January 3, 1937 January 1, 1937 3. Alfred P. Sloan 4. Homer Martin's Memo to GM Reply to Sloan's **Employees** Memo January 5, 1937 January 6, 1937 5. General Motors 6. UAW's Reply to **Statement General Motors** January 21, 1937 January 21, 1937 7. The Settlement February 11, 1937

Experiencing the Strike

The songs, photographs, and video in this section explore how GM employees and their families experienced the forty-four-day sit-down strike.

Songs

Participants in protest movements of all sorts had long relied on songs to convey messages, share frustrations, boost morale, and foster a sense of community. Songs proved "better than a thousand speeches" at motivating workers to join in and stay together (Lynch 124). The GM sit-down strikers and their supporters both sang and composed songs about their experiences in and outside the factory. In most instances, they fashioned new lyrics to well-known melodies, a practice that made it easier for fellow strikers to join in.

A 8. "The Fisher Strike"
Anonymous, 1937
A 10. "Sit Down"
Maurice Sugar, 1937
A 12. Women's Auxiliary Song

A 9. "Oh, Mister Sloan"
Gilliland and Beck, 1937
A 11. Untitled Strike Song
Walter Frost, 1937

Photographs

Anonymous, 1937

Photographs provide another window onto the experiences of sit-down strikers. A variety of individuals — journalists, documentary photographers, and GM, UAW, and government officials — recorded images of the strike on film for numerous purposes. Some of the shots were carefully posed; others were more candid. Whatever their intent, the images below capture important dimensions of how strikers and their families survived the six-week ordeal.

Makeshift Bed

- 13. Photo: Children
 Picketing in Flint
 February 3, 1937

 15. Photo: A Striker
 Dancing a Jig

 14. Photo: Passing
 Food to Striking
 Workers
 1937

 16. Photo: A Striker
 Sleeping in a
- January 1937

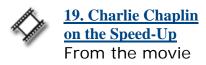
 17. Photo: National
 Guard Troops
 1937

 Telebrate the End of the Sit-Down Strike
 February 11, 1937

Video

1937

In addition to amusing themselves while on strike, members of the community supplied the sit-down strikers with entertainment from outside the factory. The operator of a local theater, for example, sent several entertainers into Fisher One, while the Contemporary Theater of Detroit staged a specially adapted two-act play, *Virtue Rewarded*, in both Fisher plants. The actor and filmmaker Charlie Chaplin also donated showings of *Modern Times*, a film which depicted life on the assembly line.



National Coverage and Broader Implications

This section provides broader perspectives on the Flint sit-down strike. The first five documents reproduce editorials or cartoons published for national audiences during or immediately after the strike. The last two documents contain graphs depicting membership in labor unions and participation in strikes.

20. Cartoon:

Herblock on the

American Automobile

Industry

January 7, 1937

22. Resources Against

Extremists

Extremists
Editorial in the
New York Times,
January 27, 1937

24. Cartoon:
Herblock on the End
of the Sit-Down
Strike
February 1937

26. Graph:
Participation in Work
Stoppages (Strikes
and Lockouts)
1900-1970

A 21. The Sit-Down Editorial in *The* New Republic, January 20, 1937

23. Is the Sit-Down
Unfair?
Editorial in The
New Republic,
February 17, 1937
25. Graph: Union
Membership in
Private NonAgricultural
Employment
1900-1999