

## Tory M.P. Says He's Gay, Testing British Party's Tolerance

By WARREN HOGE

LONDON, July 29 — A newly stated commitment by Britain's Conservatives to social inclusiveness and tolerance came in for a test today when a senior member of the party announced that he was gay.

Alan Duncan, 45, the Tories' parliamentary spokesman for foreign affairs and a central figure in Conservative politics for the past decade, made his acknowledgment in a front-page interview in The Times of London.

"Living in disguise as a politician in the modern world simply isn't an option," he said. "The Tory view has always been, 'We don't mind, but don't say.' Well, that doesn't work anymore."

The party leader, Iain Duncan Smith, promptly sent him a letter of support, saying, "What you have done is honest and will not affect you in any way politically in the future."

Mr. Duncan's disclosure emerged at a moment of feuding between party factions identified in newspaper shorthand as traditionalists and modernizers. The internal struggle came to the surface last week when Mr. Duncan Smith abruptly removed the party chairman, David Davis,

after Tory liberals contended that he was blocking progress toward opening up the ranks to women and members of minority groups.

Mr. Davis was replaced by Theresa May, the first woman to serve as chairman, and she hailed Mr. Duncan's announcement as another signal, following her own appointment, that the Conservatives were practicing tolerance. "There are many people who will say this shows a Conservative Party that has moved on," she said. "It's always been an open, decent and tolerant party, but this is a very upfront example of that."

Mr. Davis, who learned of his demotion while on vacation in Florida, returned to London over the weekend and gave an angry televised statement attacking his enemies in the party. He said he was the victim of "a cowardly campaign of character assassination" and called the arguments used against him "a tissue of lies."

Mr. Davis was a contender for the leadership of the party last year and is viewed as an alternative if Mr. Duncan Smith should falter. "Vendettas and character assassination have crippled three previous Tory

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*'Living in disguise' is not an option today, a politician declares.*

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leaders," Mr. Davis said, adding that Mr. Duncan Smith himself would be the victim of continued "unpleasantness and division."

The Tories lost the last two national elections to Labor after dominating British politics for most of the 20th century. They were abandoned by the centrist voters that Margaret Thatcher succeeded in bringing into the party ranks in the 1980's. Today they have become a party of rural England, with no meaningful representation in Scotland, Wales or urban areas of England.

The age and social profile of their members are similarly narrow, and much of the inside fighting is over how to become more in touch with changing times. In public opinion polls, the party has been unable to break free of the 30 percent mark, and it must rise above that number to become electable again. "The Con-

servative Party has been very slow to catch up with the modern world," John Bercow, a member of Mr. Duncan Smith's leadership team, said today. "It is doing so now."

While a number of Labor politicians have declared that they are gay, Mr. Duncan is the first sitting Tory member of Parliament to do so. Others who have been exposed in the press in recent years have resigned or lost their seats.

During last year's leadership contest, the early favorite, Michael Portillo, sacrificed support within the party because of his admissions of homosexual experiences during his university years at Cambridge. Lord Tebbit, a former party chairman, backed Mr. Duncan Smith with the pointed remark that he is a "normal family man with children."

Michael Brown, a former Tory member of Parliament, who left office in 1994 after the sensationalist press reported he had gone on vacation with a man, said today that there had always been many gay Tories "in the closet." Speaking to the BBC, he said, "What Alan Duncan has done is to make sure that next time there is a Tory M.P. doing this, it is just one big yawn."