



Focus

THINK parliamentary prospective candidate for the Green Party. Sandals, facial hair, leggings, tofu. Stop. Rewind. Start again. Try little green mini-dress from Ghost (second-hand). Chelsea base, heir to millions, car, lots of blonde hair, make-up. Former nude model for Tatler. This is the La Cicciolina of eco-politics. And she's just off to a save-the-elephant do at Sotheby's "to see if I can pick up an eco-billionaire. There's lots around these days."

Julia Stephenson is, in her own summing-up, "an extraordinary creature". Michael Portillo had better watch out for she is — her view again — his nemesis: poised to seize Kensington and Chelsea from the Conservatives for the Greens on 7 June.

"We're very enthusiastic. We polled 11 per cent when I stood for the Greater London Authority last year. We have nowhere to go but

Vote Julia — or the planet gets it

Alex Renton meets the It girl now standing for the Green Party against Michael Portillo

up. And what a good way to protest — better than staying at home feeling disgruntled. We'll make the trains run on time. Me and Mussolini." And she laughs charmingly.

Stephenson's biog, paraphrased from an election press release, is

pretty simple — "It-girl-novelist-turned-Buddhist has put film deal on hold in order to turn that girl-about-town energy to winning a seat at the General Election."

The cuttings file enlarges on this. Stephenson, furniture heiress, was expelled from the Lucie Clay-

ton secretarial college for throwing veggieburgers at a teacher during an animal rights demo outside Waitrose. Stephenson, granddaughter of the Vestey beef fortune, became very depressed in 1997 after Tara Palmer-Tomkinson blanked her in the Fulham Road. She found solace in Buddhism.

Stephenson, twice married, once went out with a Mossad agent who served with distinction in the Israeli commando raid at Entebbe. For five months. Then, growing suspicious, she rang the Israeli Embassy. They helpfully confirmed that the Entebbe raid took place in 1977, when the boyfriend would have been 10 and no, they didn't have any pre-teen soldiers in the special forces. "The scales fell from my eyes ..."

Both he and another boyfriend, Princess Diana's stepbrother the Earl of Dartmouth, made it big in Stephenson's first novel, Pandora's Diamond. Her second, an eco-conscious Sloanes-on-skis saga called Chalet Tiara, is currently being translated into Czech, having done pretty well in English.

More. Stephenson, a vegan who ate meat so long as it was organic, left her first husband after six months to have an affair "with a proletarian artist from North Kensington".

There's much more in the files. "Lies, lies, damned lies," she grins. "Some of it written by me ... Oh, the desperate things we do." She laughs some more.

It has to be said that the Stephenson laugh, tinkly and charming, does take the edge off some of the nonsense. I mean — who cares what you tell the gossip columns? It's all a bit of fun, isn't it? What about your age, then? "Thirty-five." "But you were 34 in 1997." "That was a lie. Then, I wanted to be thought of as older and with more gravitas." Well, it worked. Obviously.

BACK to the politics. But is all this going to be truly helpful to the Green Party? You have, after all, said some pretty embarrassing things over the years. The feng-shui map you keep under your car seat to stop you from getting lost. And what was that about preferring Switzerland and Harrods? "I loathe casually chaotic places like Spain and Notting Hill." But this is hugely damaging. Julia! Notting Hill is probably the greenest-leaning part of the constituency! "Oh, Notting Hill's a bit contrived and bohemian. I'm far too dowdy for it." Yeah, right. She is a wit, damn rare in politics, so we'll forgive her most things. She says she's only done what a girl whose name ends in "a" has to do. "It does wind people up, all that stuff, but it's brought you to talk to me. And that gives the Green Party a platform. I am what I am — all that's my past and now I'm a politician. Whatever my weird frothy history is, if I can mention one sensible thing in the course of an interview, that's done some good."

Key campaigning issues in Kensington and Chelsea will be animal rights, foot and mouth, wicked farmers and nice farmers. She will be lobbying the Cadogan Estate to allow a farmers' market at Sloane Square. And Stephenson has trenchant views on public spending and people's right to influence it. "The Gov-



'Not Left, not Right, but forward! Nobody could possibly argue with us'

ernment has no money. It uses ours." she informs voters who may hitherto have been unaware of this scandalous state of affairs.

All this, of course, is what in American politics is known as shooting fish in a barrel. Too easy, and I feel a bit rotten for trying it. There's little point kicking the Green candidate for Kensington and Chelsea, because, frankly, you'll never leave a mark. And why bother? Julia Stephenson is a nice girl with her heart in the right place. "The great thing about the Green Party is that nobody would disagree with us. Everyone wants purer air and better transport and more parks and so on. Not Left, not Right, but forward! Nobody could possibly argue with us."

And I won't. There are fuddy-duddies who rate the Green Party because it's such a good argument for retaining the old-fashioned British electoral system — which makes sure people like the Greens never get elected. I'm not with them. Go for it, Julia! And if Michael Portillo doesn't grant you that public debate, he's more of a fool than we thought.