

SUBJECT



35
C. Koster

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

20 March 1981

France

CALL BY M. CHABAN-DELMAS

M. Chaban-Delmas called on the Prime Minister this afternoon as arranged. Most of the conversation was of a general kind relating to the present political situations in France and the United Kingdom. But three points which came up may be worth recording.

M. Chaban-Delmas said that he believed President Giscard would do worse in the first ballot than he had done in the election seven years ago. He thought President Giscard would poll less than 30 per cent of the votes, M. Mitterrand well over 20 per cent and the other main candidates between 10 and 20 per cent. In the second round of voting, on the other hand, the President might do rather better than last time. In the view of M. Chaban-Delmas, M. Mitterrand did not have more than one chance in five of securing a victory.

M. Chaban-Delmas said that it was certain that M. Barre would be replaced as Prime Minister immediately after the elections. He had already made all his dispositions. However, it would be quite wrong to suppose that M. Barre would give up politics. In fact he "thought of nothing else" but his political future. His plan was to spend the next two years building up his political base in Lyons with a view to winning a place in the National Assembly in the legislative elections in 1983. He would then aim to emerge as M. Chirac's leading rival in the next Presidential elections.

M. Chaban-Delmas refused to be drawn on the likely candidates for the succession to M. Barre. However, in his view, the choice made by President Giscard, assuming he was re-elected, would be crucial to the success of the President's next period in office. If a member of President Giscard's entourage, however able, was chosen, it would be a bad sign and would suggest that the President intended that the new septennat should be a continuation of the previous one. If, on the other hand, he chose a political figure, a Gaullist, (M. Chaban-Delmas said that he had proposed a suitable candidate) this would be a positive sign and would indicate that the President intended to make a new start. This was essential.

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