



Bread and Hyacinths: The Rise and Fall of Utopian Los Angeles

Lionel Rolfe

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This fascinating account of Los Angeles' buried past tells the story of Job Harriman, a former minister turned union organizer and attorney, who in 1911 was narrowly defeated as mayor of Los Angeles running on the Socialist ticket. Behind his defeat lay an unthinkable brutal, stop-at-nothing campaign headed by Los Angeles' de facto political boss, General Harrison Gray Otis, publisher of the Los Angeles Times. Harriman's progressive mayoral campaign represented an epic battle for the future of Los Angeles against the bitterly reactionary forces of Otis and his backers. The authors amply demonstrate that Otis was the victor in this contest, and how that victory explains much about why Los Angeles is the way it is today. "Bread and Hyacinths" follows Harriman through his childhood as an Indiana farm boy, through his formative years as a union organizer to his emergence as a key figure in the pivotal era of American socialism. It eloquently describes his lifelong optimism and determination in the face of poor health, financial woes, and personal and political troubles. Viewed in perspective against the backdrop of a city - and a nation - torn by labor strife and political corruption, Harriman emerges as a crucial, if ultimately marginalized, figure in American political history. Viewed in the light of today's uncertain economy and political unrest, this period of California history can be seen as a disturbing omen of things to come. "Bread and Hyacinths" has been optioned as a motion picture by director Paul Haggis ("Crash", "Billion Dollar Baby", "Flags of Our Fathers"). This brief, useful book illuminates an obscure chapter in the history of Los Angeles and America's socialist movement...The book also serves as a corrective to the Times's distorted history of the Llano del Rio Cooperative Colony, a socialist community founded by Harriman in Southern California's Antelope Valley. – Los Angeles Times This slender but potent book draws us into an early and unfamiliar era of Southern California, when Los Angeles seemed more like Charcoal Alley than Lotusland...[A] fine example of what regional publishing can and ought to be: vigorous, knowing, committed and unafraid, even if a bit eccentric. – Los Angeles Daily News

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