

Parkinson given ovation at dinner

By a Staff Reporter

Members of the Eastbourne Parliamentary Club applauded Mr Cecil Parkinson, Secretary of State for Industry, when he arrived to make a speech at a dinner last night and they gave him a standing ovation when he left.

Mr Ian Gow, Minister for Housing and the local MP, discreetly paved the way for Mr Parkinson at his first public engagement since he announced that Miss Sara Keays, his former secretary, was to have his child in January.

He praised the "notable courage of the Secretary of State, who may have wanted to go to ground this week, in fulfilling the engagement which he made several months ago".

Earlier, Mr John Gummer, the new chairman of the party, clashed with a television interviewer over the Parkinson affair.

In a Channel Four News interview designed to set the scene for next week's Conservative conference at Blackpool, Mr Gummer was repeatedly pressed about the matter.

At the seventh attempt to prise a view from Mr Gummer the interviewer, Mr David Walter, ITN's political correspondent, even asked whether the Conservatives' support for family life might not now look "a little hypocritical in the light of what has happened".

Mr Gummer replied pointedly: "I rather think you are making this interview about one subject. I have said I am not going to discuss it."

Nevertheless, it was said that there had been a significant number of protest calls to Conservative Central Office yesterday complaining of Mr Parkinson's treatment of Miss Keays and of his wife Ann.