

# Love affair puts Parkinson's future in doubt

By Anthony Bevins, Political Correspondent

Mr Cecil Parkinson, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, yesterday attempted to brave the scandal created by his own announcement that he was the father of a baby expected next January by his former secretary, Miss Sara Keays.

He announced just before midnight on Wednesday that in spite of a previously expressed wish to marry Miss Keays, it had now been decided that he would remain with his wife. Yesterday, before leaving his London home for his department office, he said that his marriage would survive. "We will get over it", he said.

He later attended the normal Thursday Cabinet meeting and a Downing Street lunch in honour of the deputy prime minister of Iraq.

Downing Street emphasized again that the Prime Minister viewed the matter as "private" and it was stated that Mr Parkinson would still be addressing next week's Conservative Party conference.

Nevertheless, senior Conservatives remained sceptical about the "high risk" strategy being pursued by Mrs Margaret Thatcher and her trusted colleague. It was felt that if media attention continued to focus on Mr Parkinson, Miss Keays and, next year, the baby itself, it was difficult to see how the minister could possibly survive.

The Prime Minister may have been informed of Mr Parkinson's long-standing affair with Miss Keays by either the Home Secretary or the director-general of the Security Service at the time of the minister's inclusion in the Falklands war Cabinet in April last year.

Mrs Thatcher ruled after the Blunt affair, in November 1979 that: "The director-general

should report to the Home Secretary if he receives information about a present or former minister or senior public servant indicating that he may be, or may have been, a security risk, unless circumstances are so exceptional that he judges it necessary to report direct to the Prime Minister."

Neither Downing Street nor the Home Office was willing yesterday to be drawn on the possible security aspects of Mr Parkinson's affair.

**Mr Parkinson yesterday overruled the recommendation of the Director-General of Fair Trading to refer a proposed takeover, for part of Rank Hovis McDougall, to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. Mr Parkinson, whose predecessor, Lord Cockfield, made several controversial decisions, had earlier said he would seek to follow the advice of the director general, Sir Gordon Borrie.**

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In his report on the Profumo affair in 1963, Lord Denning said: "I would not ordinarily regard adultery as a security risk when committed clandestinely with a person who was not likely to resort to blackmail. Much must depend, however, on the circumstances."

Given that Mr Parkinson had access to the most sensitive military and diplomatic information at the time of the Falklands crisis, the Security Service would have had special cause to ensure that the particular circumstances of Mr Parkinson's relationship were understood by the Home Secretary, then Mr William Whitelaw, or by the Prime Minister.

Mrs Thatcher's distaste for

scandal or even the hint of sexual transgression by members of her frontbench team is well-known in Whitehall and at Westminster. She has dismissed men from her team, and has failed to promote others, at the slightest hint of domestic difficulty.

In that regard the Prime Minister undoubtedly reflects the moral code of her own party rank-and-file, but she is also acutely conscious of the political consequences of public scandal.

The fact that Mr Parkinson's resignation was not required is therefore seen as a measure of Mrs Thatcher's undoubted liking and respect for one of her own inner circle in the Cabinet.

But last month's announcement of a replacement of Mr Parkinson as Conservative Party chairman may well have been a calculated attempt at damage limitation, particularly if Mrs Thatcher had early warning of Miss Keays's April pregnancy.

● Mr Parkinson, who has enjoyed a meteoric rise in power and influence under Mrs Thatcher, is the fourth Tory MP to hit the headlines in this way since the Prime Minister gained power in 1979 - and the latest in a long line of Conservative politicians to be embroiled in extra marital encounters (Richard Evans writes).

One, Mr Nicholas Fairbairn, the former Scottish solicitor-general, whose former secretary, Pamela Milne attempted to commit suicide 18 months ago after their affair ended, yesterday gave his public backing to Mr Parkinson and said he would be sending him a message of support.

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