

Parkinson admits love affair

Mr Cecil Parkinson, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, admitted last night that he had had an affair with his former secretary, Miss Sara Keays, and that she is expecting his child in January.

Mr Parkinson said in a statement through his London-based solicitors Messrs Farrer and Co, that he had wished to marry Miss Keays but was now staying with his wife.

A spokesman at 10 Downing Street said the Prime Minister knew of the statement, but the question of Mr Parkinson's resignation "does not and will not arise".

The statement read: "To bring to an end rumour concerning Miss Sara Keays and myself, and to prevent further harassment of Miss Keays and her family, I wish, with her consent, to make the following statement:

"I have had a relationship with Miss Keays over a number of years. She is expecting a child due to be born in January, of whom I am the father. I am of course making financial provision for both mother and child.

"During our relationship, I told Miss Keays of my wish to marry her. Despite my having given Miss Keays that assurance, my wife, who has been a source of great strength, and I decided to stay together and to keep our family together.

"I regret deeply the distress which I have caused to Miss Keays, to her family and to my own family."

Mr Parkinson, who is 52, married his wife, Anne, in 1957



Mr Cecil Parkinson

and has three daughters. The family lives in Potters Bar in his Hertsmere constituency.

The statement was issued after the publication yesterday of a short item in the satirical magazine *Private Eye*, in which it was suggested that Miss Keays had not been involved with Mr Parkinson, but with another Conservative MP.

Miss Keays's London solicitor, Mr Jeffrey Wicks, said the decision to make the statement so soon after the *Private Eye* piece appeared was "purely coincidental".

Mr Wicks said the allegation in *Private Eye* about Miss Keays and the second MP was "grotesquely untrue" and a writ against the magazine would be issued today.

At Downing Street, a spokes-

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man said: "The Prime Minister takes the view that this is a private matter. Mr Parkinson is a member of the Cabinet, doing a good job, and the question of resignation does not and will not arise". Mr Parkinson had not offered his resignation.

● Conservatives are likely to admire Mrs Margaret Thatcher's loyalty but the party may be less ready to overlook his indiscretion (Our Political Editor writes). Before last night's announcement, Mr Parkinson was scheduled to make a speech at the Conservative Party Conference in Blackpool next week at which he could have expected the warmest of receptions for his part as party chairman in the planning of the general election victory. Whether he speaks or not the

conference will have been marred.

The damage to Mr Parkinson's career is likely to be greater than Mrs Thatcher seems to expect. His rise in politics since he entered the Commons in 1970 has been swift, and his competence in successive government posts has been acknowledged even by colleagues who are jealous of him.

But the judgment of political parties on their errant members is severe and Mr Parkinson will be lucky if he is promoted further.

At the same time, a Minister whom Mrs Thatcher particularly valued and on whose total support she had come to rely increasingly has been weakened: if she herself is not weakened in consequence, her burden has been increased.

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