

CAMPAIGN AND ELECTION

I think my election was about the last where no deal was done. It was first past the post – although, of course, the election procedure was somewhat different, taking off the bottom end those with the lowest number of votes.

The procedure itself was rather amusing because I was first asked whether I would be willing to stand when it was suggested that perhaps the British Conservatives might have a turn – but Lady Elles was the sort of favourite from the Group – and we were then told by Egon Klepsch and by various other people (Egon then was the leader of the Christian Democrats) that he did not think she would be acceptable to all his members – for whatever reason, I have no idea – but that they might just accept Plumb. So I remember Robert Ramsey, who was then alongside me as the leader of the British Conservatives, saying ‘your name is going into the frame’ and I said I was not sure whether I was really interested or not. But I said to him I can only say one thing, if it were to come about and if I were to be elected, then if I go you go, because you will come alongside me. I think he thought for not very long but he said ‘ok’, so as far as campaigning is concerned I did very little. If people asked me questions, such as ‘are you serious?’ I would reply ‘Yes I am serious’. ‘What are your views on this, that and the other?’ Well, I am a bit apolitical in many senses. I became a totally committed European in my early days and in that sense, therefore, I was not really taking one side or the other which, I suppose, was a good thing. I did go through and meet pretty well all the political groups, including Le Pen, including the Irish, because they were there as members, whether I liked their policy or not. I went to Le Pen and I said I do not like what you do, I do not like what you say, I disagree with you but I am standing for politics, I will be fairly straight and I can only say to you that I shall be totally independent from any political party going as I do into the Chair. I do not know if he voted for me or not. I was not interested. All I know was we got up to the wire.

What did concern me a bit was that one or two of the leaders of some of the other Groups said to me well, what can you offer us as still the leader of your own group in the form of chairs of committees and this sort of thing, and I got very angry at that because, as I said, I am not that sort of chap. I am standing for the European Parliament; I am not in a position to say, in order to get your vote – and I could not care less whether I get your vote or not – that I am going to offer you this or that because it is not in my gift to do that sort of thing, and neither would I. And so there we were. It was a very interesting development in the lead up to the election. Of course, the election itself was very interesting because out of 570 odd votes, I think it was, I believe I won by five and I did not vote for myself. I have never voted for myself on anything, at any time, even going back to school days, in my life. I am stupid I know, but nevertheless that is a fact. If you say to a Group, large or small, ‘it is your turn’ and maybe they have not got the sort of person there with the right sort of character to take on the job then I think it is wrong. It is up to that Group then to say ‘well, we really have not got anybody to put forward so therefore we should think of another Group’. It does not work like that now, I mean it sort of goes the rounds. In principle I do not like that, but I suppose in theory it is a system that works because taking – as now, for instance – a new Parliament, then they do not know each other. At the time I was elected I would like to think that quite a few people in the Parliament had heard of Henry Plumb, and so therefore they knew me and as they came up to me we talked and there you are, I was elected.

PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

I have to say that pressing for the presence of the President in the summits was important, and I am so delighted to see my good friend Hans-Gert Pöttering standing in the front row with all the Presidents, just as important as the rest of them.

But I did not see my role as being one of great significance or importance. I finished up on the day that I had to retire as Henry Plumb who was Henry Plumb who entered the Parliament. I had the same old pals and I could come out and say well, there we are, I enjoyed it.