



1936

The Flint Sit-Down Strike

The 1936 Flint Sit-Down strike took the UAW from a collection of isolated locals on the outside of the industry to a major union that led to the unionization of the domestic auto industry. Shortly after the UAW held its first convention, the recently founded union decided that it could not be successful by organizing piecemeal campaigns at smaller plants. On December 30, 1936 union members learned that General Motors planned to stop producing dies at the Flint plant and union leaders immediately called for workers to strike. The strike resulted in General Motors recognizing the UAW as the exclusive bargaining representative for their union employees. The Sit-Down strike transformed the UAW into a major force in the American Labor Movement.

¹ Sit-Down Strike

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² Child Picketers

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³ General Motors/ UAW Agreement

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Credits:

Fine, Sidney. *Sit-Down: The General Motors Strike of 1926-1937*. University of Michigan Press, 1986. Print.

Keywords/Topics:

Politics and Legal Issues, Work/Jobs

Questions:

1. Why did the GM employees strike?
2. What were the benefits of using child picketers?
3. How long did the strike last?
4. Why was this strike so important?

Links to Internet Websites:

<http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/dollflint.html>

<http://apps.detnews.com/apps/history/index.php?id=115>

http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-54463_54466_20840-53981--,00.html

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The sit-down strike was different than other strikes because workers refused to leave the plant instead of picketing outside. The goal was to keep management out and prevent employees from coming to work. In previous strikes companies could hire scab workers to work while employees picketed but this new method prevented all production, costing the company money.

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During the Flint Sit-Down strike, UAW members and GM employees used their children to picket and protest outside while they occupied the plant. This tactic was intended to draw attention and empathy from non-union supporters. President Roosevelt did not allow federal intervention to end the strike but the state court issued injunctions ordering the strikers to leave the plant. Police used tear gas to force strikers out of the plant but they were unsuccessful. When the second injunction was ordered, strikers retaliated by spreading the strike to Chevrolet Plant #4.

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After strikers occupied Chevrolet Plant #4 GM agreed to negotiate and on February 11, 1937, General Motors and the UAW reached an agreement. The UAW had won the recognition from General Motors but their fight was far from over. They would battle another five years to gain recognition from Henry Ford.