

Rumblings of revolt among Tory dissidents

By Philip Webster, Political Reporter

Conservative MPs who are unhappy over the Government's economic policies held a series of private discussions on their return to Westminster yesterday to consider ways of putting pressure on the Prime Minister to change her strategy.

With the Cabinet meeting today to discuss big savings in public expenditure programmes, Sir Geoffrey Howe, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, was warned of a revolt by backbenchers if he attempts to raise extra revenue in an early Budget by increases on petrol and alcohol.

The mood of the dissident Tories was appropriately summed up by Mr Patrick Cormack, MP for Staffordshire, South West, who told *The Times*: "Those of us who question the wisdom of the Government's economic policy were not answered at Blackpool and remain profoundly depressed by

the obdurate attitude of the hardliners, who seem quite content to contemplate any sacrifice to maintain doctrinal purity, a strange posture for a Tory."

There is no obvious coordination of the "wets" campaign, but their tactics will clearly be influenced by the outcome of the Croydon, North West, by-election on Thursday, and the attitude of the Cabinet to the Chancellor's request for substantial savings.

If the firm monetarist line is maintained, it was said yesterday to be all the more likely that Mr Geoffrey Rippon would be "drafted" to challenge Mrs Margaret Thatcher for the leadership.

Meanwhile Sir Ian Gilmour, one of the former ministers who spoke in Blackpool last week, issued an unusual statement of support for Mr John Butterfill, the Conservative candidate at

Croydon, in which he conspicuously omitted to mention government policies.

"If the people of Croydon stick to essentials on Thursday they will keep faith with the Tory party and the Tory tradition", Sir Ian said.

Mr Edward Taylor, MP for Southend, East, last night hit out at Mrs Thatcher's critics. There was something bogus and sinister about the current wave of attacks on her economic policies, he said, because the criticisms were directed at the creation of a myth which MPs knew to be untrue, that the total of three million unemployed directly arose from huge spending cuts and the Prime Minister's obsession with monetarism.

Mrs Thatcher was a person of guts and determination who was best suited to supervising the nation at a time of crisis, he said in Glasgow. "We will certainly not help Britain by seek-

ing to use her as a scapegoat

"If the Government and the party are to succeed, minister and MPs should concentrate on explaining what is being done and why, rather than disengaging through silence or manufacturing myths."

□ Mr Rippon, a former Cabinet minister who is Tory MP for Hexham, said last night that he would offer himself for the party leadership "only in very exceptional circumstances" (the Press Association reports).

Interviewed on the Tyne Tees Television's current affairs programme, *Briefing*, he was asked if he would "put up, or shut up" if he did not get the policies he was advocating. He replied: "Only in very exceptional circumstances, and only where that appeared the only way in which you could get the Government to change course".

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