

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

Evidence 6: United Automobile Workers' Reply to General Motors, January 21, 1937

A

Introduction

In response to the charge that a vast majority of GM workers supported an immediate end to the sit-down strike, the UAW issued the statement below.

Questions to Consider

- What specific evidence did the UAW offer to support their charge that workers were forced to sign loyalty petitions?
- Which statement do you find more convincing, and why?

Document

The claim of General Motors Corporation that 110,262 employe[e]s have indicated their willingness and desire to go back to work immediately cannot have any significance at all. The signatures on the petitions and postcards were collected by the management through coercion, intimidation and the threat of the loss of jobs if the employe[e]s did not sign.

At Chevrolet Gear and Axle in Detroit, the union has already pointed out in the case of George Culley, employed there for six years who was discharged Tuesday, Jan. 5, after he refused to sign the petition. He was immediately taken to the office, told he was "agitating the union" and removed from his job.

In Flint, workers in the Buick and Chevrolet plants were told by the foreman that unless they signed the petitions they would not be eligible for the employe[e] loans made by General Motors during the layoff season. Others were threatened with loss of jobs. In numerous instances there were actual threats of violence unless workers signed the petitions or postcards.

At Saginaw, Mich., where it is claimed that 745 out of 920 voted against the union in a secret poll, the company sponsored a vigilante organization who

threatened F. J. Michel and Powers Hapgood, representatives of the union, with physical violence. The vigilante campaign was openly sponsored in the local press.

Claims of General Motors are further negated by the fact that because of these threats, the union issued instructions at a number of these plants, including Ternstedt's in Detroit where 12,000 are employed, for workers to sign the petitions and postcards in order to protect their jobs.

Of course, union members and strikers are eager to go back to work themselves. But they want decent conditions established before they do go back. The only obstacle to the immediate resumption of work is the obstinacy of General Motors Corporation executives.

Source:

Detroit News (22 Jan 1937), 1.