

HEY, MARC

That's what thousands affectionately call Rep. Vito Marcantonio in his home bailiwick. Profile of a twenty-four-hour-a-day congressman renominated by three parties. A visit to his district.

IT WAS at the very beginning of the primaries campaign. Signatures had to be filed for a place on the Democratic, Labor, and Republican tickets. A tough job even for the indefatigable Twentieth Congressional District. The house-to-house canvass was just getting under way. Fingering their quotas of index cards, the district captains were reporting on the evening's progress in the "inside" office at headquarters, 1766 Lexington Avenue. Mostly it was the same story: "He said yes. She said sure. They said of course."

One of the younger captains stopped over a card and shook his head: "This guy won't sign."

"Whadya mean he won't sign?"

"Who is he?"

"Where does he get that stuff?"

The captain just stared glumly at the card and over the hub-bub repeated: "He won't sign. Not this one." It grew quiet. A tense quiet. Looking straight at Marcantonio, a warm grin melting across his face only at the last moment, he held the card out to his chief. Scrawled over its face was the word: "Deceased."

Loud laughter filled the little office. Warm laughter. "Nobody but a dead guy would've signed for Marc." The kind of record these captains made in getting the number of signatures they did almost proved it. The vote rolled up on primary day practically clinched it.

How did it happen?

The metropolitan press, excluding the progressive labor press, and in language varied only by the "style" set by its publishers, opened its columns to all comers bent on driving Marcantonio out of public office. It became front page stuff every time a direct or indirect attack was leveled at the representative from the Twentieth District. Editorial comment on his victory was divided between the vicious trick of lumping him with New York's defeatist congressmen Fish and Barry, and bewilderment garnished with liberally dispensed venom—whether in the gutteral lingo of the *Mirror's* "Dirge for a Dead Duck" or the more august vitriol of the *New York Sun*.

Then how did it happen? The answer lies in the things Marcantonio stood for, the way he fought for them, the kind of man this Vito Marcantonio is.

"Hey, Marc, could I see ya a minute?"

In his law offices downtown, in his headquarters uptown, on 116th Street, at the Marcantonio Club—everybody, anybody, young, old, Negro, white, native, foreign-born—if you live in the district you know you can stop him and say, "Hey, Marc," and you know you will be heard.

VITO MARCANTONIO was born on Dec. 10, 1902, the son of a hard-working, poor Italian family, on 112th Street and First Avenue. His father, Saverio, was born and brought up in the same neighborhood. His mother, Angelina, was born in Italy. Grandfather Vito Marcantonio and Grandma Antonia had come over in the emigration of the early eighties. Grandfather Vito was a carpenter—a builder—a man of strong democratic traditions, a man who would have understood and been proud of what young Vito means to the people he grew up among today. Grandma has lived to see it. At seventy-nine her energetic little figure is a familiar sight trudging briskly about the district, especially around campaign time. She attends all the big meetings, and beams at those where her Vito speaks to the people in fluent Italian, quoting Garibaldi and the wonderful words of Garibaldi's hymn. But woe to the heckler or anyone her bright little eyes suspect of incipient heckling or



Marcantonio of New York's Twentieth—"Nobody but a dead guy would've signed for him."

inattention. "Sh-hh," she whispers loudly. "You better listen. You'll learn something."

She probably said the same thing to him, back in the days when young Vito went to PS Eighty-Five on 117th Street and First Avenue and got into all the mischief that kids must who have no playground but dusty, tenement-lined streets; no refuge from trucks and trolley cars but narrow alleys; no quiet resting place but fire escapes. He undoubtedly got the same always-to-be-remembered scoldings for tearing his pants and ripping his shirts and scuffing his shoes. Hard-earned, often irreplaceable necessities. Everything those kids had was hard-earned and won in battle against poverty. Even their fun.

At the foot of 112th Street, but with particular convenience at 116th Street, ran the East River. Their river. Cool, broad, carrying boats from far-off places—boats heavy laden with cargoes over water heavy laden with garbage. Even this, their prime source of recreation, was spoiled for them—polluted by disease-infested filth.

Marc loves that river. He always did. He helped fight to get it cleaned up, to stop its use for sewage. "Even the fish can finally live in it now," he says. It is his great pride that on the shores of his river stands one of the biggest government housing projects for his people. New, clean, free from vermin-ridden darkness, from evil-smelling age, safe from the scourge of tenement fires, surrounded by sunshine, and built with windows in every room that let it in. He fought and won that housing project. It was typical of the campaign promises he made and kept. But that's jumping far ahead.

He didn't see the housing project when he stood on a dock at the foot of 116th Street with his pals—a skinny little Italian

boy among other skinny little Italian boys—poised for the plunge. "The water was so dirty somebody always had to jump in first," he remembers. "The guy who jumped in made a ring of clearer water for the rest. Especially for the littler kids." With his characteristic slow and slightly crooked grin, he adds: "I used to jump in first most of the time."

Next to swimming, baseball was the favorite sport. True you had to dodge trucks and share the street you played on with all the teeming, raucous sidewalk life of the narrow canyon between moldy tenements. But baseball in the great tradition it was. Marc still likes to break in on such a game with the neighborhood kids.

There was less time for such pleasures when high school days arrived. Only two of the boys who graduated from his class at PS Eighty-Five were able to go to high school. The rest went to work or in vain search of it. Marc went to De Witt Clinton. It was all the way down on Fifty-ninth Street and Tenth Avenue in those days. By working after school and what to other kids were holidays he was able to go on to college and to law school. This part of his story is the typical story of thousands of boys from working class homes who by their own sacrifices and the sacrifices of their families manage to wrest an education—against the toughest odds.

In 1924 Vito Marcantonio graduated from New York University Law School. He completed his legal training as clerk in two offices which provided the appropriate basis for his future interests and activities—in Joe Brodsky's labor law office and then in Mayor LaGuardia's.

His clients were always his people.

Nineteen thirty-four saw the beginning of his political career. Defying the obstacle of a machine-ridden Tammany district which only Mayor LaGuardia before him had cracked in a congressional race, he ran as the Republican nominee from the Twentieth Congressional District and won. His Democratic opponent was Lanzetta. In 1936 Tammany staged a comeback—using all the tricks in its arsenal from Red-baiting to tin-boxes. But in 1938, Marcantonio ran again. This time on two tickets—Republican and American Labor—and was elected on both. The 1940 campaign was a more triumphant repetition of the same. And as for 1942—

TO TELL Marcantonio's story from 1934 to the present day is to recite every issue vital to the American people in general and the people of the Twentieth Congressional District in particular. Its population is the typical New York working class neighborhood with one thing in common: poverty—a conglomeration of Italian, Puerto Rican, Irish, Negro, Jewish-Americans.

What were the issues? Their needs: jobs, relief, housing, WPA projects, hospitals, playgrounds, a local high school, naturalization aid—fight against fascism, fight against the sabotage of machine politics, fight against oppression, poverty, discrimination. Though his enemies tried to use it against him, his people understood the need for making that fight wherever it would do the most good—uptown and everywhere.

When a group of seamen boarded the Nazi liner *Bremen* in New York Harbor in an early anti-Nazi demonstration and threw its swastika into the bilge-water where it belonged, Marcantonio came into court to defend them. He called it a modern Boston Tea Party. He'd defended seamen before—and many since in court and in Congress—in their battle for organization. When American boys went to Spain to fight in the first attempt to stop the fascists, Marcantonio boldly spoke at rallies and meetings in their behalf and for support to the Spanish people. Intensely proud of his Italian heritage, he has fearlessly rallied his people against their fascist murderers. That heritage, he says, belongs to the people and comes from Garibaldi, Sacco and Vanzetti, the Italians who fought Mussolini in Spain, who are fighting Mussolini at home today.

He is proud of his immigrant background. Time and again

his voice has risen in the halls of Congress and over national hook-ups in defense of the rights of the foreign-born. He has flung into the teeth of the reactionaries the magnificent role of the immigrant in the building of America, his loyalty to his new home, his courage, the beautiful faith he keeps with the dream that his children will grow up free men and in a free new land that would be their own.

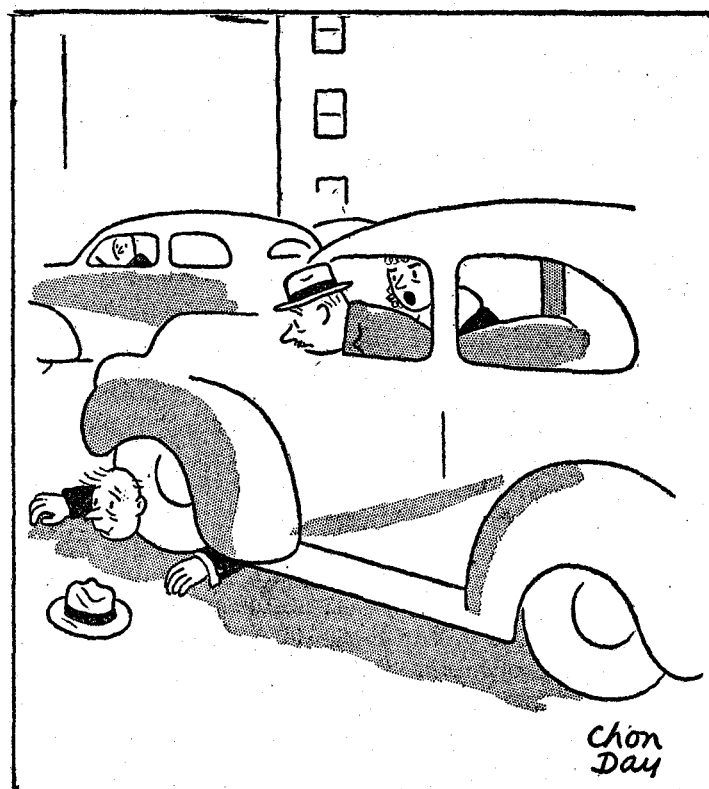
Marcantonio is also known as a champion of Negro rights. It was he who fought to win the Navy Cross for Dorie Miller. Marcantonio was the first to name him and lift him from obscure mention as the unknown young Negro messman who, breaking Jim Crow rules that forbade his doing so, seized a machine gun at Pearl Harbor and used it ably against the Japanese invaders. This is only the most recent page in a record of struggle for the freedom of the Scottsboro Boys, for Angelo Herndon, for scores of other Negro victims of discrimination.

Marcantonio's election to the presidency of the International Labor Defense several years ago was a recognition of his outstanding work in behalf of civil rights. He was among the first to oppose Martin Dies and he has continued to be one of the leaders of the fight to end the pro-fascist activities of the Dies committee.

Eight years is a long time to account for in any man's life. Particularly in the life of such a dynamic, vital figure as Marcantonio, and more particularly during eight such years as we have lived through. Today that life is chiefly divided into activities on two fronts—the second front to destroy Nazism and the home front to strengthen every aspect of the country's war effort.

How does a man with three official party machines working overtime against him win such a brilliant political victory as Marcantonio did on August 14? Walk into his headquarters any Sunday afternoon and you'll get the answer. You'll meet the typical captains, lieutenants, assistants, but above all, the people of the Twentieth Congressional District, the army of the constituency. The army comes to speak its mind and its heart. If you ask any of the captains what the literally thousands of people talk to Marc about in these never-postponed all-day sessions, they'll say:

"They tell him their hard luck stories. All hard luck stories



Office of War Information

"Don't just sit there! Get out and see if he's hurt the tire!"

are the same. You can't pay the rent. Or you ain't getting enough relief. Or your kid needs to go to the hospital or he has no shoes. Or your son got in trouble. They don't just tell him. He listens. And he does something about it. And he don't stop doing it till the final ending of the case." The rest of the time he spends going to their weddings, christenings, funerals, birthday parties—not as the intruding baby-kissing politician—but as the honored invited guest of the family.

With understandable pride a representative group of captains were vying with each other in telling the stories of the present campaign in their own territories. One, a plasterer, Italian, member of the New York County Democratic Committee, digresses to talk about the six-block-long parade his group organized for a recent service flag raising at which Marc spoke. They even had two floats in addition to the six bands—Thomas Jefferson Cadets of the American Legion and Father Duffy Cadets. One float was "Remember Pearl Harbor," filled with little girls in Hawaiian costumes. Another captain, a Puerto Rican, is a shipyard worker who rushes home every day from his job in Kearny, N. J., grabs some supper and gets busy from six until all hours of the morning covering his territory. Another is a young Italian woman, twenty-eight years old, a music teacher, mother of a little girl she takes around with her canvassing her district. She recorded one of the highest Marcantonio votes. "And can she cook—even Marc said she makes the best chicken cacciatora in the district."

These are typical of the leading workers. They had some help from progressive people in other parts of the city. Michael Quill, for example, came up with a group of Transport Workers. Up and down the fifth and sixth flight tenement steps he stalked with his cane in one hand and his batch of cards in the other. The streets still ring with the repetition of the conversations he had with his countrymen—brogue and all. Ferdinand Smith led the National Maritime Union's contingent of volunteers; Lewis Merrill, the office workers. There were furriers, garment workers, lawyers from the ILD staff—everybody who was anybody.

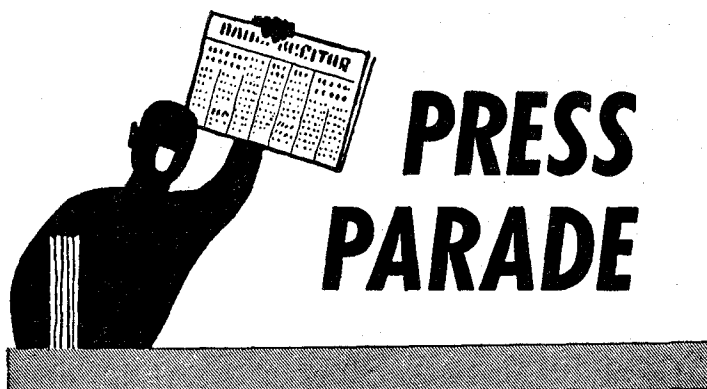
The captains like to tell of the fifty service-flag raising ceremonies Marc never failed to attend in recent weeks. With solemn respect they tell of how he neither said nor allowed anyone else to say a word about the campaign on these occasions. He spoke only of the boys the flags represented, boys he knows by name, with whom he corresponds, to whom he sends books, and from untold numbers of whom he got happy wires of congratulations. Incidentally, he was deluged with jubilant wires from every part of the country. Many signed with names he didn't know and had never heard. Many bore names the whole country knows.

THERE is an enormous amount of clerical work in an election campaign. Who did that? Volunteers again. Girls who came in after long days of work to sit into the small hours of the morning typing, writing, filing. Girls who left war factory jobs at two PM to come home and report at headquarters by three, then stayed as long as they could keep their eyes open. One such girl was a sort of office manager. No matter what hour of the day or night you called headquarters, she seemed to be there to give the answer to any question.

Campaign workers, worried about Marc's health, brought him things to eat from their own meager stores. Grandma hovered over the headquarters keeping a watchful eye on her sleepless, tireless, indomitable grandson. And all of them together won their triumph . . . the triumph of the people's will to fight and win the people's war in spite of appeasers and domestic Hitlerites.

What the opposition will cook up between now and election day is a matter of speculation. What the outcome will be is not. Marcantonio and his win-the-war platform will come through in November as they did in August.

SASHA SMALL.



No Sooner Said . . .

Some will maliciously distort the meaning of James A. Farley's clear-cut victory over President Roosevelt in the showdown as to which should name the Democratic candidate for New York.



Axis propagandists undoubtedly will try to use this incident abroad to suggest that America's War President has been repudiated by his own party in his own state, the largest in the Union. They will try to show

Raymond Clapper in the
Scripps-Howard Press, August 21

The nomination of Jim Farley's man, John Bennett, for Governor, means, among other things, that there will now be a reaction against New Dealism in domestic affairs in the state, for Bennett is not a New Dealer and, of course, Tom Dewey, who is almost certain to carry the banner, or target, for the Republicans, is an out-and-out anti. It is not easy to de-



Westbrook Pegler in the
Scripps-Howard Press, August 21

Good Beginning

CAPTURE of Solomon Island strongholds by US Marines was a fitting occasion for the debut of official "combat correspondents" trained by the Marine Corps. Lieut. H. L. Merrill's exciting narrative was followed by Serg. James W. Hurlbut's account, which called the Solomon battle a "kick-off" to the Pacific fight. These stories pack a terrific wallop. Appearance of the combat reporter was hailed in leading editorials. Gratifying results of this first experience may well stimulate other branches of the armed services to follow suit. The need for writer-soldiers was emphasized in an article by Samuel Sillen on "The Frontline Writer" appearing in New Masses for July 28.

Prophecy or Understatement?

"THE world's attention is today centered upon a movement originating in Italy [fascism] which has more than a merely local significance."

From an article "Fascismo," by G. Cannata, the "Liberator," (the successor of the old "Masses") January 1923.