

The Flint Sit-Down Strike, 1937

(http://www.dhr.history.vt.edu/modules/us/mod06_1936/evidence.html#StakingOutPositions)

In July 1936, about a year prior to the sit-down strike at the General Motors plant, hundreds of workers died in auto plants in Michigan. The deaths were thought to be a result of a heat wave combined with the difficult working conditions. Responding to the unsafe working conditions that led to the deaths, low wages, and to General Motor's decision to fire two brothers who worked in one of the plants. On the night of December 12, 1936, aided by the United Auto Workers Union, the workers in Body Plant Number One gained control of the building by locking all the doors and simply ceasing to work. On January 1, 1937, workers gained control of the second plant in Flint. Chevy Plant Number Four continued to run until February 1, 1937 when striking workers took control of it. By locking themselves inside and refusing to come out, the strikers were not only able to maintain control of the strike and to ensure that they would not simply be replaced by other workers, they were also able to protect themselves from violence. Inside the plants the workers occupied themselves by organizing concerts, playing board games, and giving lectures. Outside, union supporters arranged for food to be delivered to the strikers. After 44 days of striking, General Motors President Alfred Sloan announced a \$25 million wage increase and recognition of the union. This led to further negotiations on wages and safety regulations.

UAW Demands, January 3, 1937

1. National conference between responsible heads of G.M.C. and chosen representatives of international union, United Automobile Workers of America. Such conference to discuss and bargain collectively on the following points as a basis for national agreement between General Motors Corporation and its employe[e]s, as represented by international union, United Automobile Workers of America.
2. Abolition of all piece work system of pay, and the adoption of straight hourly rate.
3. A 30-hour week and six-hour work day and time and one-half for all time worked over the basic work day and work week.
4. Establishment of a minimum rate of pay commensurate with an American standard of living.
5. Reinstatement of all employe[e]s who have been unjustly discharged.
6. Seniority, based upon length of service.
7. Recognition of the international union, United Automobile Workers of America, the sole bargaining agency between General Motors Corporation and its employe[e]s, for the establishment of joint tribunals and joint rules of procedure for the adjusting of any and all disputes that may arise from time to time between employe[e]s of General Motors Corporation and the management.
8. Speed of production shall be mutually agreed upon by the management and the union committee in all General Motors plants.

The Settlement, February 11, 1937

Agreement entered into on this 11th day of February, 1937, between the General Motors Corporation (hereinafter referred to as the Corporation) and the International Union, United Automobile Workers of America (hereinafter referred to as the Union).

The Corporation hereby recognizes the Union as the Collective Bargaining agency for those employees of the Corporation who are members of the Union. There shall be no discrimination, interference, restraint or coercion by the Corporation or any of its agents against any employee because of membership in the Union.

The Corporation and the Union agree to commence collective bargaining negotiations on February 16th with regard to the issues specified in the letter of January 4th, 1937, from the Union to the Corporation, for the purpose of entering into a collective bargaining agreement, or agreements, covering such issues, looking to a final and complete settlement of all matters in dispute.

The Union agrees to forthwith terminate the present strike against the Corporation, and to evacuate all plants now occupied by strikers.

The Corporation agrees that all of its plants, which are on strike, or otherwise idle shall resume operations as rapidly as possible.

It is understood that all employees now on strike or otherwise idle will return to their usual work when called and that no discrimination shall be made or prejudices exercised by the Corporation against any employee because of his former affiliation with, or activities in, the Union or the present strike.

The Union agrees that pending the negotiations referred to in Paragraph Two, there shall be no strikes called or any other interruption to or interference with production, by the Union or its members.

During the existence of the collective bargaining agreement contemplated pursuant to Paragraph Two, all opportunities to achieve a satisfactory settlement of any grievance or enforcement of any demands by negotiations shall be exhausted before there shall be any strikes or other interruption to or interference with production by the Union or its members. There shall be no attempts to intimidate or coerce any employees by the Union and there shall not be any solicitation or signing up of members by the Union on the premises of the Company. This is not to preclude individual discussion.

After the evacuation of its plants and the termination of the strike the Corporation agrees to consent to the entry of orders, dismissing the injunction proceedings which have been started by the Corporation against the Union, or any of its members, or officers or any of its locals, including those pending in Flint, Michigan and Cleveland, Ohio, and subject to the approval of the Court to discontinue all contempt proceedings which it has instituted thereunder.