Half a century has passed since protests against unemployment and evictions and early Depression strikes sparked the movements that culminated in the organization of the United Automobile Workers (UAW) of America. From its inception as a Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO) affiliate in 1936, the UAW went on to take its place as the largest and, in many respects, most vital union in the United States during the decade between the Great Sit-down and Taft-Hartley. It is forty years since the passage of that act, which put labor on a defensive course it has not yet reversed. Nineteen forty-seven, too, was the year that Walter P. Reuther gained full control of the UAW, emerging from the bitterest and most widely publicized factional fight in trade-union history with the support of a clear majority of its membership. The passions generated by that battle have begun to subside, but the historiography of automobile unionism has remained deeply divided. However, in the public mind, as always, the winners have a decided edge.¹

Maurice Sugar, Detroit’s most prominent labor lawyer and UAW general counsel from 1939 to 1947, was a key leader of the losing side. One of the aims of this study is to understand the perspective of those defeated in 1947. The point is not to attack or to open old wounds but to reassess the entire process and to examine the goals and ideals of the losing coalition from the vantage point of one of its intellectual guides. It is, further, to shed light on the historical forces that precipitated the rise and fall of the old Left and its broad group of allies as the dominant elements in the UAW. In looking at the Left and labor before the victory of Reuther and his conception of trade unionism, we are dealing with a sharply defined era in U.S. labor history, one that began with the Depression and ended with the Cold War.

Few figures allow us to come to terms with this era more clearly than Maurice Sugar, and few places in the United States provide a more appropriate setting than Detroit. Stretching back to his collegiate conversion to socialism
1912 and forward to 1950, Sugar’s active life presents a remarkable journey along the intertwining paths of the Left and the labor movement. He seemed to be continually on the frontier—at first in the literal sense, born in a timber boomtown near Sault Ste. Marie and then at many of the critical junctures in the struggle of working people for justice in American society.

One of the first labor lawyers in the United States, Sugar spent the years immediately following his graduation from the University of Michigan Law School in 1913 battling against injunctions and antipicketing laws for Detroit American Federation of Labor (AFL) unions. Sugar and his wife, Jane Mayer, joined the leadership of the Michigan Socialist party. Although classified as a “yellow,” an anti-Bolshevik, Sugar was among the handful of Michiganders who went to jail for their refusal to register for the draft. This experience, copiously documented, encouraged his shift from yellow to red, although he did not join the Communist party, which was organized in September 1919. Indeed, Sugar refused to join any political party after the Michigan Socialist party was dissolved in 1919. This resolve held firm throughout his career, allowing him, as an independent Marxist of generally pro-Soviet leanings, to serve both the labor movement and the Left in a way that would otherwise have been impossible. In this he was typical of a group of individuals (including Sugar’s friends, Scott Nearing and Carl Haessler) who played similar roles.

Reinstated to the bar with the aid of Frank Murphy in 1923, Sugar returned to the defense of labor unions and took on civil-liberties cases, especially those involving racial discrimination. Beginning with the Depression, his activities diversified substantially. Virtually every significant movement or event engaged his energies: the antieviction struggles of the Unemployed Councils, the Ford Hunger March of 1932, the fight to release the Scottsboro Boys and Tom Mooney, and dozens of new labor and civil rights cases. Then, as lawyer for the pathbreaking Mechanics Educational Society of America, a candidate for judge and city council who garnered vote totals amazing for a loudly denounced “red,” and the reigning authority on the mechanisms of antilabor strategy practiced by the companies and public officials, Sugar became the Midwest’s most prominent defender of labor’s interests on the legal and political fronts. Finally, as lawyer and advisor during the sit-downs of 1937 and as general counsel for the UAW after 1939, he emerged as a labor leader of national stature.

While it would not be accurate to call Sugar’s period of involvement simply the “pre-Reuther era,” since Walter, his brothers, and their comrades were significant actors in the UAW almost from the beginning, the union’s center of gravity was George Addes, who served as secretary-treasurer from 1936 to 1947. The broad Addes coalition, which grew out of the anti-Homer Martin Unity caucus of 1937–38, included Communists and various political associates from Popular-Front configurations along with a great mass of militants like Ed Hall or Paul Miley who were vaguely Left but were tough trade unionists above all. They put together majorities throughout the decade, although after 1941 they sometimes agreed only on their opposition to Reuther. This was Sugar’s crowd.
Sugar was the highest-placed friend of the Communist party within the UAW. Although he never followed “the line” slavishly, he generally adhered to its principles. The Nazi-Soviet pact tested his loyalty, but the business of organizing the Ford Motor Company, auto’s last great citadel of resistance, so preoccupied him that the agony the pact caused so many never surfaced in his public or private utterances. As general counsel, Sugar was also the keeper of the union’s constitution and hence the main day-to-day defender of rank-and-file interests. This role he perhaps relished above all others. It was only in a fully democratic union that socialist principles could make their weight felt. Union democracy and Marxism: for Sugar they fit hand-in-glove. Many others on both sides thought they did not. The complexities of their interrelationships and Sugar’s activities in defending both constitute, perhaps, the unifying theme of the entire book.

A number of critical issues in recent U.S. social and political history may be examined through Sugar’s biography. Bert Cochran has rendered grudging testimony to the activities of the Communist party in CIO organizing, particularly in the automobile industry. But he and most writers on this subject seem preoccupied with showing the mistakes, limitations, and myopia of the Communists; even pro-Communist writers, in aggrandizing the role of the Party, remain concerned with evoking an idea of what might have been had certain other courses been taken. There is an assumption running through much of this that the Communists were in a position somehow to have led a class-conscious American working class, if not to revolution, at least to a substantially stronger position than was achieved had they only done it right. Although the evaluation of errors and “wrong turns” still has its place, a more urgent task is to understand the historical significance of the Communist party during the decade of its greatest influence and particularly in a context away from regular contact with its leadership. Sugar’s role as a witness to the process and as a liaison who often revealed the mechanisms of Communist influence in a major union is important indeed. As a sympathetic nonmember, he typified the world of the “fellow travellers” (an honorable term in the pre-McCarthy era), a much larger and more stable community than the Party itself. Hardly “dupes,” they unquestionably influenced the Party as much as it influenced them. Sugar’s vantage point, I would argue, represents the perspective of the U.S. communist movement much more than the vacillating pronouncements of Party leaders or even the activities of the rapidly changing Party rank and file.

Another important problem is the relationship of the law to the labor movement (particularly the place of constitutional rights, the product, after all, of a bourgeois revolution) in the struggle for a socialist transformation of the United States. Sugar’s thought and action in this regard may well be his most important contribution. In his mind, the courtroom was a forum from which to educate the working class and the public at large about the injustices perpetrated by the capitalist system. At the same time, the very constitutional rights supporting the economic interests of the ruling class could often be turned against it in
defense of the proletariat. What better illustration of the dialectic, of the unity of opposites, could be found? Sugar was able to pose sharply the inherent contradictions within U.S. law between property rights and human rights. His classic statement of this problem was his discussion of the “legality” of the sit-down strikes of 1937, which reached tens of thousands of radio listeners in the nation’s industrial centers. The law as an instrument of capitalist domination also remained a constant theme in Sugar’s work. In hundreds of court cases, but perhaps above all in the great legal struggle against the Ford Motor Company, Sugar demonstrated the historic prejudices of the law in favor of capital, while simultaneously utilizing concepts from the common law, such as the doctrine of “unclean hands,” to challenge them.

Sugar’s activities also carry us into the fight for legislative reform of labor law and into the manifold consequences of “labor’s bill of rights,” the Wagner Act. The increasing role of government in labor disputes (whether through the National Labor Relations Board [NLRB] or direct presidential intervention), the regularization of labor relations by legal strictures promoting “labor peace” through collective bargaining, and the whole problem of the no-strike pledge and the War Labor Board were all questions that engaged Sugar’s detailed attention. Through his eyes, therefore, we can witness the growing place of the government under the New Deal in relations between capital and labor and the growing dependency of labor on the law. The very law that protected it initially increasingly limited its alternatives. Finally, with the Taft-Hartley “revision” of the Wagner Act in 1947, the law became a virtual prison. No person in the United States, with the exception of his close friend, CIO Counsel Lee Pressman, was in a better position to observe this development—moving forward with the logic and irony of a Greek tragedy—than Maurice Sugar. The U.S. version of the class struggle grew with the law only to be stifled by the law. And the ultimate rationale for its stifling, in the form of Taft-Hartley compliance by labor’s officialdom, was anticommunism.

Nineteen forty-seven was the climax of Sugar’s life. He lost the factional fight against Reuther and was removed as general counsel. That year also saw the waning of a particular style of trade-union politics. Some called it factionalism, others called it anarchy, but many called it democracy. The roaring convention battles, complete with fistfights, name-calling, and outrageous factional songs, the “flying squadrons” of the various factions, the daily plotting, the massive factional political campaigns in every local in the nation, and the labyrinth of deals made among leaders at all levels have become part of the lore of labor history. The Reuther regime put an end to all that; the last convention smacking of the old ways was in 1951, at which Reuther consolidated his power. The order and respectability of the UAW in the 1950s and the leadership of a “labor statesman” should perhaps be seen as compromises with the realities of the Cold War United States that saved as much for labor as could be saved. But just as obviously, something important was lost. Factionalism ensured that the ranks,
whatever their opinion, could speak out: lots of members may have hated the nasal New Yorkese of Communist whip Nat Ganley or the gravelly brogue of Association of Catholic Trade Unionists (ACTU) spokesman Henry McCusker, but their presence and recognition meant that all others could be heard as well. The essentials of the union constitution under which such democracy was possible was developed by Maurice Sugar and George Addes, who also remained the ongoing watchdogs of the constitution. All internal conflicts relating to local elections, antiunion behavior, spying, seniority, grievance processing, and so on passed through their offices. They, and especially lawyer Sugar, were the keepers of the seal, which in the UAW of those years meant the keepers of the faith in union democracy. This strand of the story, the changing place of the ranks in the UAW, may be the one with the deepest meaning for Sugar—and, perhaps, for today. Union democracy of the old sort disappeared, as well, in the fog of anticommunism.

And so did a unique coalition of the Left and labor, whose special character grew out of its geographical location. Detroit was not New York, nor was it Washington. Time and time again, Communists and their friends in Detroit and in auto generally acted in ways not appreciated by the central leadership. Time and time again, UAW leaders and followers irritated the center of power in the CIO. But for the 1930s and 1940s, there is a real question about where the center was. Was it not in fact in the coal fields, in Akron, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Detroit, even South Bend—the places where industrial unionism flourished? And everywhere, what happened in the community at large was critical to the success of industrial unionism. Very often the stimulus for community support came from the activities of the Communist movement. Nowhere was this truer than in Detroit. Several local unions there were founded in International Workers’ Order halls, for example. More broadly, community awareness and mobilization on behalf of unionism grew through demonstrations, drives, political campaigns, single-issue formations, lectures, artistic presentations, and a host of other public manifestations of prolabor sentiment. This whole phenomenon may be explored in depth through Sugar’s biography. Through his political campaigns as “labor’s candidate,” through his countless lectures, through his role as public spokesman for unions in the course of their strikes, through his exposure of spies, paramilitary right-wing groups, and mobsters and the complicity of local government in protecting them, and through his ability to capture the deepest meaning of the struggle in his famous labor songs, such as “The Soup Song” and “Sit-down,” Sugar encompassed a whole range of involvements that brought the public and the labor movement together. A careful exploration of how the wider Left community in Detroit contributed to the advance of the labor movement is therefore a crucial element of this book.

Maurice Sugar was an important figure. His list of accomplishments is impressive. But more essential is the way that Sugar draws together, in his life, so many of the fundamental threads of the history of the Left and labor in the
first half of the twentieth century. There were dozens of other local and middle-rank leaders like him, but few had the special blend of experiences that seem, almost, to summarize an era.

At first glance, it might seem unusual that a French social historian should write a book about a rather specialized aspect of U.S. labor history, so perhaps an explanation is in order. Shortly before Christmas in 1977, I received a telephone call from Ernest Goodman, Detroit’s most renowned civil-rights lawyer, whose firm had won a variety of landmark decisions over the years and whose name inspires reverence in the heart of anyone who has taken a chance with the law in the name of justice. In my case the connection was direct, since he had defended my wife and me (and several dozen others) in a case arising from our participation in a march that violated Governor George Romney’s declaration of martial law after Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. Acting on the suggestion of Philip Mason, creator and director of Wayne State’s Labor History Archives, Goodman wanted to know whether I might be interested in writing a biography of Maurice Sugar. I vaguely knew who Sugar was—author of “Sit-down,” founder of Goodman’s firm, original organizer of an annual Left fund-raising extravaganza called the Buck Dinner, and a folk hero of the old Left in Detroit. His funeral in 1974 was a major event. I also was fascinated by the many tales I had heard about the battles within the UAW, had read most of the standard works on Michigan labor history, and had even directed a Master’s thesis on the formation of the Great Lakes steelworkers’ local. Goodman promised me access not only to the then unauthorized and unclassified Sugar Collection recently turned over to the archives, but to other materials still in the possession of the family and the firm as well as help in setting up interviews. No strings were attached, and I would have carte blanche in thematic development and interpretation.

We agreed to all this in a subsequent letter—this is in no sense an “authorized” biography—and I set to work. I quickly discovered what a massive amount of research would be required and drew George Colman, former Presbyterian minister, Detroit activist, and bona fide historian (he was my Master’s student mentioned above) into the project as oral historian. As it turned out, George carried out a number of marvelous interviews and other research activities in the early stages, but other commitments took him away from Detroit. I cannot thank him enough for his contributions and for the intellectual stimulation he provided.

The most important sources for this study are the papers of Maurice Sugar, which can be divided into three unequal categories. The first is the Sugar Collection at the Walter P. Reuther Library for Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University. Now cataloged into 117 cartons (one of the archives’ largest series), these materials range from Sugar’s earliest writings in the Detroit Central High School literary magazine to his voluminous correspondence as general counsel for the UAW. The amount of documentation on Sugar’s political devel-
opment, particularly his role in the Michigan Socialist party before 1920 and his place in Left politics in the 1930s, is impressive. Sugar’s tracking of the growth of the UAW (along with a distressing unconcern about his role in it) gives us one of the best sets of clippings, position papers, and marginalia that we have for the period from 1936 to 1947. It is especially important in that the volume of material picks up precisely where the valued Joe Brown Collection begins to fade—and remains significant throughout the period. Finally, the originals of Sugar’s songs, several hundred personal letters, and a wide range of important memorabilia are located in the Sugar Collection.

Legal scholars will be disappointed in the collection, however. When Sugar cleaned out his office on his retirement in 1950, he kept only those briefs and related materials that provided a legal record of the political and factional battles before and after the establishment of the UAW. Hence one finds his investigative notes relating to the post-Hunger March arrestees and a commentary on the grand-jury whitewash, large holdings concerning the Black Legion, the paramilitary fascist organization that slated Sugar for assassination, and the multiple legal documents relating to the fight against Homer Martin in 1938–39, but few briefs for his many labor cases, including such critical ones as the Chrysler sit-down injunction hearing of April 1937.

Many of the later cases (from 1934 on) remain in the files of Goodman, Eden, Millender, and Bedrosian (the firm Sugar founded), which, along with several private files retained by Jane Sugar, constitute the second general category of Sugar papers. Photograph collections developed by Jack Auringer and a number of personal letters were quite useful in clarifying aspects of Sugar’s biography. Especially important, his correspondence with Bud Reynolds during the 1960s provided valuable retrospective information on Sugar’s view of the law and its role in the class struggle during the late twenties.

The third principal source is Sugar’s incomplete autobiography. It informs virtually every page of the first five chapters of this book. In the early 1960s, at the urging of friends and colleagues, Sugar undertook to write his memoirs, focusing above all on the cases he felt best illustrated his pathways in labor law. His intended readers were, above all, young lawyers with a thirst for social justice and an interest in the labor movement. As with so many people his age, he was also able to recall his childhood in vivid detail. The result was a headache for any potential publisher but a gold mine for the historian. In thirty-four chapters totaling more than twelve hundred pages that barely reach 1935, Sugar recounts hundreds of incidents and dozens of cases in the form of fascinating and insightful anecdotes. Sugar did not finish his autobiography, in part because of failing health and, I think, in part because of the amount of pruning that would have been necessary for publication. In fact, he would have been forced to rewrite everything he had already done, perhaps in a totally different style. Unhappily, therefore, he did not get to what many would consider the most important years of his life, the time with the UAW. But he did leave several vignettes about particular events and personalities (among them the Flint sit-
down and "my relations with Walter Reuther") that are of great interest. A copy of all this material, although originally made available for my exclusive use by Ernest Goodman, is now in the Sugar Collection at Wayne State.

Beyond Sugar’s personal papers, I have drawn information about him and those with whom he interacted from a wide variety of sources. The Burton Historical Collection of the Detroit Public Library houses copies of the manuscript censuses (above all, for 1900), business directories, and descriptive materials that allowed me to fill in the context of Sugar’s early days in Brimley, while photographs and a visit to the place provided an image of the physical setting. Sugar’s peculiarly “American” Socialist perspective, which he shared with Eugene Debs, was rooted in this context, and I needed to understand it clearly. Secondary works, especially Richard Dorson’s classic Bloodstoppers and Bear-walkers made sense of the lore of the timber country and helped me to appreciate Sugar’s love of the north and his sense of humor. His early Detroit experience was set in the era of the city’s growth as an industrial center. Besides a variety of Wayne State theses and dissertations, the most useful secondary works were Melvin Holli’s Reform in Detroit, Olivier Zunz’s Changing Face of Inequality, and Steven Meyer’s Five Dollar Day. Sugar’s legal education at Michigan was placed in perspective by the early chapters of Jerold Auerbach’s masterly Unequal Justice.

The microfilmed papers of the Socialist Party of America, the rare collection of materials (including the only copy of the Michigan Socialist newspaper) in the Robert Westfall Papers in the Labadie Collection at the University of Michigan, and the unexcelled Detroit Labor News (Reuther Library) provided the main primary documentation (besides Sugar’s papers) for chapters 2 and 3. I found Ray Ginger’s Debs, James Weinstein’s Decline of Socialism, Robert Murray’s Red Scare, and Theodore Draper’s Roots of American Communism to be the most influential secondary works—despite my substantial reservations about each—in developing my understanding of the larger picture. Nick Salvatore’s Debs has also had an impact. For the specifics of the local labor scene and factional Socialist conflicts after the war, several holdings at the Reuther Library—above all, the materials relating to the Auto Workers Union and Justice Department spy reports recently obtained via the Freedom of Information Act—provided important data. Sugar’s pamphlet, The House of the Masses Trial, and assorted Reuther Library materials relating to the post-Palmer-raid situation in Detroit illuminate a little-known chapter in the splintering of the U.S. Left in 1919–20, the origins of the Proletarian party, and help us to understand the longstanding enmity Sugar and a host of other Marxists in the area felt toward members of the new Michigan Socialist party.

Although the forthcoming study by Joyce Peterson will do much to fill the gap, there is no general work on the economic and social history of Detroit in the late twenties and the early Depression years. For the auto industry, we have Robert Dunn’s classic, Labor and Automobiles (1929), for race relations and the Sweet case, David Levine’s Internal Combustion, and for the politics of the early thirties, Sidney Fine’s Frank Murphy (vol. 1). On the early relationship between
the Communist party and auto workers, I relied heavily on Roger Keeran’s dissertation, now published. But most of the difficult work of reconstructing Sugar’s life and milieu during the period between his reinstatement to the bar and the Ford Hunger March was drawn from his autobiographical sketches and other writings; personal interviews with Jane Sugar, Jack Tucker, and several others; and the manuscript and printed materials in the Sugar Collection. Although the other series at the Reuther Library generally do not become important until after 1932, a number of oral histories (especially that of Phil Raymond) and the Joe Brown Collection shed light on various aspects of early Depression developments.

Paucity of documentation and secondary literature disappears as a limitation after 1932. If anything, the problem is the reverse. Of the scores of commentaries and histories consulted, the most influential were (more or less in order of importance) Bert Cochran’s Labor and Communism, which appeared as I was beginning my research and served as a marvelous counterpoint to a number of my then naive conceptions of the role of the Communist party in the CIO; Keeran again, who worked my thinking in the other direction; Sidney Fine, The Automobile under the Blue Eagle, an immense storehouse of information on the 1933–35 period (and which I found more satisfying than his more famous Sitdown); Mark Naison’s study of communism and community in Harlem, which I read as I was developing my thesis on the Left community and union consciousness in Detroit; Meier and Rudwick’s Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW, a godsend, again appearing in the midst of my researches (although I think they underestimated the significance of the Left, and specifically Maurice Sugar, in developing links between blacks and industrial unionism in the city); The Many and the Few (1946) by Henry Kraus, which still captures the spirit and the meaning (if not all the details) of the Flint sit-down better than any other book, although we anxiously await the published results of Neil Leighton’s massive oral-history project; Ray Boryczka’s articles on the early years of the UAW and Nelson Lichtenstein’s book on shop-floor relations and rank-and-file militance during the war, which were important in guiding me through the thicket of vituperation between Reutherites and anti-Reutherites that obscures so much of the history of the auto union from 1936 to 1947; the contemporary journalism of Louis Adamic and Carl Haessler, which provided insights on a variety of specific issues, and a different kind of observer, Clancy Sigal, who evokes the bitter war of 1946–47 better than any historical work in his novel, Going Away; and finally, Steve Nelson’s autobiography, which introduced me in detail to the kind of Communists that seemed to abound in Detroit, who, while loyal Party members, often deviated from the line, especially if the line seemed to conflict with rank-and-file workers’ interests.

In an area where the bibliography is exploding, there are a number of books, besides Lichtenstein’s and Naison’s, that were not yet out when I began my research. Fortunately, dissertations or articles were available, so the basic arguments of Harvey Klehr on communism during the 1930s, Maurice Isserman
on the war years, and Howell Harris on new management strategies could be appreciated if not always fully accepted.4

The endless source materials, both printed and manuscript, in the Reuther Library provided the main foundation for chapters 5 through 10. The Sugar Collection remains the principal foundation but is now joined by the remarkable UAW collections. The key one for me was that of George Addes, the most important figure in the UAW before Walter Reuther's rise to power. He served as secretary-treasurer of the UAW from 1936 until he was defeated in 1947 by the Reuther juggernaut. Sugar was his main correspondent, especially after the attorney took over officially as general counsel in 1939. He was also Addes's most trusted confidant and advisor on all sorts of matters, the éminence grise of the union's broad Left coalition that Addes led. The papers of Homer Martin, Carl Haessler, R. J. Thomas, Walter Reuther, Emil Mazey, UAW Public Relations, the Wayne County AFL, UAW War Policy Division, the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, and UAW locals Dodge 3, Bendix 7, Plymouth 51, Briggs 212, and Ford Rouge 600 were the most important collections for my purposes, although references to Sugar and correspondence with him were found in several dozen other collections. The UAW Convention Proceedings, the executive board minutes (verbatim after 1946), Sugar's own clipping collection, and various newspapers, especially the United Auto Worker, the Wage Earner, and Labor Action were the principal printed sources used.

Despite the voluminous source material, the observant reader will note that the biography loses much of its personal flavor after 1938 (see chapter 8). Sugar, though more prominent in his role, becomes more elusive as a person. It is especially difficult to trace his political opinions or to observe precisely how he related to political organizations, particularly the Communist party, after that date. The practical reason for this is the paucity of documentation—no political writings, no personal papers or letters, and above all none of the autobiographical reflections that give such life to the first two-thirds of this book. Moreover, Sugar's friends and colleagues were reluctant to talk about his private views on a variety of politically sensitive issues if they were not absolutely certain of his opinions, and even then, specifics were hard to come by. After taking on the job of general counsel in 1939, Sugar made it clear that that would be his life—it was the culmination of his career. His position made him the representative of all the union and therefore public or even repeatable private political comment might be regarded as unacceptable for one serving in his function. He was immensely popular and respected in virtually all quarters of the union. Why should he undermine that trust by appearing closely associated with any group? This closed-mouth attitude also meshed with his natural diffidence and was strongly reinforced after he failed to get a conviction for libel against a man who accused him of being a member of the Communist party in July 1939. What we see, at least until the trying struggle of 1946–47, is the public Sugar, fighting the legal battles of the UAW and defending its constitution. This lacuna is a shame, for it is clear from what evidence we have that he was dismayed with the
course taken by the U.S. Communist party from 1939 on. A detailed chronicle
of his disappointment or, better, a running critique would have allowed us to
carry forward the story of that side of his life. What we have instead are fleeting
glimpses only, largely as they relate to UAW policy. Only on the question of
anticommunism was Sugar clear and vocal: he would not tolerate it and fought
against all initiatives, whether from Homer Martin, Richard Frankensteen, or
Walter Reuther, to exploit its political benefits.

The other major element among the sources for this book was the oral
interview. The collection in the Reuther Library was only of marginal use to me
although the long narrative of Carl Haessler was illuminating. George Colman
and I therefore conducted a number of interviews, the importance of which can
be gauged from references to them in the text. They were all conducted in 1978
and 1979. For personal information and details on Sugar’s younger years es-
specially, four long interviews with Jane Mayer Sugar and her sisters Gertrude
and Emma Mayer were invaluable. Unquestionably, my four interviews with
Ernest Goodman gave me the greatest insight into Sugar’s mind, his personality,
and his legal and political principles. Their agreement on issues—after Goodman
joined Sugar’s firm in 1938—was virtually complete, and thus it was possible to
quiz Goodman on certain questions almost as if he were the man himself.
Obviously the historian can offer such evidence only for what it is, but in the
case, for instance, of Sugar’s view of the Nazi-Soviet pact, Goodman’s remarks
ring true. Goodman was also my mentor in matters of the law, procedural detail,
and the like, and in the interpretation of several of Sugar’s written passages.

George Addes was my next most important source. In two long interviews,
he confirmed again and again his close cooperation with Sugar and emphasized
the latter’s general role in the history of the UAW as traced in this book. He also
stressed his perception of Sugar’s distance from the Communist party—as a
sympathetic outsider who took his own positions on issues as they came. Addes
also provided fascinating insight into his own place in the history of the UAW,
especially the crucial questions of the election for president at the Cleveland
Convention in 1939 (from which office he backed away), the response of the
International to the wartime strikes, and the grinding conflict with Reuther in
1946–47. Sam Sweet, long-time education director for Plymouth Local 51;
Percy Llewelyn (recently deceased), the first president of Ford Local 600;
Sheldon Tappes and Christopher Alston, two of the great black pioneers in
UAW history; and George Burt, regional director for Canada until 1950, all
provided long and detailed interviews focusing on specific issues relating to
Sugar’s biography. We were unable to obtain a requested interview with Emil
Mazey.

Among those without formal UAW affiliation, we interviewed Larry
Davidow, first Sugar’s friend in the Socialist party, then his enemy, who pro-
vided important new information on Sugar’s status and role in the Flint sit-
down strike. LeBron Simmons, a Detroit activist attorney, gave us an excellent
picture of how Sugar was viewed in the black church-related community in
1935; his interview was a critical turning point in our assessment of Sugar’s role in developing a prounion consciousness among black people in Detroit. Stanley and Margaret Nowak, important figures in the Polish Left community and in women’s political activism, provided a wealth of material on issues ranging from the early Proletarian party to the organization of cigar workers and the Women’s League against the High Cost of Living. An interview with William Weinstone, district organizer (DO) in Detroit from 1934 to 1938 and currently official historian of the U.S. Communist party—carried out in New York in March 1979—allowed me to pursue a number of questions about Sugar’s relationship with the Communist party (he made it perfectly clear that Sugar was not a member) and about the origins of Sugar’s misgivings concerning Walter Reuther, a story followed up in some detail in chapter 6. Finally, early in the process, Colman and I spent several delightful and fascinating hours with Saul Wellman, also a DO in Detroit who, as he put it, “oversaw the dissolution of the Communist party in Michigan” in the 1947–54 period. Saul provided all sorts of information and made numerous suggestions about lines to pursue. I thank him for the stimulation he provided and the warm welcome he gave to me.5

Virtually all our main interviewees graciously invited me (or us) into their homes and spent long hours sorting out often distant and not always pleasant memories. I cannot thank them enough. Many others contributed to this book as well. My three Master’s students who wrote on topics related to this study, Michael Kroll on George Addes, Joseph Fardella on ACTU, and Scott Craig on blacks, communism, and auto organizing, provided insights and information that I never would have seen otherwise. Dozens of people in Detroit talked about Sugar and this history with me—for a while, new ideas sprouted weekly. To try to name them all would be to risk forgetting someone special. But I must thank those who read all or parts of the manuscript. Melvin Small, Robert Zieger, Tom Klug, Steve Babson, and Seth Wigderson shielded me from many errors and offered a number of important insights. The logic, organization, and readability were improved by Sándor and Carol Agócs, Nancy S. Macy, Austin Johnson, and Lois Johnson. Besides discussing hundreds of problems with me, Lois also typed the entire first draft, turning my hieroglyphics into English. The amazing Ginny Corbin, who never makes a mistake, typed two further drafts and saved me from dozens of misspellings. As for Gertrude and Emma Mayer, whose support was so crucial as the research was proceeding, I just hope that the final product will put to rest their numerous concerns about the manuscript. They obviously contributed greatly to the book and it would be sad to think it a disappointment to them.

But finally, and above all, I thank the man who made this book possible and in whom the spirit of Maurice Sugar lives on, Ernest Goodman. I ask him to share the dedication of this volume with the person who got me interested in the whole business long ago.