

CANVASSING SCRIBE FINDS THEY WEREN'T KIDDING

By LESTER RODNEY

Since we work on the Daily Worker and are presumably a writer, the suggestion was made that we "write up" our evening of canvassing on the Lower East Side to put Elizabeth Gurley Flynn on the ballot for City Council. Many others must have had more interesting experiences—and for sure, more signatures—but since we are supposed to be a writer, here it is.

In an hour and a half of canvassing on Eldridge Street among predominantly Spanish-speaking people, we got six signatures and for the first time really BELIEVED what the campaign managers have been maintaining right along, that if enough people go out there are more than enough signatures to be obtained.

It's a funny thing. No matter how many times you go out knocking on strange doors in your lifetime, no matter that each time you have discovered that you enjoy it, and, returning from the canvassing feel you wouldn't have missed it for the world, each time you begin all over again with some feeling of uncertainty and the vague wish that they had told you to stay in the headquarters and do sorely needed clerical work instead of canvassing. And then darned if you don't come back from canvassing feeling . . .

Well, we went up to Dr. Albert Blumberg, who with Evelyn Wiener is co-chairing the drive to put Gurley onto the ballot, and said "You know something, Doc, when you go out you realize that it's just a question of enough people going out . . ." And Doc threw up his hands as if to say, "What have we been saying right along!"

That's really and truly the whole story. People won't fall over themselves to eagerly fill up the petitions. But neither will they run away from you, and some will listen, ask a question or two, reach for the pen, sign, and wish you good luck in getting more.

When we started, we found it hard to locate the right doors for the list of registered voters we

were given. After knocking on doors to ask where so and so lived, it dawned on us that a good way to proceed in the circumstances was just to knock on any old door and ask if they were registered voters. If not, thank you, if yes . . . well, we're here to get signatures to put this wonderful woman Elizabeth Gurley Flynn on the voting machine for City Council. She is for the working people and needs 3,000 signatures . . .

Ninety percent of those we talked to received us with courtesy and thoughtfulness. It would certainly have helped us to be able to speak Spanish well on this street, but this is not a fatal defect. In one kitchen, where we were invited to sit around a table with four others, one woman read the Spanish leaflet with Miss Flynn's appeal, while the others listened. It was like a kitchen forum, as they interrupted to ask something, the translator checked back with me in English, gave my reply in Spanish, then considered the reading.

Result? As the youngsters say, they apparently "got the message." Two women signed to wipe out the dreadful blankness of a new petition and send us on our way on winged feet.

Another signature was obtained after all I had to say had been said, and apparently no sale, though polite attention. "It's up to you," I said, giving up on the signature. "Thanks for listening anyhow. I don't get paid for signatures. I'm climbing these stairs because I believe in what this woman is running for, a better break for the working people . . ." This true statement seemed to impress the man, and he suddenly signed, so I pass it along.

One voter who spoke no more English than I speak Spanish could not gather satisfactorily from my answers to his questions—such as, did this mean he had to vote for her, was she the only candidate

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so far, and so on. He beckoned me to follow him to a group of men on the sidewalk playing cards near a street light in the balmy weather, and motioned me to give them the facts so they could relay it to him in Spanish.

After a moment one of the men held up his hand genially to stop me, saying, "Don't waste your time, we are all Democrats here."

Well, I said, I was a Roosevelt man myself, and I believe Elizabeth Gurley Flynn stands for more of the good things FDR stood for than some people who call themselves Democrats, certainly more than a character like this governor of Arkansas . . .

This brought an amused chuckle of appreciative agreement along with translation to my "contact," and, well, one more name down anyhow toward the 3,000 needed to get that good name Flynn on the voting machine in November . . .