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10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

25 January, 1982

President Mitterrand's Health

Thank you for your letter of 11 January. I have since seen Robert Armstrong's letter of 22 January.

The Prime Minister has told me that she was struck by the way in which President Mitterrand declined to play a positive role at the Cancun meetings. Given recent French statements about their intention to adopt a more forthcoming policy towards third world problems, he could have been expected to play a leading role but did not do so. The Prime Minister has no particular reason for attributing this reticence to health reasons but nevertheless finds it difficult to explain.

In her two recent contacts with President Mitterrand (at Cancun and at the last meeting of the European Council) the Prime Minister was struck by the peculiar colour of Mitterrand's skin. She also recalls that when she commented to Mitterrand's interpreter at the European Council that Mitterrand had lost weight, the interpreter replied: "He has to - his doctor has told him he must".

But despite these tentative indications of ill health, the Prime Minister has not detected any evidence that Mitterrand's mental or intellectual faculties are deteriorating.

A. J. COLES

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With the compliments of  
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*From the Secretary of the Cabinet: Sir Robert Armstrong KCB, CVO*

Ref. A07215

22 January 1982

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You sent me a copy of your letter of 11 January to John Coles about the state of President Mitterrand's health.

I have not seen the President since he came to London in September, except in the distance at the meeting of the European Council, and cannot, therefore, comment at first hand.

When I went to Paris in December for a meeting of Personal Representatives, I asked Monsieur Attali politely after the President's health. Rather to my surprise he did not simply thank me and pass me off with generalities, but went into a list of minor ailments, including rheumatism, of a kind which (he suggested) are normally associated with advancing years. I remember wondering a little whether he was seeking to reassure me (or to put me off the scent) with this rather unexpected display of medical openness.

I am sending a copy of this letter to John Coles.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

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