



Orvie: The Dictator of Dearborn : The Rise and Reign of Orville L. Hubbard (Great Lakes Books)

David L Good

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The literature on political machines of American mayors is rich and varied. Essentially undiscovered, however, is "Orvie," the most flamboyant and original of them all-and, on his home turf, arguably the most powerful. David L. Good describes the public and private life of Orville L. Hubbard, a man whose remarkable political career overlapped the terms of seven presidents. Hubbard was mayor of Dearborn, Michigan, home of the Ford Motor Company, from 1942 to 1978, ranking him as the second-longest-tenured mayor in U.S. history. He became a model for successful suburban leaders, establishing a reputation for outstanding municipal services and low taxes-as well as for the most notorious racist rhetoric north of the Mason-Dixon line. During his reign, Hubbard was compared with nearly all the tyrants of the twentieth century and some before.

At his peak of some 350 pounds, Orvie was a blimp-shaped dreadnaught who set up a government in exile in Canada because sheriff's deputies were waiting to arrest him back home; was pictured in the newspapers on his way to the Republican National Convention disguised in a clown mask; and ordered his fire chief to take an axe to the office door of Henry Ford II. Acquitted in a federal civil rights case, Hubbard showed his appreciation to the jury by taking them out to dinner. After the 1967 riots in Detroit, Orvie threatened to "shoot looters on sight."

Hubbard took over a town-the town run by the American legend Henry Ford-without a traditional party organization, extensive patronage, or other trappings of a political machine. The "Hubbard machine" was essentially a one-man operation, consisting of Hubbard himself who prevailed on the sheer force of his personality.

David L. Good, who reported on Hubbard for eighteen years, bases his book on personal observation, public and private records, and interviews with Hubbard and family members. Although the book reads like the stuff of novels, Orvie: The Dictator of Dearborn is a serious study of one of the most controversial figures in American municipal government.

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