

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

Evidence

<u>Staking out Positions</u>	<u>Experiencing the Strike</u>	<u>National Coverage and Broader Implications</u>
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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.

A 1. William Knudsen to Homer Martin January 1, 1937	A 2. UAW's Demands January 3, 1937
A 3. Alfred P. Sloan Memo to GM Employees January 5, 1937	A 4. Homer Martin's Reply to Sloan's Memo January 6, 1937
A 5. General Motors Statement January 21, 1937	A 6. UAW's Reply to General Motors January 21, 1937
A 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](#)
Anonymous, 1937


A [9. "Oh, Mister Sloan"](#)
Gilliland and Beck,
1937


A [11. Untitled Strike Song](#)
Walter Frost, 1937


Photographs

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.


 [13. Photo: Children Picketing in Flint](#)
February 3, 1937

 [14. Photo: Passing Food to Striking Workers](#)
1937

 [15. Photo: A Striker Dancing a Jig](#)
1937


 [16. Photo: A Striker Sleeping in a Makeshift Bed](#)
January 1937

 [17. Photo: National Guard Troops](#)
1937

 [18. Photo: Workers Celebrate the End of the Sit-Down Strike](#)
February 11, 1937

Video

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.

 [19. Charlie Chaplin on the Speed-Up](#)
From the movie

Modern Times,
1936

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

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



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 Non-
Agricultural
Employment

1900-1999