

Fear of damage to Government prompts decision to go



Unhappy return: Mr and Mrs Parkinson at their Potter's Bar home; two of their daughters at the family's Pimlico town house (Photographs: Steven Boggs and John Voss)

Keays statement forces Parkinson's resignation

From Julian Haviland, Political Editor, Blackpool

The Conservative Party's centenary conference in Blackpool, designed to celebrate its general election triumph last June, came yesterday to the climax that the Prime Minister had striven to avoid, with the departure from office of her election chief-of-staff, Mr Cecil Parkinson.

Mrs Margaret Thatcher's determination and loyalty had kept him in her Government as Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for four months. But she and he misjudged the party's and the country's tolerance of private failings in public men.

Mr Parkinson, an able and popular minister who had risen quickly to high rank and come to earn Mrs Thatcher's total confidence, was in the end dismissed by the long statement made late on Thursday by his former secretary and mistress, Miss Sara Keays.

Miss Keays's reproachful account of his actions and attitudes was given to *The Times* at her request and made known through 10 Downing Street early yesterday. The Prime Minister and Mr Parkinson at the Imperial Hotel, Blackpool, where both were staying.

Mr Parkinson decided that the scandal and threat of further scandal made it impossible for him to do his job and would therefore resign. The Prime Minister and Mrs Keays as well as his family if he did not go.

About 2am he saw the Prime Minister and told her so. After six sleepless hours he saw her again. His resignation was offered and accepted. Their brief talk was said to have been distressing to both.

Mr Parkinson and his wife left Blackpool at once. Last night Mrs Parkinson said she was "quite broken".

Prime Minister spoke one sentence. In Mr Parkinson's presence. "We do not forget today the man who so brilliantly organised the election campaign," she said, and they responded.

As they left for London Mr Parkinson and his wife, Ann, had nothing to say. But he left words through friends that he did not accept the whole of Miss Keays's version.

It was said on his behalf that in recent days he had done his best to comply with the Prime Minister's wishes and to try to carry on with business as usual at his department.

He had been grateful for his reception when he had spoken to the conference the previous day and by the representatives' sympathy for his wife. His conference speech had gone better than expected, although he had never felt that he was out of the woods.

He was going home to reflect on the immediate past and on his future. He might look to a career in industry or commerce, but he had no plans. He had no intention of giving up his parliamentary seat.

The Imperial Hotel was the setting 20 years ago for another convulsion in the Conservative

Party, the struggle for succession to Mr Harold Macmillan. Yesterday morning Cabinet ministers came and went through its public rooms, checked by their colleagues' change of fortune, dealing with their bills and their baggage and unwilling to confide their feelings to reporters.

Mr Michael Heseltine, Secretary of State for Defence, who

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described Mr Parkinson as one of his closest political friends, said that his going was "a shattering event. None said an unkind word. All who spoke were warm in their praise for the Prime Minister's attempt to shield his minister."

Mr Parkinson and his wife retreated yesterday to the privacy of their family home in the tiny village of Northway outside Potters Bar, Hertford-

shire, after driving from Blackpool. (David Cross writes.) Mr Parkinson, who refused to talk to any of the dozens of reporters besieging the gates of the Old Vicarage when he arrived in a dark blue Daimler with his wife at 1.35pm, later sent out a message via his political agent stating that he would be spending the weekend with his family and not talking to the press.

To reinforce the point, a middle-aged housekeeper left to pick up supplies of groceries.

Mr Parkinson returned to his 3 red-tiled Queen Anne home next to the parish church of St Thomas of Canterbury, looking tired and ashen in a dark blue lounge suit after the long drive and a sleepless night.

He sprang quickly from his chauffeur-driven car to greet one of the policemen keeping reporters at bay, before forcing a smile for his agent, Mr Mark Penlington, who met him at the doorway.

His wife slipped quickly from the car into the house in front of him. Mr Penlington had arrived at the house 20 minutes earlier after receiving a message from Mr Parkinson that he wanted to talk to him. The curtains of the

ground-floor windows facing the street were drawn soon after Mr Parkinson's arrival.

Earlier in the week the former Secretary of State had been seen using the telephone by reporters looking through the windows. A copy of the book *Yes, Minister* had also disappeared from a bedroom window shelf where it had been visible from the road.

At 1.10pm, Mr Parkinson's three daughters, Mary, Emma, and Joanna, arrived in a yellow Volkswagen clatching overnight bags to join their parents for the weekend.

They showed no signs of emotion as they entered the house without speaking or even acknowledging the presence of waiting reporters and photographers.

Shortly afterwards Mr Penlington left the family group with the message that there would be no statement from Mr Parkinson either yesterday or today.

At 4.40pm the family group was joined by Mrs Parkinson's daughter, Mr F. A. Jarvis. At 6.20pm Mrs the eldest daughter, left the house with her sisters and drove off in her Volkswagen to an undisclosed destination.

In a statement issued through his solicitor, Farrer and Co, Mr Parkinson referred to the statement issued on October 5 when she first came to light.

Mr Parkinson said that in the last paragraph of that statement he and Miss Keays had made clear that "neither of us, nor our respective families, would thereafter answer questions" about the matter.

"Miss Keays has since given her version of certain events. As I remained convinced that it is in no one's interest that our differences should be discussed publicly, I do not propose to say any more."

Election win 'has altered politics'

By Our Political Editor

The Prime Minister claimed yesterday that the Conservative Party, by holding to their convictions and securing reelection to government, had altered the whole course of British politics for at least a generation and created a new common ground.

In her speech at the final session of the party conference at Blackpool, she said they had forced their opponents to shift their ground. The Labour Party was reassessing its attitudes to home ownership and was thinking again about Europe; and the Social Democrats now sang the virtues of capitalism, competition and the customer.

"The Conservative Party has staked out the common ground and the other parties are jostling to get it," she said.

The party's opponents had been forced to shift their ground. The policy and direction of social socialism had been utterly rejected.

At Labour's Brighton conference socialist policies were given a respraying, polished and offered once again to the voters, but they were yesterday's policies.

Mrs Thatcher was given the theatrical reception that has become traditional but seemed yesterday to have been raised to an even higher pitch either to obscure or to compensate for the loss of a senior Cabinet minister.

She recalled with quiet satisfaction, but did not dwell, on the past success of the general election which was, she

said "not exactly a photo finish".

The British people, the ultimate jury, had found in favour, she said, of what the Conservatives had done since 1979 to reform the trade unions, extend home ownership, reduce direct taxation, strengthen the forces of law and order, and secure the defence of the realm.

The two longest passages dealt with the two sharpest points of present political attacks the Government's defence posture and its attitude to the financing of the health service.

Of the Soviet Union, Mrs Thatcher said in familiar tones that it was unlikely to change much or quickly. But she added that Soviet Communism could not be divested.

She went on: "When the circumstances are right, we must be ready to talk to the Soviet leadership. That is why we should grant every genuine opportunity for dialogue."

But such exchanges must be hard-headed, she said. "I do not want the word 'dialogue' to become suspect in the way the word 'detente' now is."

Mrs Thatcher repeated with emphasis her much-derided claim last year that the National Health Service was safe with the Conservatives. She would go further, she said. "The NHS is safe only with us because only this Government will see that it is prudently managed and financed."

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THE BLACKPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL
HELICOPTER TERMINAL BUILDING
Officially opened by
THE RIGHT HON. CECIL PARKINSON, M.P.
Secretary of State for Trade and Industry
14th October 1983

Curtain down: Mr Denis Thatcher yesterday formally opened a £500,000 helicopter terminal at Blackpool airport, without unravelling the official plaque. The Prime Minister's husband stepped in for Mr Parkinson 20 minutes after his resignation was announced. Mr Thatcher made a speech opening the terminal, standing in front of a pair of blue velvet curtains covering a plaque (right) declaring that the terminal had been officially opened by the Rt Hon Cecil Parkinson, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. The terminal will serve British Gas's Morecambe Bay field.