

# Chance of Parkinson survival dwindles

By Our Political Editor

Mr Cecil Parkinson's prospects of remaining long in office looked slender last night as more of his colleagues were privately critical of him.

Four days after his public statement that his former secretary Miss Sara Keays, was to have a child by him, and that he had made and then withdrawn an offer to marry her, he appeared to be protected only by the Prime Minister's firm support.

Mrs Margaret Thatcher said on Wednesday night, as soon as the facts became public, that the question of Mr Parkinson's resignation from the Government "does not and will not arise".

But no other member of the Government, and no prominent member of the Conservative Party, has made any public statement of support for him since then.

Government whips have sounded Conservative MPs and found divided views. Younger MPs, and those with backgrounds in the profession, have tended to be sympathetic and to say that Mr Parkinson should stay. Older members, and those with roots in the shires, are inclined to be more censorious.

A common view yesterday was that Mr Parkinson would survive the Conservative Party conference, which starts at Blackpool tomorrow, and perhaps for some weeks longer.

One senior figure on the voluntary side of the party said: "I admire the Prime Minister's courage as usual in taking this sort of line. I do not think there will be a resignation before Thursday. But I do believe his days are numbered, for the sake of her rather than anyone else".

Downing Street said last night: "There is absolutely no evidence to support the suggestion that Mr Parkinson is about to resign. There is no change in the position. The question of resignation does not arise".

Tonight Mr Parkinson is to appear on BBC Television's *Panorama*, to be interviewed on the Government's economic performance. He must expect to be asked whether to continue as a minister is more likely to harm than to help the Government.

His readiness to face, if not to answer, challenging questions was seen last night as evidence that he and the Prime Minister still believe that the present storm will subside.

It appeared yesterday that the response of the party and the wider public so far to Mr Parkinson's predicament and bearing has not changed Mrs Thatcher's view, formed four months ago, that she could and should sustain him.

It is now known that he told her the full facts for the first time at Downing Street after the polls closed on general election day on June 9. The

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# Parkinson doubt grows

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Prime Minister thanked him for his services as party chairman and his role in the campaign and raised the question of his further promotion.

Mr Parkinson said that he could not accept advancement without her knowing that a child was to be born in January to his former secretary and that the whole history was bound to become public. She took her decision to promote him in that knowledge.

Support for Mr Parkinson has come in a National Opinion Poll carried out on Saturday for the London Weekend Television programme *Credo*.

Of 580 adults questioned 62 per cent said they believed he should not resign, while only 32 per cent felt he should go. The sample was divided on whether the emphasis laid on Victorian moral values by Mrs Thatcher made his unfaithfulness especially grave. Forty-five per cent agreed it did, but 50 per cent disagreed.