

# Preface

"Rarely," Jay Lovestone wrote of the General Motors sit-down strike just after its conclusion, "does a single event of and by itself mean so much." Historians of the American labor movement probably would be disinclined to challenge this judgment insofar as it applies to the growth of unionism in the automobile and other mass-production industries, and yet the strike has received surprisingly little scholarly attention and has not heretofore been the subject of a single, documented book-length study. Henry Kraus, to be sure, has written a vivid account of the strike in *The Many and the Few: A Chronicle of the Dynamic Auto Workers* (Los Angeles, 1947), but his narrative is undocumented, it does not concern itself in any depth with some of the most important aspects of the strike, and it is lacking in objectivity. The importance of the event, its relationship to subjects that have long been my concern, and the availability of important manuscript collections bearing on nearly all phases of the dispute explain my own interest in the strike and prompted my effort to write an account, based on the sources, of the origins, character, and consequences of this momentous labor conflict.

I first raised some of the questions considered in the book in an article on the strike that appeared in the *American Historical Review* in April, 1965. Since the positions defended by GM and the UAW in the strike reflected the prior experience of both organizations and the nature of the antecedent conflict between them, I have devoted a good deal of attention to the history of both the company and the union and especially to the confrontation between them that began in June, 1933, when Section 7 (a) of the National Industrial Recovery Act altered the rules governing industrial relations in the United States and adumbrated some of the principal issues over which the strike would eventually be fought. The key role of Frank Murphy in the ultimate resolution of the conflict and the central place occupied by Flint in the strike explain the consideration given in the pages that follow to Michigan's governor and GM's Michigan stronghold.

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