

# HOW I DIDN'T GET ELECTED

by Don Mathew

"I don't usually vote Labour, but I will spare you at least one vote, because your dog is so well-behaved."

One of my canvassers reported this remark, beaming, while returning from an otherwise pretty fruitless tour of hostile territory - an episode in my recent and unsuccessful attempt at winning a Council seat in the recent Waveney elections.

Hostile..no, that's not the word... Few, very few, people were hostile or even rude. You lot are all the same. What about the Groundnuts Scheme?" hurled at me early on in the campaign was an exception. The other, almost apologetic, extreme "I'm most awfully sorry, but we're all frightfully Blue in this household" was the more common.

A lot of people were positively glad to see someone. Especially older people, and those living on side roads or on long bus-less by-ways. For some, a political visitor was just the chance for company; a chat, an exchange of views; and even though you had 6000 electors in your ward, you felt that as a candidate it was somehow dishonest to hurry away.

Of course, there were times to do just that. You were either an embarrassment ("I don't discuss my views on the door-step"), a bore ("never vote, not interested"), or sheer inconvenience ("I'm feeding the baby..having a bath..I'm ill..my daughter's just fallen down and broken her leg"). Know the time to withdraw gracefully!

Several people imagined I was already on the Council. "What did you do..What about..When are you going to get this done?" Council house repairs were an outstanding grievance; repeated visits to the Housing Office, long waits for work to be done, poor workmanship, the feeling of neglect by a big bureaucratic machine. "Look at my back gate/fence/front door/ceiling". Once I was seized almost by the scruff of the neck and dragged in to inspect an enamel sink turning a most unpleasant shade of bluey murk.

Hardly anyone realised that in my ward they had 5 votes (there were 5 council seats vacant "That's new, isn't it? Can we pick out who we want to? Why are there eleven candidates? Can we vote just once? Can we give all our five votes to you?" Patience, patience, remember what they told you about the value of courtesy. Remember, you're on display-

And, indeed, you are. In fact you have, for a while, become public property. Your face has become vaguely familiar from election leaflets and you are regarded by people with an uneasy feeling that they should know you but can't quite place you. This itself can lead to a mild unease, annoyance, slight irritation...Who is he? What does he want?...Do I know him?...Should I? The cosy domestic outer skin is breached by this as surely as it has been by the ring on the bell or the firm knock on the door. Not that you're

demanding admission, but you are there on the doorstep - or nearby. I made a point of standing well back, especially towards the end of the evening, so as to reassure people that I had no designs on the inner sanctum of their household.

Yet there was always the other peril - of people you knew, had once known, hadn't had a chance to call on for some while, or who really did take the whole business seriously. "How's your mother now? What's your new address? Haven't seen you for ages. Like a cup of tea? What are you standing for that lot for? Do you agree with council attendance allowances? Dip Farm..rates..Anglian Water Authority..something must be done..sister's children?...what about the buses?...how's your grand-father?...look at that wall.. council house subsidies..well, seeing as we know you.."

And the day itself. Not real disappointment, for it was a hard ward for my party to fight. People are fed up..with politics and political promises, with rates and rents, with distant bureaucracy, and uncertainty, and the water

people, and the price of potatoes. In fact, they're fed up with being fed up.

They want to be left alone for a while. don't think they've got over two General Elections in one year yet.

And a bit of anger. I'd canvassed hard for three weeks, people had seemed interested and had promised to vote, yet on the day most of the stay-at-homes seemed to be ours. It wasn't even a good evening for television although against that the fair was here and offering half-price rides for children that evening. And after all, I suppose people have a constitutional right not to vote or to answer the door, to enjoy themselves by being miserable and to be energetically apathetic.

Anyway, I'm planning the next election already. No canvassing. No more political theory. No more stressing what a young, keen, eager Councillor I would make. Instead all my helpers will woo the hearts of the British electorate by parading the streets with the most attractive, happy, and well-disciplined dogs we can find.

Don Mathew

## SAVE THE WHALE



Sperm whales are a threatened species. (More than 19,000 to be killed this year). They are killed for products that could be replaced were government and industry induced to find a substitute. And whaling is, as presently practiced, cruel.

Action needs support. Member of Parliament, Emlyn Hooson has put down this Early Day Motion stating:- "That this House is of the opinion that the Government should impose a ban on the import of sperm whale products into this country and take all practical steps to impose a stop on whaling for a period of 10 years as an essential conservation measure of great importance to mankind in general.

This motion can be signed by M.P.'s until the end of the Parliamentary Session, i.e. the

summer recess. If an opportunity is given to discuss it will be moved, seconded and voted upon; as many M.P.'s as possible are needed to sign the motion to ensure that this opportunity is given. It is vital, therefore, to motivate M.P.'s to sign.

So will all you Friends of the Earth members, sympathetic individuals and other concerned organisations mobilise yourselves, each other and others beside to write to all M.P.'s in your area urging them to sign this motion.

The more letters an M.P. gets from his constituents the more likely he is to lend his signature to the motion.

For more information concerning this issue, contact Friends of the Earth Limited, 9 Poland Street, London W1V 3DG. Tel: 01-434 1684.