Sir Teddy - still the rebel with a true blue cause

By LINDA CHRISTIE

THE day he was called into John Major's office is still imprinted on his brain.

Rebel MP Sir Teddy Taylor had broken the golden rule in politics - he had refused to sign a three-line whip.

Sir Teddy explained: "It had always been the party's secret weapon. If you lose the whip the constituencies threatened to choose someone else for the seat.

"But what people don't realise is that made history here in Southend. Central Office sent someone down, but the constituency party told them to take a running jump - that hadn't happened.

"The seaside town visited followed a call to the MP's office. The Southend East MP had refused to vote in favour of extra cash for the NHS and an increase in VAT on fuel.

"I said to John Major, there's no way I can do it. He said you have to support the party. I told him: 'John, I like you as a person but I can't do it. He shook his head and said it was very sad, but I was on my own.'"

Another seven MPs followed Sir Teddy's lead, but the shrinking Government was forced to welcome them back after a three-month stand-off.

Disillusioned the party was nothing new for Sir Teddy. He faced the ire of a furious Ted Heath 25 years ago after resigning from his Scottish minister post because the Government signed the Treaty of Rome.

"I was labelled a rising star but I decided to throw away my political career because the treaty made it clear we were heading for a single European state. Unfortunately no-one agreed with my views then."

Sir Teddy believes Europe is one of the main issues which contributed to the popularity of the Tories this month - and it will decide who votes for or against the party.

"I have written to all the candidates asking their views and I would even support Ken Livingstone if he put forward a decent policy on Europe."

"All I am for is a referendum. If people choose to go ahead with it then fine, but at least it was their choice."

If none of the candidates gives Sir Teddy the answer he seeks he will abstain from voting.

He is already fighting off pressure from leading party figures to become the new shadow Scottish secretary.

He explains: "I can't do it, I just wouldn't be able to devote enough time to Scotland."

His love of the town prompted him to turn down the free Lady herself, Margaret Thatcher, back in the late 1970s.

"I was in the shadow cabinet as culture and industry secretary," he explained. "If the party got into power I wouldn't be able to do the job."

I won - Sir Teddy celebrates his victory and a rare Tory success on May 1

Looking back at his canvassing for this election, Sir Teddy said: "Victoriously, for the first time in my life I got the impression that all politicians are unpopular."

"There was a pretty strong desire to kick the Government in the guts, people felt they were arrogant and self-assured."

Another factor could have been the Conservative posters.

"They were appalling - all this stuff about Blair's funny winkle and eyes."

"The party should have sat back and said: 'They are going pretty well in Britain now, but remember what they were like under Labour. If I had been chairman I could have moved them about 100%.'"

"The election was fought using Clinton-style politics and PR techniques but I feel if you just tell people what the facts are, even if those facts are bad, they will respect you."

Another nail in the Tory's fast-growing coffin was划算.

"But it was as bad as the media made out."

"The answer I'm afraid is yes," admits Sir Teddy.

"We went from the party of standards to the party of scandal."

"We saw MPs take money and not declare it. Another was given a free trip by an industrialist then used the ticket to apply for tax relief."

"Anyone who broke the rules should have been removed."

"I've got to say John Major is a sympathetic, understanding, decent person, but what we needed was a clear lead."

Tony Blair's infant Labour Government already faces serious allegations. Glasgow's millionaire MP Mohammed Sarwar stands accused of paying a rival candidate to ease up his campaign.

Sir Teddy said: "When compliants of the sort made against Mr Sarwar and Neil Hamilton arise, the MP should be immediately suspend,

"Then have to explain to the party why they should be taken back. Otherwise it drags on forever."

But the sex scandals that have rocked the party were never really worried Sir Teddy. "They have been going on for years, it's just people find out about them now. Some MPs personal lives are in complete disorder, I keep thinking where's the temptation? If you do your job properly you don't have time for sex."

He adds with a smile: "The standards of parliament have gone down like a stone since I joined 33 years ago - purely a coincidence, I hope."

"In those days my parents were so proud of me, but the other day my son George told me he had a discussion with his friends about what their fathers did. He was embarrassed to admit I was an MP."

It could be the last hurrah

IT was one of the bloodiest and longest General Election campaigns ever, and it could be Sir Teddy's last.

He admit: "I might have a go again but I'm 60 now, you can't go on forever."

"I'm just glad my career didn't end in rejection."

Sir Teddy, whose political profession has led to health problems.

In 1970 he collapsed in the Commons and was taken to Westminster Hospital where he met wife Sheila, a medical social worker.

He revealed: "The doctors say I've always been so used to long hours I don't know how I wouldn't have coped if I had lost my seat - although I do believe things happen for the best."

As for his long marriage to Sheila, chair of Southend Community Care Services, Sir Teddy believes the key is his determination to stay near his family.

"I have a flat in London but I probably only use it once a 4-week. "Sheila and I get on very well and are proud of our children" (John, 24, George, 22, and 11-year-old Louise).

The busy pair are now planning a care trip away, race because Sir Teddy is renowned for his hard work in the constituency.

He revealed: "Yesterday, for example, I had 120 letters. "I wonder if it's arrogance but I love taking on impossible cases and sorting them out."

"Politics doesn't come into it at all."
Sir Teddy Taylor is proud to be called scum. It won him the vote of one Shoebury fan and his son a nickname that will stick for life.

George, 22, spent a week helping his famous father campaign.

Sir Teddy said: "I was lucky I didn't get any abuse whatever but George found a very nice lady in Newington Avenue.

"She told him I had helped her out with a problem and she was delighted to find I wasn't toffee-nosed at all - in fact, I was scum like her.

"She asked George if he knew me and George admitted: 'Yes, I'm son of scum'. The name has stuck.

The MP's popularity has never been in doubt. While other Tory stalwarts saw their safe seats tumble, Sir Teddy won with a respectable lead.

Now he's a man with a mission - to crank the 11,000 Rochford voters who were added to his constituency this year.

He said: "When they opened the boxes from those wards it was quite horrifying. I thought I had lost.

"The news came over on the television that other seats had suffered a 10 per cent swing. I worked out with the Rochford results so had I could even lose by 8,000 votes, it looked pretty bleak."

He added: "When I first stood for Southend East in 1990 I was very unpopular because I was a Scotman.

"But the box that saved me, to my astonishment, was the Milton ward. That gave me a special feeling about that area."

"This time I was touched by the good results coming from the Shoebury ward.

"He admitted: "When I went into the count that night I couldn't believe it. The people must want a change."

"But it has been a dream to me. I love it here and they are my kind of people."

He was full of praise for his opponents, Labour's Nigel Smith and the Liberal Democrats' Paul Smith. "She was so nice I felt like voting for her myself. He also found time to commiserate with fellow Tory Dr Bob Spick, who saw his Castle Point seat fall to Labour."

"I know how great that sense of rejection feels. He had committed himself to Parliament and to the party 100 per cent."

"I think he was more a part of the people than myself and we had never had a great relationship, in fact we had quite a few disagreements - but I knew he was very serious and conscientious."

"As well as rating his profile in Rochford Sir Teddy already has a list of problems he wants to solve during the next five years."

"Top of the agenda is a ring road or bypass around Southend to make trips to London easier - but he admits it could be tough. "Southend people are upset by change."

"The other is getting a better deal for the seaside town's old folk.

He explained: "They feel no one cares for them. I want to change that."