



Arthur H. Samish (1899–1974) and “Mr. Legislature.” Taking pictures for *Collier's*, photographer Fred Lyon caught Samish in this remarkable pose in his suite at the Senator Hotel in Sacramento. (© Bettman/Corbis.)

distillers, and tavernkeepers into a kind of pro-saloon league, and in 1935 he made a contract with the California State Brewers' Association providing an assessment of 5 cents on every barrel of beer for a political fund to be dispensed by Samish with no accounting. In later years he often reminded his clients in the liquor industry that as a result of his efforts California had the lowest liquor taxes in the nation. He also reminded the oil companies that retained him as a lobbyist that oil severance taxes in Louisiana and Texas were about 100 times as high as in California.

In 1938 the Sacramento grand jury employed a private detective to investigate charges that Samish had attempted to bribe members of the state senate. The detective reported finding “ample evidence that corruption, direct and indirect, has influenced the course of legislation.” Samish, it was discovered, had received from his clients about \$500,000 during the previous 3 years. The basis of Samish's method was “to acquire influence with a group of Legislators through campaign contributions or other favors and then to sell that influence to industries concerned with legislation.”

Ten years later, in 1949, *Collier's* magazine published an exposé called “The Secret Boss of California.” Forgetting, for once, the importance of secrecy in his operations, and giving way to the most blatant braggadocio, Samish posed for a color photograph in his hotel suite at the state capital. On his knee he held a ventriloquist's dummy, which he addressed as “Mr. Legislature.” The appearance of such an article and especially of such a picture in a national magazine finally compelled the California legislature to take some sort of action. It passed a law requiring



lobbyists to register and to file monthly financial statements, but these statements usually proved to be so vague that they were meaningless.

The downfall of Samish finally resulted from his failure to report his income and expenditures to the federal government. In 1953 he was convicted of income tax evasion and later served 2 years in a federal penitentiary; the state assembly subsequently reorganized its committee system to eliminate Samish's influence.

In addition to lobbying, which gained such a dangerous degree of influence over the legislature, another institution that emerged in California politics was the professional *campaign-management firm*—a distinctive contribution of California to American politics. In the 1930s an organization called Campaigns, Inc., founded by Californians Clem Whitaker and Leone Baxter, revolutionized political campaigning by making carefully planned use of the mass media and the commercial techniques of the advertising industry. It was natural that the first full-fledged professional campaign-management firm in the United States should have developed in California because of the state's lack of party organization, its constant influx of new voters, and its extraordinarily frequent use of the initiative and the referendum.

Clem Whitaker was a reporter in Sacramento at the age of 17. Within a few years, he was operating his own Capitol News Bureau, furnishing syndicated news on state politics to more than 80 California papers. In 1933 he met Leone Baxter, an articulate young widow who worked for the Redding Chamber of Commerce. Joining forces, Whitaker and Baxter in 1934 managed the Republican campaign against Upton Sinclair, and though they later expressed regret at some of the shabbier devices they felt compelled to use against him, this campaign firmly established their reputation. The partners were married in 1938. For the next 20 years their support decided many of the key issues of California politics. They usually managed the campaigns for or against five or six initiative or referendum propositions in every state election. Whitaker and Baxter would accept no campaign that was not in accord with their own political views, and as their financial success increased, their views became more and more conservative.

Dozens of other professional campaign-management firms followed in the success of Whitaker and Baxter. Some firms specialized in boosting candidates, others in gathering the signatures needed to place propositions on the ballot. The influence of such firms in California politics was enormous. "If you give me \$500,000," one professional campaign manager told author Gladwin Hill, "I'll guarantee to get on the ballot a measure to execute the governor by Christmas."

The third institution to emerge as a consequence of California's nonpartisan politics was the *informal party organization*. The Republicans had formed the first such body, the California Republican Assembly (CRA), at a low point in their party's fortunes in 1933, but the Democrats had been unable to follow suit because of the lack of comparable dedication and enthusiasm among their grassroots volunteer workers. In 1952, however, Adlai E. Stevenson became a kind of patron saint for liberal Democrats, and hundreds of new Democratic clubs sprang up in support of his presidential candidacy. Intense disappointment at his defeat played a part in bringing these clubs together in a statewide federation the next year, the California Democratic Council (CDC).