

'I Told Her About Elizabeth Gurley Flynn' And the Woman Signed the Petition

By A. B. MAGIL

That Friday evening of Labor Day weekend I dropped around to 15 Second Ave., the Elizabeth Gurley Flynn campaign headquarters, to join the ranks of signature collectors. Three thousand signatures are needed by Sept. 23 to put this outstanding Communist leader on the ballot as a candidate for City Council.

The "dispatcher" nearly threw

Funds are urgently needed to finance the Elizabeth Gurley Flynn campaign, the campaign committee announced. Funds should be brought or sent to the committee at its headquarters, 15 Second Ave., between Houston and First Streets. Charles Dirba is treasurer of the committee.

her arms around me. A woman had been waiting since 5 o'clock for someone to go out with her. (Signature gatherers are usually sent out in teams of two.)

We were assigned a building in a housing project at Avenue C and Houston St. We listened carefully to our instructions, took the petition, the leaflets in English and Spanish with Elizabeth Gurley Flynn's statement on her candidacy, the copies of the Daily Worker, the postcards to Mayor Wagner urging support for the Brown-Isaacs-Sharkey bill to ban discrimination in housing—and set off.

My partner was a garment worker who lived in Brighton. She was tired but determined.

★

IT must have been close to 7:30 by the time we arrived at the

building. We decided to go up to the top floor, the 13th, and work our way down.

I suppose there are as many techniques of signature collecting as there are collectors. In my own case I managed to get off on the wrong foot. A Spanish-speaking woman with a bundle was in the elevator that carried us up and as we approached the 13th floor, I decided to try my Spanish on her. I offered her a leaflet in Spanish and began telling her about our Elizabeth. But she opened the door of the elevator and fled like a deer into her apartment. We knocked but she wouldn't open.

Most of the tenants in this building are Puerto Ricans and Negroes. There are some Jewish families and a sprinkling of non-Jewish and non-Puerto Rican whites. At headquarters it had been suggested that since this was the beginning of the Sabbath, we omit the Jewish families in order not to offend religious feelings.

★

A YOUNG Puerto Rican opened the door at our knock. We said we wanted to talk about the election campaign and asked if he were a registered voter. He explained that he didn't live there, but was only visiting and called the woman of the house. She invited us into the living room. In the kitchen were two other visitors, a young man and a girl. A small boy clung shyly to the woman's skirt.

This time my Spanish produced no terrifying effect. I told her of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn's more than 50 years service to the American labor movement, of the things she stood for, including opposition to discrimination against Puerto Ricans and Negroes. My team-



ELIZABETH GURLEY FLYNN

mate put in a few words in English.

The woman signed. We went from apartment to apartment. Only a couple of the whites gave us a curt brushoff. A surprising number of husbands were not at home (some of them worked nights) and a few of the women didn't want to sign without consulting their husbands. In other cases the persons who came to the door had already signed another petition and were

therefore ineligible; a few could not sign because they had failed to register in last year's election.

★

ONE MAN read the Spanish version of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn's leaflet carefully. When he came to her statement that she was a member of the National Committee of the Communist Party, he looked up. "She's a Communist?" he asked in English. We nodded. He finished the leaflet and signed.

By mistake we knocked on the door of one Jewish family. An elderly man answered the door. He asked us to wait while he went to look after something he was cooking. When he returned we were surprised when, without asking us for further explanations, he signed the petition.

On the whole Negroes and Puerto Ricans were the readiest to sign. We distributed the five copies of the Daily Worker we carried—one tall Negro insisted on giving us a dime for his copy. Four persons also signed the postcards on the Brown-Isaacs-Sharkey bill.

We covered five floors in an hour and a half. However, on the ninth floor we found that the hour was late—getting on toward 9—and mothers were too busy putting children to bed to answer the door.

I had a strictly personal reason for appreciating the lateness of the hour. I had made the mistake of not eating before going out. My

AN INDEPENDENT CANDIDATE

AN EDITORIAL

Canvassers determined to see Elizabeth Gurley Flynn run as a candidate for City Council are exhilarated by the results they get. The signatures come from every category of the population in the district, and canvassers report the

advice to signature collectors is that the spirit is more likely to flourish if the body is fortified with food.

WE RETURNED to headquarters with our treasure of eight signatures. It proved to be tops for that night. I congratulated my teammate, who had borne the brunt of the pitch-making except where Spanish was required.

What are eight signatures when 3,000 are required? As I sank my teeth into the pizza pie in the Italian restaurant on the corner, I wondered if we'd make it. Well, we've done it before for Elizabeth and others because hundreds have climbed stairs, talked to people, worked hard for the right of a Communist to run for office. Just think what it will mean to have that wonderful American woman, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn in the thick of this city campaign, speaking at street meetings, over radio and TV!

I'd finished my pizza pie and was figuring out when I could come again to collect signatures.

Pete Seeger to Sing At Hootenanny Sep. 13

Folksinger Pete Seeger heads the bill at a Hootenanny song-fest this coming Friday night, Sept. 13th, at the Chateau Gardens, Houston St. and Second Avenue.

Others sharing the program with Seeger are blind Sonny Terry, the Negro blues harmonica player, and folksingers Jerry Silverman and Jackie Berman.

Some of the young Americans who attended the recent World Youth Festival in Moscow will also appear in the folk song concert. The Hootenanny is sponsored by "Sing Out," a folk music magazine.

WANTED!
Canvassers