

Tory MPs doubt justice of Pym's dismissal

By Julian Haviland, Political Editor

The Conservative Party received with awe yesterday the news of Mrs Thatcher's dismissal of Mr Francis Pym as Foreign Secretary.

No MP questioned her right to remove him, but some doubted the wisdom and many the justice of so rewarding a man who took on the job at the height of the Falklands crisis and served industriously and loyally.

Mr Pym made no comment yesterday. But Viscount Whitelaw, as Mr William Whitelaw is to become, defended the Prime Minister's action in a frank discussion on BBC radio.

After saying it was important that the Prime Minister should have close personal relations with those with whom she attended international conferences, Mr Whitelaw said: "In politics sometimes there is personal difficulty - not difference, but difficulty. I think then there is no use perpetuating it".

Mr Whitelaw, a close colleague of Mr Pym in the last Government, said later on BBC television: "I am sure there will be many people who, like me, will be very sad about Francis Pym."

But Mr Whitelaw seemed to support Mr Pym as the next Speaker of the Commons. "I still hope it will be possible to find some place where his talents will be used to the best advantage of the country."

Mr Pym does not intend to be removed from active politics. Indeed, such anger appeared yesterday to have



Sir Geoffrey Howe yesterday before he flew to Luxembourg for a European Community meeting.

been generated among MPs on either side of the Commons at reports that Mrs Thatcher had pressed him to accept the position of Speaker, that he would hardly now be electable. MPs are jealous of their rights in the matter.

Mr John Silkin, Labour's Shadow Leader of the Commons, said yesterday that the Prime Minister's offer to Mr Pym was an insolent example of her conceit."

The other Cabinet changes announced occasioned less

surprise in the party. Mr Nigel Lawson's appointment as Chancellor of the Exchequer has received broad approval on the grounds of his undoubted competence and toughness, although his admirers include some who believe him too headstrong.

Sir Geoffrey Howe also appears to enjoy the confidence of most of his colleagues in his new role as Foreign Secretary. The immediate problem, and in the Prime Minister's eyes a most pressing one, is Britain's relations within the European Community and in particular the permanent adjustment to the structure of the budget, where Sir Geoffrey's considerable experience of international financial negotiations may prove invaluable.

Mr Leon Brittan, the new Home Secretary, also has admirers among members of all groups in the party.

The right respect him as a firm exponent of the Treasury's monetary policies. The left believe him to have sound social reforming instincts and likely, in particular, to preserve the right balance between increasing the effectiveness of the police and safeguarding civil liberties.

The further list of changes in the middle and junior ranks of the Government, to be announced today, will be scrutinized by newly-elected and re-elected Conservative MPs to see whether the Prime Minister has kept her repeated promises to ensure that all sections of her party are fully represented.