

Top Tories tell Thatcher: sack Parkinson

S. Tms - 9 OCT 1983

SENIOR Conservative MPs are planning to send word to Mrs Thatcher this week demanding the resignation of Cecil Parkinson, the trade and industry secretary. The official line by government and party spokesmen is that the question of Parkinson's resignation does not arise, but a cross-section of Tory MPs yesterday insisted that it does - and that it must.

Dissatisfaction over the handling of the Parkinson affairs surfaced, among some Tory MPs, as an expression of a wider concern at the government's conduct since the general election victory.

Speaking privately, MPs gave clear warning to Mrs Thatcher and Tory Central Office that they regard Parkinson's affair with Miss Sara Keays, and his statement last week, as extremely damaging.

They intend to make their views known at this week's Tory conference in Blackpool to John Wakeham, government chief whip, and Edward du Cann, chairman of the 1922 Tory backbenchers' committee. They will be passed on to the prime minister.

Tory MPs canvassed by The Sunday Times covered the party spectrum.

"He's let the party down", one senior MP said. "If his private life becomes public, he must take the consequences. In his statement, he said he promised to marry the girl and changed his mind. I can't see how he can possibly hold his head up. How can we give a standing ovation to an admitted adulterer?"

An MP from the Tory right wing commented: "People in the constituency say he should resign, mainly because of his promise. They don't think it's because we're the party of the family or any of that rubbish, but just because he broke a promise."

by Michael Jones
and Martin Kettle



Sara Keays in London

A Tory Privy Councillor said: "People are very upset. They say it's all very well for the rich to talk about a love-child, but it's not the same for ordinary people. I think it's extraordinary that he hasn't gone."

A Tory left-winger said: "There's this terribly lofty Tory attitude that we can ride anything out and nothing matters. The fact is we're on a weak wicket. We talk about Victorian values and now this."

A government minister said: "Why didn't he get divorced and do the decent thing. Other people have. The government is full of them."

The prime minister, however, appears committed to retaining Parkinson in his cabinet post unless he decides that his position has become untenable. He is scheduled to address the Tory conference on Thursday. At Central Office, however, the shadow of the Parkinson affair, coming so quickly after his replacement as party chairman last month, has stunned officials. They are under orders to say nothing.

Tory conference organisers intend to use their complete control over its agenda and the

speakers called this week to ensure that the Parkinson affair has strong competition for media attention.

Grassroot revolts will be allowed, even encouraged - a rare event at Tory conferences, where loyalty to the leadership is annually orchestrated.

Three confrontations are expected between ministers and the Tory rank and file:

● **Law and order:** the home secretary, Leon Brittan, will reject demands for mandatory sentences for violent criminals. Right-wing Tories want minimum five-year sentences for all armed criminals. Brittan will make one major concession. Murderers involved in armed robberies, deaths of police and prison officers and terrorism, will have minimum 20-year terms. (*Leon in the lion's den, page 15*)

● **Local government:** the environment secretary, Patrick Jenkin, faces a double attack - rates and the abolition of metropolitan councils. Tory opinion is increasingly frustrated over the government's failure to reform the rates system. Tory councillors are also critical of Jenkin's plan, announced on Friday, to abolish the Greater London Council and six English metro-councils, which they fear will be replaced by unelected bureaucracies.

● **Health cuts:** the social services secretary, Norman Fowler, will be expected to reassure the Tory conference that the National Health Service is, as Mrs Thatcher said in the general election, "safe with us".

Tory MPs who have been uncritical will look to this week's debates for reassurance that the government has not become irrevocably accident-prone.

People, p9; Illicit love, p16.