

T053

Ulster ruled by political parties it didn't elect

Last Thursday's Upper Bann by-election gives food for thought on three aspects.

The first concerns the lack of true democracy in Northern Ireland. Since its creation the province has been ruled from Westminster by political parties it had no voice in electing, and whose policies were never submitted to its voters. Nor have they ever had any input in the formation of those policies. At this by-election two of our main parties, the Conservatives and the Social Democratic Party, at last offered candidates. The other two continued the traditional stance. Labour's refusal caused a former chairman of the Northern Ireland Labour Party (with which Labour always declined to affiliate) to stand 'For the Right to Vote Labour'. On 7 May 1990 he told a press conference at Portadown that Labour is about to announce its new policy on Northern Ireland, adding-

'But no one in Upper Bann was consulted about that policy. Furthermore, no one here will be given the chance to vote for or against it in this election. That is dictatorship, not democracy.'

The second point arises from the fact that the Conservative candidate lost her deposit. In her campaigning she was obliged to support the Anglo-Irish Agreement, because that is her party's official policy. At the first opportunity Northern Ireland voters had to pronounce their verdict on the Agreement, they overwhelmingly rejected it. Clearly they took the view, which as a constitutional lawyer I believe to be correct, that the Agreement is unconstitutional in effectively transferring representation of the province's Catholic population to the Dublin Government.

The third point is that in this overwhelmingly Protestant constituency over two thousand voters (nearly double the number who voted Conservative) declared their support for IRA terrorism by voting Sinn Fein. Such support will continue until the British Government stops shilly-shallying. It should declare the firm intention of treating counties like Down and Antrim in precisely the same way it treats counties like Kent or Yorkshire, as integral parts of the territory of the United Kingdom. No one suggests that Kent will at some future time be handed over to France if the inhabitants should be persuaded to agree.¹

¹ *The Times*, 23 May 1990.