



# Governor Henry Horner, Chicago Politics, and the Great Depression

*Charles J Masters*

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Many have never heard of Governor Henry Horner of Illinois, yet his story is remarkable. *Governor Henry Horner, Chicago Politics, and the Great Depression* focuses on Horner's career in law and politics from 1915 to 1940, while examining the economic and political dynamics of Illinois during the darkest period in American history. This principled governor managed to maintain his political integrity in a climate where honesty was a liability, says author Charles J. Masters, but the few historians who include Horner in their narratives offer contradictory and dismissive characterizations of him. Masters corrects the public record and reintroduces Horner to political lore as a man who brazenly fought both the Chicago Democratic machine that worked to plot his downfall and Roosevelt's White House to steadfastly do right by the people of Illinois.

In this first book-length treatment of Horner in over thirty-five years, Masters traces the politician's career, the history and politics of Chicago, and the effects of the Great Depression in Illinois. The volume details Horner's life as a lawyer, probate judge, and two-term Democratic governor of Illinois. Horner's relationships with President Franklin D. Roosevelt and such political players as Michael "Hinky Dink" Kenna, "Bathhouse" John Coughlin, and Chicago mayors Carter Harrison, Anton Cermak, and Ed Kelly are set against a backdrop of assassination, political sniping, court-packing schemes, Prohibition, and the New Deal.

*Governor Henry Horner, Chicago Politics, and the Great Depression* examines the governor's management of the political and economic challenges of the state when millions of Americans were jobless, homeless, and hungry. The severely divergent economic and political positions of the state's northern industrial and southern agrarian interests made the period even darker. Masters shows how Horner stemmed foreclosures, dealt with bank closings, placated unpaid teachers, soothed massive labor unrest, fed the hungry, and confronted the ever-present threat of revolution. While Hitler's Germany was spreading Nazism throughout Europe, some Americans were questioning the fundamental order of their own political system, suggesting that socialism, communism, or Nazism could offer a better way. Masters addresses how Horner, Illinois' first Jewish governor, dealt with these challenges to the U.S. political system.

A story long absent from the historical record, *Governor Henry Horner, Chicago Politics, and the Great Depression* offers a portrait of the man, his style of governance, his successes, and his failures. The volume, with eight illustrations, effectively reevaluates Horner's historical reputation and role in Illinois politics in the midst of the worst economic depression in our nation's history.

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