Clearing Up A Mystery

By MORRIE RYSKIND

The "Gloomy Dean of Beverly Hills" explains why he hasn't been sounding off in print of late. It all began, he points out, with a curious letter that "changed my entire life."

So many people have been commenting—many of them favorably, I hasten to add — on the fact that they haven't seen my opinions in print lately, and so many distorted rumors are making the rounds that I think it time to make an explanation. It was the most recent Gallup poll on the subject that forced my hand. If you recall, it went something like this:

Question: Mr. R. hasn't been heard from lately. To what do you attribute this and how do you feel about it?

	Percentage
Approve	78.3
Disapprove	2.4
He joined a Buddhist monastery	22.9
He was defenestrated	17.6
And a good thing, too	67.4
Who?	92.3

(This adds up to more than 100 per cent, because 1. Dr. Gallup isn't very good at figures and 2. some people gave more than one answer.)

Not, the good Lord knows, that anybody cared much about what I had to say, but it was a little as though Yellowstone's Old Faithful had quit spouting every hour on the hour. After all, for years I erupted almost as regularly. You could hardly pick up an issue of a hidebound reactionary magazine (like the FREEMAN, say) without reading some mournful diatribe of mine on the state of the nation and/or the world; when you glanced through your daily paper, there I was with a Letter to the Editor, viewing something or other with alarm; there were nightly telegrams of protest that I sent to presidents, vice presidents, governors, senators and even umpires. And the friends I pestered! Believe me, I didn't get to be known as the Gloomy Dean of Beverly Hills by just sitting on my hands.

But get a load of me now! The metamorphosis couldn't be more striking if Cassandra had suddenly turned into Pollyanna. No longer is my day full of a futile correspondence—me and those one-way letters Roosevelt, Truman *et al.* never bothered to answer. I have time now for the pleasanter things of life: I can look at TV, play a game of scrabble, venture around a pitch-and-putt course, and occasionally go to the track. I don't say I'm prepared for all this leisure, but I'm reading some books on how to spend a pleasant old age and deriving a quiet contentment from them. True, I am still regarded as too young for the bowling green, but it won't be long now.

How come? Well, a few months ago I received a letter—the letter that changed my entire life—from a John A. Despol, who is Legislative Representative (vulgarly known as lobbyist) for the CIO California Industrial Union Council. To be strictly accurate, the note wasn't addressed to me but to my wife; California, however, is a community property state and my wife is entitled to half my income and, in return, I'm entitled to look at half her mail if she decides to show it to me. Luckily for me, Mr. Despol's communiqué was included in my allowance that month. Otherwise—but I shudder at the thought.

Mr. Despol's Automation

I ask you now to turn to Mr. Despol's missive (it is reproduced in full in the box on the next page) and read it carefully. I know you will experience —even though vicariously—the joy that was mine when I read his magnanimous offer. No longer need I bother my pretty little head about World Affairs; Mr. Despol and his competent staff would do all the required reading and research, reach an unbiased but liberal decision, write my letters for me (including a carbon so I could remember where I stood) and even provide me with the stamps. True, I would still have to sign the letter and lick the envelope; but Mr. Despol, I understand, is working on that, too, and, when some bugs are ironed out, I may not have to do even that.

Well, sir, I may not be the shrewdest fellow in the world, but I know a Bargain when I see one. After all, not since Orwell's Big Brother has such a benefactor appeared on the horizon; and Despol did it by 1955, which beats Big Brother by twenty-nine years.

California, always a progressive state, has been quick to take advantage of Mr. Despol's automation. Even in early April, when Mr. Despol's venture was launched, 800 high-minded citizens were already having their thinking and writing done for them; goodness knows how many thousands have been benefited by this time. This is the CIO's answer to Do-It-Yourself and, furthermore, you can't cut yourself in the process.

Of course, there were—there always are, alas!—right-wing reactionaries who protested: they screamed that people ought to think their own thoughts and write their own letters. And this group of malcontents who would turn the clock backward was joined by some Wall Street congressmen—some of them from California, I regret to say—who asserted that union funds were being used for illegal purposes and that they would sick Taft-Hartley on Mr. Despol.

But nothing came of it, what with meetings at the summit and the necessity of rushing important matters through so Congress could adjourn. Nothing probably will come of it.

Mr. Despol denied the vile insinuations and nasty slanders and pointed out that his offer was made only to bona-fide members of the CIO, and certainly his organization's members had a right to use union funds to pay postage and research for its own members. Of that, I believe, there can be no doubt.

Which brings up the one point that puzzles my wife and myself. She doesn't remember joining the CIO, but she's sure Mr. Despol wouldn't lie about such a thing. We have concluded that it must have been at some PTA meeting or perhaps at the Republican State Convention where, she assures me, so many resolutions are passed so fast she's never quite sure what happened.

But pish on trivialities and posh on technicalities! The main thing is that Mr. Despol is now handling our political attitudes, and we even have hopes of getting a guaranteed annual wage for letting him do this. There is talk, further, of time-and-a-half for any envelopes we lick on Sunday —just talk, so far, but wait till next fall when our contract expires!

CIO CALIFORNIA INDUSTRIAL UNION COUNCIL

117 West Ninth Street Los Angeles 15, Calif.

April, 1955

Dear Friend:

We are inviting you, as a member of the articulate liberal community in your area, to take advantage of our Legislative Secretarial Service. Over 800 citizens holding pro-liberal-labor views in California have already signed up, and we are sure that other citizens like yourself will be similarly interested.

This is how it works:

You will fill out the enclosed authorization card and drop it in the mail. From time to time, during legislative sessions, you will receive from our office an individually typed letter to your Congressman, Senators (U. S. or State) or assemblyman. Your return address will be on the letter; all you need to do is sign it and place it in the envelope which will be enclosed with it. The envelope will be already stamped and addressed, ready for you to mail. You will also receive a carbon copy of the letter to keep.

The letters will be concerned with issues which are important, timely and controversial. The point of view expressed will be based on liberal-labor attitudes which most liberals generally hold. We are sure that you are in full agreement with liberal-labor policy on issues such as minimum wage laws, unemployment insurance, housing, child care centers, and the like.

This secretarial service will mean more letters on important issues to your legislators. It helps you to keep in touch with your legislators at the time the legislative fight is on in Congress or Sacramento. It can be your way of letting your legislator know that you, as an individual, are keeping abreast of the most important issues arising in Congress and in Sacramento. It also helps your legislator keep in touch with you, because he will answer your personal letter, letting you know his position.

Remember that the final action—the signing and mailing of the letter is taken by you. You approve, sign, and mail every letter which bears your signature. The authorization card which we have enclosed with this letter is merely to let us know that you want us to provide you with this service. There is no charge.

The only way your legislator can know how you, the voter, feel about a proposed law is through your telling him. We will be happy to help you tell him if you will sign and mail the enclosed card.

Legislatively yours,
JOHN A. DESPOL
Legislative Representative

P. S. This proposal can be summed up as follows: We will provide you with what amounts to a private secretary who will do research, write and type your letters for your signature. Professional lobbyists have this kind of service. So do many business executives. We just thought it would be a good idea to provide the same kind of service to those of you who would like to be amateur lobbyists more often.