

Sinclair had been the country's best-known pamphleteer and propaganda novelist since 1906 when he had published *The Jungle*, a melodramatic story of the heart-breaking conditions of life among the immigrant packinghouse workers of Chicago. Sinclair moved to California in 1915 and made his home in Pasadena. In the middle of the waterfront strike at San Pedro in 1923, he was arrested for trying to read the Constitution of the United States to a meeting of strikers on a vacant lot, and this episode led him to found the southern California branch of the American Civil Liberties Union.

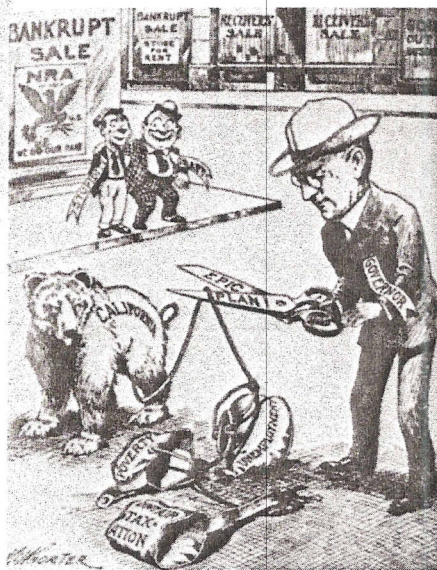
By 1933 he had written 47 books (about half his ultimate output), and there was hardly an aspect of capitalistic society in America that had not received unfavorable attention in one or another of his writings. On the other hand, he regarded Marx as a rigid doctrinaire. Sinclair's own brand of socialism was of the romantic, Americanized sort that had produced the nineteenth-century utopian colonies.

It was characteristic of Sinclair that when he decided to run for governor as a Democrat, he began his campaign by writing a utopian novel about it. *I, Governor of California, and How I Ended Poverty: A True Story of the Future* (1933) was an imaginative history of California from 1933 to 1938. In lively fiction it told how Sinclair was elected governor after a campaign of unprecedented bitterness and how he then put all the unemployed to work in state-aided cooperative enterprises. Through this catchy, quasi-literary device Sinclair set forth his program to End Poverty in California (EPIC). If the voters should decide to let him make his novel come true, a California Authority for Land (CAL) would purchase all the farms that were sold for taxes and establish cooperative agricultural colonies on them, with cooperative stores for the members. A California Authority for Production (CAP) would acquire thousands of factories that had been idle or only partially in use, and a California Authority for Money (CAM) would issue bonds to finance the purchases of the lands and factories and scrip to serve as the medium of exchange among the members of the cooperatives.

The national Democratic administration regarded Sinclair's candidacy as extremely unfortunate and unwelcome. The goal of the New Deal was not to undermine the capitalist system but to save that system by reforming it. Yet not even a statement from President Roosevelt opposing Sinclair could have prevented him from winning the Democratic nomination. Under these circumstances the president adopted a policy of making no public comment whatever about the campaign in California.

The depression was still raging, and thousands of people still lived in terror of being unable to provide food for their families. Wherever Sinclair went, these people crowded around him to wring his hand and promise him their support. In August 1934 he won the nomination with the highest vote that a Democratic candidate for governor had ever received in a California primary. More than two-thirds of his total vote came from southern California. Fifty-four percent of it came from Los Angeles County, where unemployment and other forms of economic hardship were even worse than in the state as a whole.

In the Republican primary, the extremely conservative Governor Merriam won by a plurality over three relatively progressive candidates. As Democrat George



Upton Sinclair's campaign weekly, *EPIC News*, featured this editorial cartoon on June 9, 1934. (Courtesy of the California Historical Society.)

Creel remarked, this left the voters of California with “a choice between epilepsy and catalepsy. Sinclair has a fantastic, impossible plan, and Merriam is as modern as the dinosaur age.”

The California Republicans, now thoroughly frightened, organized an attack against Sinclair on a scale so elaborate and intensive that it marked the beginning of a whole new era in the history of American political campaign techniques. Louis B. Mayer, head of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) studios and chairman of the Republican state central committee, mobilized the resources of the public relations, advertising, and movie industries.

Sinclair's own writings provided his opponents with much of their ammunition. He had denounced and antagonized a remarkable number of groups and institutions: the clergy, in his book *The Profits of Religion*; American colleges and universities, in *The Goose Step*; public schools and schoolteachers, in *The Goslings*; and the press, in *The Brass Check*. But his opponents did not content themselves with reprinting passages from these works; they also indulged in outright fabrications and distortions. In a faked newsreel, a group of tramps, who were actually movie extras made up for the part, were shown debarking from a freight train and telling an interviewer that they were the first of an army of hoboes from the east who were on their way to California because they had heard that as soon as Sinclair was elected there would be a general sharing of the wealth.

Sinclair's opponents falsely charged that he was an atheist, a believer in free love, and a Communist. The Communist party, in fact, denounced Sinclair as a “social fascist”—its current term for anyone who advocated compromise with capitalism. Even the Socialist party of California repudiated him, although in somewhat milder language than the Communists. Sinclair also lost the support of Dr. Townsend and his followers by criticizing the Old Age Revolving Pensions plan as “a mere money