

An affair of the party

S. Times - 9 OCT 1983

Has Cecil Parkinson redefined the acceptable face of permissiveness? By ELIZABETH DUNN

FOR ALL the speculation on the future career prospects of Mr Cecil Parkinson, there can be little doubt that, in the finest British tradition, he has upheld the sanctity of the family and underpinned the Victorian values so dear to his leader's heart.



many left. That applies to all politicians, not just Tories."

Down in Sussex, Malcolm Muggeridge is in despair for a society drifting away from Christianity: "The vital point is that Mr Parkinson has sinned. Like the Victorian

In Victorian times, no taint would have attached itself to the reputation of any gentleman who sought company outside the home, provided he paid for the consequences and maintained appearances with his lady wife. Only if caught in particularly flagrant circumstances might an eminent Victorian have been dispatched to India until things blew over. So, Mr Parkinson remains Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. So far.

Professor Laurie Taylor, head of Department of Sociology at York University and a seasoned Westminster-watcher, makes the point with some force: "Private morality and the strength of the family have been such an important part of the Tory philosophy, and you could suggest that Mr Parkinson is showing the strongest possible belief in the family. He'll make a cash settlement on the mistress and continue with the family. Victorian morality was very like that. Prostitutes and others could be used on the side in order that the family could be preserved."

But he adds: "To me, it seems that to have such an element of hypocrisy at the centre of the government is too difficult to maintain."

Is the nation's threshold of tolerance, then, not yet of a height to permit the unimpeded progress of an erring Cabinet Minister - if he's found out?

Richard Ingrams, whose Private Eye managed to name the wrong MP as father of the child on Wednesday, before Parkinson's midnight statement, emphasised that the real expectant father had already been replaced as party chairman; to that extent his career had already suffered. "I think you can get away with all kinds of things now as an MP. There was one MP who was revealed as having been to Berlin on some homosexual outing, and I thought that would be the end of him. Nobody took a blind bit of notice."

"And to a certain degree, yes, Parkinson has the Number 10 seal of approval. I think on the whole this is right. In the past, too much attention was paid to people's peccadillos. If you read out all the people who had a bit on the side, you wouldn't have

gentry who were also not living up to Christian morals. But if you are part of the permissive society - which I despise - he is only doing what is regarded as perfectly acceptable."

The Church of England's Board of Social Responsibility is chaired by the Bishop of Birmingham, Hugh Montefiori, who prepared a short statement and declined to elaborate on it: "The excessive exposure of the affair in the media amounts almost to prurience. What is far more important than the case of Mr Parkinson is the state of morality in the country."

Parkinson's colleagues in Westminster are tending to keep their profiles low, sharing, perhaps, Mrs Mary Whitehouse's caution. She, in declining to comment, murmured that he who was without fault should cast the first stone.

George Gardiner, Conservative MP for Reigate, and loyal to Number 10, pondered deeply before making a statement: "The old stigma of being 'a bastard' has gone. We still see it as sad when a woman finds herself a mother in these circumstances, just as it is sad when a long-standing marriage breaks up. But I think the same Christian generosity is applied to public figures as anyone else."

Leading article and Joyce Hopkirk: page 16

Heathnote



"First of all, I want you to join the Tory party"