

Veteran MP tells of being stabbed in the back by local party

Hurt and betrayed but

I will grin and bear it

Sir Patrick Cormack MP today described his "hurt and betrayal" as members of his own constituency turned against him.

But he reiterated his determination to keep his job and win his seat at the next General Election.

The 68-year-old said: "I have tried very hard not to be angry. I have tried to be relaxed and behave normally when I have talked to people who I know jolly well have tried to put the knife between my shoulder blades. I have just had to grin and bear it."

"There is no doubt that I have been stabbed in the back because the people who voted against me gave no indication they intended to do so and have advanced no reason for their actions.

"I had been led to believe my reselection would be a formality and I thought that would be the case because nobody has ever criticised the way I did the job either in the constituency or at Westminster. I went to the first selection meeting last February thinking there would be no problem."

Threatened

His application to stand for the Tories in South Staffordshire at the next General Election was defeated in an executive council vote later declared invalid - but only after he had threatened to stand as an independent against any other official Conservative candidate.

Sir Patrick, from Kinver, is something of an institution in South Staffordshire. He was first elected to Parliament in 1970 as MP for Cannock. Boundary changes saw the constituency altered to Staffordshire South West four years later and this became South Staffordshire in 1983.

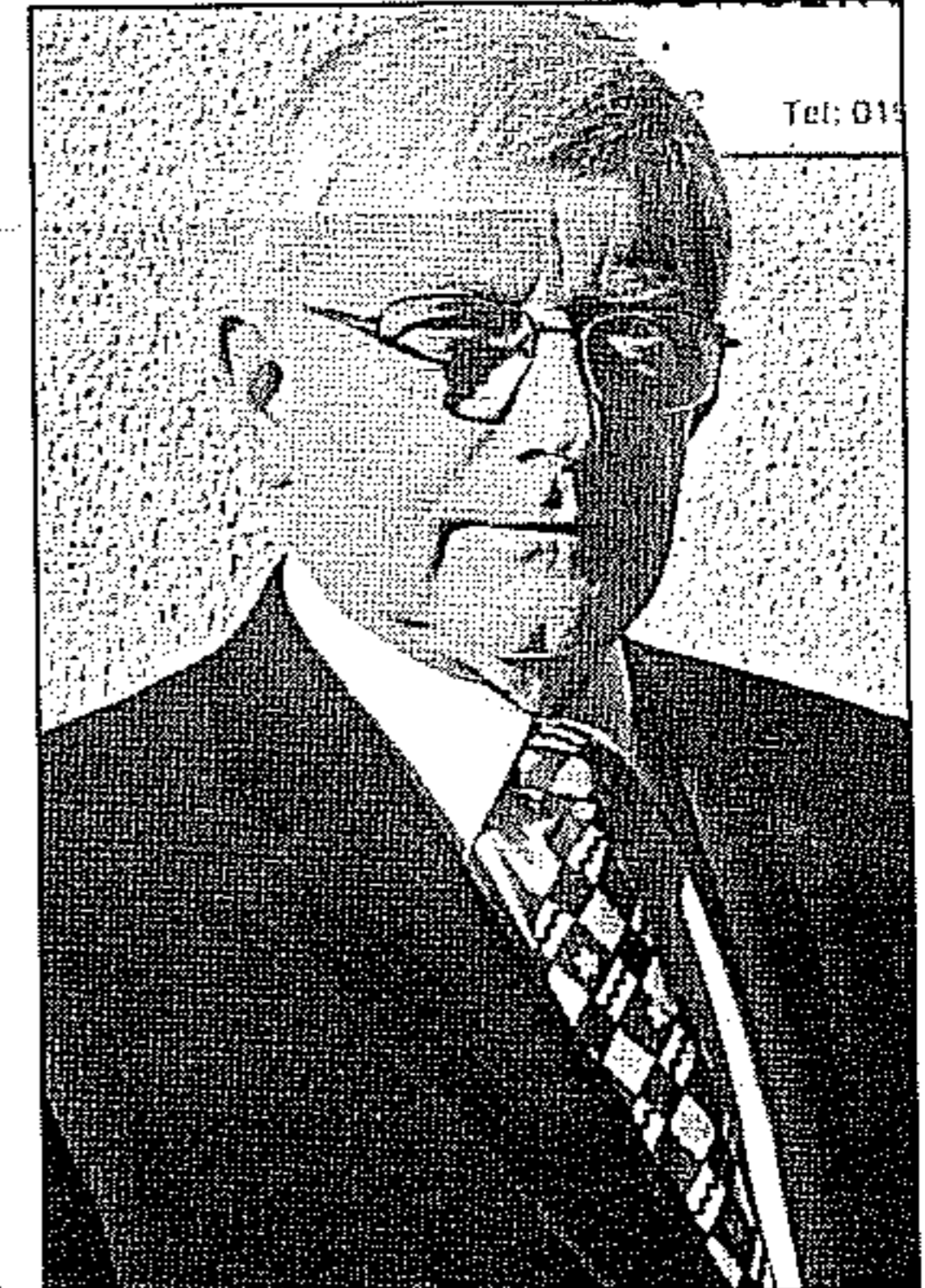
He was in 1994 and most of his time in the House of Commons has been spent on the backbenches but he was deputy shadow leader of the house for a period and opposition spokesman on constitutional affairs before relinquishing the post to stand unsuccessfully for the position of House of Commons Speaker in 2000.

The veteran politician, who has been married to wife Mary for 40 years, today described the moment he was told that the constituency did not want him to stand in the next General Election.

He explained: "I was shocked. I do not recall the precise words I used in the heat of the moment but they probably indicated I was determined to give the people of this constituency the opportunity to select me once again - and it would have been rea-



Members are being asked to vote on the future of Sir Patrick Cormack



Grass roots - David Billson, aged 64



Sir Patrick, right, with ex-PM John Major



Celebrating after holding his constituency



Upsetting - Wilhelm Rose, aged 81

sonable for people to have assumed that would have been as an independent candidate. "I do not want to make an issue of that now. I am a loyal Conservative who has been proud to take the Conservative whip for the past 37 years and wish to continue to do so. But I do not regard myself as the Member of Parliament for the South Staffordshire Conservative Association. I am the Member of Parliament for South Staffordshire - and I think that attitude is

at the root of my present problem.

"I do what I think is right for my constituents regardless of who they supported at the last election and if that doesn't always accord with party policy then tough luck.

"Some people might think I am too old for the job but I can assure them that is not the case.

"Others may say that I am arrogant. I hope that is not the case but I have always

been someone who led from the front. "I have had a very good relationship with my association over the years. As far as I am concerned it has been very happy and constructive but that happy atmosphere changed over the last year.

Things became extremely difficult and distressing but despite that I believe that I have demonstrated my continued support for them. "I sincerely hope this will prove to be a little local difficulty."