

The 1997 Election

We live in a proud and mature democracy which has just endured six weeks of campaigning to help it choose between different ideas about how the country should face the problems that challenge it; about the direction for the next five years. Did **you** hear anything that helped you to make to your mind? Did **you** hear anything positive about the direction either of the major parties wanted to go? I didn't; in fact after a few days I stopped reading my paper's election supplement and switched off every broadcast which had a politician on it because I could not take the diet of scare stories, distortions, evasions, distractions and promises they fed me. But it is too easy just to blame the media or politicians; there are a couple of questions we ought to ask ourselves first:

- * Why do the media and politicians behave like this?
and
- * What did **we** do to get real answers to our questions?

I asked one party some specific questions about their policies, but I got no answers - probably because they feared that if they let them out they would be distorted or, even worse, be seen as unpopular. What a sad commentary on our country, on our maturity as a democracy! I think the media provide us with the sort of information we buy all through the year, scandal, teasing stories and sound bites - ten word substitutes for difficult and complex problems. The media got what they wanted because the politicians did not believe that we would listen long enough to understand their ideas - or were afraid we might! We have the politics we deserve.

Let us think what we can do about this. How can **we** change the way we are treated? How do **we** decide when to treat our children as adults? When they reach 18? The Law says 18, but we **do it** when they start **behaving** like adults, don't we?

What must **we now do** to have ourselves treated as adults next time round.?