

A day in the life of a parliamentary candidate

There was absolutely no doubt that Henry Orpington liked politics. He talked about politics all the time. All the members of his family were pleased, therefore, when Henry was adopted as the prospective parliamentary candidate for the constituency in which they were living. One year later the date of the general election was announced by the Prime Minister. Throughout the election campaign Henry's wife and his two teenage daughters worked night and day for him and he finally won a seat in the House of Commons by a very large majority. Every day of the campaign was a challenge, but there was one day in particular that Henry would never forget. That was the day he thought he was going to be blown up by a bomb.

On a Friday morning at the beginning of the campaign, the phone rang in the Orpingtons' house at six-thirty in the morning. Henry got out of bed and ran down the stairs. He wondered who could possibly be ringing at that early hour in the morning.

Henry: Hello.

Man's voice: Is that Mr. Henry Orpington, the parliamentary candidate?

Henry: Yes, speaking.

Man's voice: Oh, good morning. I want to warn you about a bomb....

Henry: A bomb? Where? Hello! We've been cut off. Operator! Operator! Operator!

It was no good. The line had gone dead. As calmly as he could Henry went upstairs to tell his wife the alarming news. They decided to get dressed at once and take the two girls to their aunt's house. Henry informed the police but asked them to keep the news from the press. At half past eight Henry was in conference with his election agent, Andrew Higgins, at party headquarters.

Andrew: If you want my opinion, I suggest you cancel all your engagements for today and wait until the police get to the bottom of the matter.

Henry: Certainly not! I'm not going to let myself be scared by some stupid crank.

Andrew: What did the man sound like? Did you recognize his voice?

Henry: No, I was half asleep. His voice wasn't familiar but he sounded quite pleasant. He didn't seem to be threatening me.

Andrew: That makes the whole business even more sinister. Look here, Henry, one day won't make all that much difference. I'll tell people that you've lost your voice or something.

Henry: No, I'm going to carry on as usual. Think of the advantage it would give my opponents if I were out of the campaign even for one day.

Andrew: If you say so. But I'd like to make it clear that I'm dead against it.

Henry Orpington's first engagement that day was an open-air meeting on a large housing estate at ten o'clock. As most of the men were out at work, his audience consisted mainly of women and young children. Andrew Higgins kept a close watch on the platform from which Henry was making his speech, while several plainclothes policemen mingled inconspicuously with the crowd.

There was very little reaction to Henry's speech, except from one or two hecklers at the back who kept on asking what Henry's party intended to do about the rising price of fruit and vegetables. After the speech he shook hands with some of the women. One of them lifted up a baby for him to kiss, but the sight of Henry's beard must have frightened it because it began to scream its head off.

At eleven o'clock he paid a brief visit to a public house on the estate. Henry couldn't offer to buy anyone a drink because he knew very well that his opponents would consider that to be bribery. So he let one of his supporters buy him a drink instead.

At lunch time he went to his sister's house to see his wife and daughters. They had spent the morning addressing envelopes for the leaflets he was sending out. His sister, Vera, thoroughly disapproved of his involvement in politics.

Vera: Now I hope you can see the danger of getting mixed up in politics, Henry. You and the family will probably all be blown up.

Henry: Don't exaggerate, Vera. I'm sure it's just a hoax.

Vera: I only hope you're right. What other meetings have you got today?

Henry: I shall be calling at houses in Midhampton this afternoon, and then there's a big meeting tonight in the field behind Thompson's farm.

Vera: There you are, then. No doubt one of those stupid farmers has got a pile of bombs hidden in a haystack.

Henry: Oh, Vera, really!

There was a large crowd in the field when Henry arrived at eight o'clock for what was perhaps the biggest meeting of the whole campaign. His constituency was largely a farming community and the

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most important local issue concerned the subsidies that the new government would be paying to the farmers. After a hard day's work, hundreds of farmers and farm labourers had come to the field to hear what Henry had to say.

Henry: Ladies and gentlemen, I appreciate the anxiety you must all feel about this question of subsidies. I too have been a farmer and I know the difficulties you are experiencing, and so...

Heckler: ... and so you've decided to become an M.P. and get rich!

Henry: No, my friend. I want to give the farmers a voice in the House of Commons.

Heckler: I don't believe a word of it!

Henry: You've got a strong voice, I'll admit. But London's two hundred miles away and I don't think your voice will carry that far. That's why I want to speak on your behalf.

The crowd remained good-natured for the first part of his speech and Henry was feeling pleased with himself. And then, suddenly, half a dozen tractors roared onto the field.

"Do you like tomatoes?" shouted one of the tractor drivers. Henry hesitated for a moment and then replied: "Yes, I like them very much."

"Well, we can't sell them at a profit," said the tractor driver, "because the imported ones are too cheap. So rather than let them go to waste, you can have them!"

It was then that Henry noticed that the tractors were loaded with boxes of tomatoes, which the farmers started to throw at him. Unfortunately for Henry, two of them hit him full in the face. He realized that he had to say something quickly to win the crowd over to his side. "Thank you for your generous gift, but I really prefer them in sandwiches. And now let's get on with the meeting."

The crowd started to cheer and Henry managed to finish his speech without further interruptions. In the meantime the police had made a thorough search of Henry's house and assured him that there were no hidden bombs. He went back to his sister's house to collect his family.

Vera: I've got some supper ready. I'm sure you must be starving.

Henry: You shouldn't have bothered. We can all go back home now. The police have searched the house thoroughly and they found nothing at all.

Vera: Well, at least stay and eat the nice salad I've made.

Henry: All right, Vera. Just so long as there are no tomatoes in it!

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After supper, Henry and his family went home. Later that evening the phone rang.

Henry: Hello.

Man's voice: Oh, Mr. Orpington. I've been trying to reach you all day. This is Paul Harris. I called you this morning.

Henry: You did indeed! I think you owe me an explanation.

Harris: Yes, I do. When I phoned you this morning I was cut off. It was a bad line or something.

Henry: Well, what about the bomb?

Harris: The bomb? What on earth do you mean?

Henry: That's what I'd like to know. You said, "I want to warn you about a bomb."

Harris: Oh, dear! I'm afraid there's been a misunderstanding. I didn't have time to finish my sentence. You see, I'm a farmer and I overheard some of the other farmers planning to break up your meeting.

Henry: I still fail to see what all this has got to do with a bomb.

Harris: Well, if we hadn't been cut off I was going to warn you about a bombardment of tomatoes!

New words and expressions

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| parliamentary candidate | man or woman standing for election to parliament as an M.P. (Member of Parliament) |
| adopted | here means chosen |
| prospective | future |
| constituency | district represented by one M.P. The people in this district are called "constituents" |
| challenge | a test of one's ability |
| campaign | planned course of action; here refers to the time (about three weeks) just before an election |
| blow up | kill in an explosion |
| House of Commons | one of the two Houses of Parliament (the other is the House of Lords) |
| the line had gone dead | the connection had been broken |
| operator | the telephonist at the telephone exchange |
| headquarters | main office |
| the press | the newspapers, newspaper reporters |
| engagements | appointments |
| election agent | the person who manages the campaign for a parliamentary candidate |
| threaten | try to frighten |
| opponents | those who are against you (here refers to members of the other political parties) |
| exaggerate | say that something is more important etc. than it really is |
| hoax | (pronounced like <i>jokes</i>) joke |

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| get to the bottom of the matter | find out the truth about it |
| crank | someone with strange ideas |
| housing estate | an area with houses of the same type and usually built by the same builder |
| the whole business | the situation |
| plainclothes policemen | policemen wearing civilian (ordinary) clothes |
| sinister | strange and frightening |
| hecklers | people who interrupt a speaker (usually political) |
| carry on | continue |
| public house | a place where wine, beer and spirits can be bought and drunk |
| I'm dead against it | I'm completely against it |
| keep a close watch on | watch carefully |
| mingled | mixed |
| inconspicuously | so as not to be noticed |
| reaction | showing of feelings for or against |
| rising | increasing |
| scream its head off | scream very loudly |
| paid a brief visit to | visited for a short time |
| bribery | money or goods given to someone to win his support |
| disapproved of | did not approve of |
| involvement in | mixing in |
| getting mixed up in | becoming involved in |
| pile | heap, number of |
| haystack | large pile of hay |
| largely | mainly |

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|---------------------------------------|--|
| community | district and its people |
| issue | question or problem for discussion |
| subsidies | help in the form of money from die government |
| appreciate | here means understand |
| carry | here means travel, i.e. be heard in London |
| good-natured | friendly |
| tractor | vehicle used on a farm for pulling things |
| half a dozen | six (twelve to a dozen) |
| roared | made a loud noise; here came in with a loud noise imported bought from another country |
| go to waste | be wasted |
| assured him | made him certain |
| starving | very hungry |
| bothered | taken the trouble |
| I was cut off | my telephone connection with you was broken |
| What on earth...? | a strong way of saying "What...?" |
| misunderstanding | mistake due to something not being understood |
| salad | dish of fresh vegetables |
| overhear | hear something without the speaker knowing |
| win the crowd over to his side | win the support of the crowd |
| bombardment | in the military sense, with heavy guns; <i>here</i> with tomatoes |

Questions and exercises

A. Comprehension questions

1. Which constituency was Henry Orpington adopted for?
2. What sort of majority did he get?
3. Who is Andrew Higgins?
4. Does Andrew want Henry to continue with his engagements after the bomb threat?
5. Why did Henry's audience at the housing estate consist mainly of women and children?
6. Why did the baby scream its head off when Henry tried to kiss it?
7. What had Henry's wife and daughters been doing all morning?
8. What was the most important election issue for the farmers?
9. Why couldn't the farmers sell their tomatoes at a profit?
10. How did Paul Harris know about the bombardment of tomatoes?

B. Change the following sentences into the passive:

Example:

The constituency adopted Henry as the candidate.
Henry was adopted as the candidate for the constituency.

1. The Prime Minister announced the date of the general election.
2. He thought a bomb was going to blow him up.
3. They've cut us off.
4. They kept the news from the press.
5. I'm not going to let some stupid crank scare me.
6. Henry's beard must have frightened the baby.
7. Two of the tomatoes hit him in the face.
8. If they hadn't cut us off.

C. Use the following words to complete the sentences below:

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|---------|----------|
| bribery | hoax |
| scream | starving |
| crank | cut off |
| cancel | teenage |

1. I have two small sons and three _____ daughters.
2. The operator has _____ us _____.
3. I'm going to _____ all my engagements.
4. He has very strange ideas. I think he's a _____.
5. When the baby saw Henry's beard, it began to _____.
6. If Henry bought someone a drink it would be considered _____.
7. Henry thought that the telephone call about the bomb was just a _____.
8. I haven't eaten all day. I'm _____.

D. The following sentences come from the conversation between Andrew and Henry. Change them into indirect (reported) speech.

Start like this:

1. Andrew suggested that Henry cancel all his arrangements for that day.

Now you do it.

1. **Andrew:** I suggest you cancel all your engagements for today.
2. **Henry:** I'm not going to let myself be scared by some stupid crank.
3. **Andrew:** What did the man sound like? Did you recognize his voice?
4. **Henry:** No, I was half asleep. He didn't seem to be threatening me.
5. **Andrew:** That makes the whole business even more sinister.
6. **Andrew:** Henry, one day won't make all that much difference. I'll tell people you've lost your voice.
7. **Henry:** I'm going to carry on as usual.
8. **Andrew:** I'd like to make it clear that I'm dead against it.

Keys to exercises

A.

1. The one in which he was living.
2. A large majority.
3. Henry Orpington's election agent.
4. No, he wants him to cancel them.
5. Because most of the men were out at work.
6. Because it was frightened by Henry's beard.
7. They had been addressing the envelopes for the leaflets Henry was sending out.
8. The subsidies that the new government would be paying.
9. Because the imported ones were too cheap.
10. He overheard some of the other farmers planning to break up Henry's meeting.

B.

1. The date of the general election was announced by the Prime Minister.
2. He thought he was going to be blown up by a bomb.
3. We've been cut off.
4. The news was kept from the press.
5. I'm not going to let myself be scared by some stupid crank.
6. The baby must have been frightened by Henry's beard.
7. He was hit in the face by two of the tomatoes.
8. If we hadn't been cut off....

C.

1. teenage
2. cut us off
3. cancel
4. crank
5. scream
6. bribery
7. hoax
8. starving

D.

1. Andrew suggested that Henry cancel all his engagements for that day.
2. Henry said that he wasn't going to let himself be scared by some stupid crank.
3. Andrew asked Henry what the man sounded like and if he recognized his voice.
4. Henry said that he didn't because he was half asleep, but the man didn't seem to be threatening him.
5. Andrew said that that made the whole business even more sinister.
6. Andrew told Henry that one day wouldn't make all that much difference and that he would tell people that Henry had lost his voice.
7. Henry said that he was going to carry on as usual.
8. Andrew said he would like to make it clear that he was dead against it.