

LEWISHAM BY-ELECTION:

North Lewisham holds a by-election which both major parties regard as a key battle. At the General Election, the Conservatives held the seat with a majority of more than 3,000; this time, Labour have high hopes of victory. Their candidate is 40-year-old barrister Neill Macdermot. An unpredictable factor in this election is Miss Leslie Greene, Independent Loyalist. Her appeal is mainly to right-wing Tory opinion, and she is expected to take some votes from the official Conservative candidate, Norman Farmer.

Labour chooses the Rents Bill as the principal target in its attack on the Government record - for the Bill is a burning issue in Lewisham, a mixed residential area. Forty-years of piecemeal legislation had produced a muddle which pleases no one - but views on the present bill are sharply divided. Here's a landlord's opinion.

For a by-election, polling is heavy. Rumours of Government plan to amend the Bill with a ceiling on rent increases, and longer security of tenure, came too late to affect the voting; but as the ballot papers pile up in the Town Hall, and the counting begins, it becomes clear the margin will be very close.

When the last votes are counted there's a majority of eleven hundred - for labour's Neill MacDermott the first by-election since the war to take a seat from any Government.