

Parkinson given a

WARM reception

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The Conservative Party, in conference at Blackpool, yesterday warmly received its former chairman, Mr Cecil Parkinson, while reserving judgment on his political future.

A hostile reception from the 5,000 representatives would have forced him to leave office, in spite of the Prime Minister's support, and the conference organizers took every caution to prevent it.

Mr Parkinson, whose role as Secretary of State for Trade and Industry was to wind up a debate on free enterprise and industry, was brought on stage with the Prime Minister so that he shared the applause with her.

His wife, Ann, who saw it as her duty to share his ordeal, earned some extra applause for herself, and a welcoming kiss from Mr Denis Thatcher.

There was some booing from the back of the hall when Mr Parkinson was introduced by the chairman, Mr Petr Lane, but the clapping almost drowned it.

Mr Parkinson's ministerial colleagues were present in unusual strength to support him, with more than half the Cabinet beside and behind him on the platform.

When he sat down they led the applause and slapped him on the back for a brave speech of which the content, on the day, was unimportant. By now there was no booing.

There were groups of representatives who showed disapproval by sitting still and silent. But half the hall rose to the Parkinsons, and most of the rest would have done the same had Mrs Thatcher and the platform party given a lead. A critical moment for the minister and the party had been negotiated.

The belief that he can stay in office is not so widely shared in Blackpool as the hope. The artificiality of the conference setting makes the party's true mood unreadable. All that can safely be reported is that Mr Parkinson yesterday cleared another obstacle.

● The Bishop of Bath and Wells, the Rt Rev John Bickersteth, yesterday criticized the Prime Minister for not accepting Mr Parkinson's resignation after he admitted his affair.

The bishop said the Prime Minister should be as loyal to the nation as she had been to Mr Parkinson.