

## Step 2 – 09-02-09

This week I will present the second half of the story of how we won seats in Dutch parliament. We were the first political party in the world to not focus on human needs in its philosophy and methods.

We knew most would not take a “party for the animals” seriously (“they probably want to try and knit a vest for every pigeon...”) so we garnered the support of a large number of eminent members at the bottom of our list. They were opinion leaders prepared to stand in an unelectable place on our candidate list, thereby sending a clear message that the intelligentsia believed our party needed representation in parliament.

Famous Dutch writers such as Maarten 't Hart, Maarten Biesheuvel, Harry Mulisch, Mensje van Keulen and Jan Wolkers and cabaret artists, scientists, singers, TV producers and script writers alike showed their support for the Party for the Animals.

This made it evident to all that the Party for the Animals was not a single issue group for birdbrains, but a party of intellectuals.

Half our candidate list was thereby filled with Dutch celebrities.

We also wrote to moneyed animal protectors, vegetarians and environmental activists with the request of a donation to our electoral campaign. The campaign funds flowed in, we received immeasurable support from Thailand-based mosquito net manufacturer Nicolaas G. Pierson, from Internet entrepreneur Jan Peter Cruiming and from other well-wishers who prefer to remain anonymous.

This meant we could finance a serious campaign with advertisements in national broadsheets, radio interviews with Dutch celebrities (who worked pro bono) and posters in bus shelters and train stations. We even erected the largest political billboard in Dutch history, a banner measuring 120 metres squared along one of the Netherland's most busy motorways.

It was expensive, but extremely eye-catching due to its incredible size. The polls gave us one to two seats in parliament, making other political parties nervous as so many voters obviously seemed prepared to set aside their personal short-term interests and prioritise animal, natural and environmental needs.

In reply, the incumbent parties devoted more attention to animal welfare issues and during their campaigns promised an animal heaven on earth. The voters naturally took these beguiling promises with a large grain of salt, but we were so pleased to have successfully brought animal issues to the forefront of other party's agendas.

This is the biggest challenge facing any party trying to create a party for the animals in their native land.

The Netherlands has a low vote threshold (70,000 votes is enough for one seat), but even in countries with a high vote threshold, a Party for the Animals can still shine the spotlight on animal issues and give other parties pause to think.

So even if there is no way to win a seat, participation is still worth every effort. Participation provides political parties with airtime on radio and television, so they can then shake the reigning politics awake.

Especially when you make it clear that you as a party stand for a planet-wide approach, in contrast to the single issue politics practised by the majority of political parties. They

never move past protecting people and their money and they disregard the long-term interests of future generations of people and animals and their relationship with their environment.

Other parties turn into money that which we hold dear (clean air, clean water, clean soil, biodiversity, food security and compassion) and they have the audacity to claim they work from a broad perspective!

On election night, 22 November 2006, we waited with bated breath in our hired hall at the artist's society in Amsterdam. Would the voters react with the same enthusiasm for the Party for the Animals as the polls predicted?

They sure did! We won nearly three seats, electoral research showed later our support came from all walks of life. From the left, but also social liberals who were used to voting for the right. Animal rights appeared to represent this reprioritisation of interests, in which people from all different political, ideological and other various backgrounds stand up to protect those who cannot protect themselves. We created history, something that is not only exciting but something that also carries a heavy responsibility.

And now we understand what Gandhi meant when he explained the course of any emancipation movement: First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win. During our development phase we would have to move through each of the stages that Gandhi predicted. That is also precisely what happened. I'd love to tell you about it next week!