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FM PRETORIA 281000Z APR 81

TO IMMEDIATE F C O

TELEGRAM NUMBER 128 OF 28 APRIL 1981.

GENERAL ELECTION

1. ON THE EVE OF THE GENERAL ELECTION IN SOUTH AFRICA TOMORROW (29 APRIL) I SEE NO REASON TO CHANGE MY GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF THE CAMPAIGN AND OF ITS LIKELY OUTCOME AS SET OUT IN MY LETTER OF 3 APRIL TO DEREK DAY, NAMELY THAT THE GOVERNMENT MAY LOSE SOME OF THE POPULAR VOTE BUT WILL RETAIN THEIR OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF PARLIAMENTARY SEATS.

2. IN THE LAST TWO WEEKS OF THE CAMPAIGN ECONOMIC ISSUES (NOTABLY INFLATION) HAVE COME TO THE FORE. THE NATIONAL PARTY (NP) ORGANISATION HAS BEEN FORCED TO DEVOTE MUCH EFFORT TO REFUTING OPPOSITION CRITICISM OF GOVERNMENT ECONOMIC POLICIES. THE NP HAVE NOT BEEN HELPED BY A FEW ILL-CHOSEN WORDS BY THE MINISTER OF HEALTH AT A PRESS CONFERENCE TO THE EFFECT THAT A PENSIONER COULD SURVIVE ON A DIET COSTING TWENTY RAND (£11.30) PER MONTH. THE OPPOSITION PRESS HAVE SEIZED ON THIS TO DEMONSTRATE HOW AFTER 33 YEARS OF NATIONAL PARTY RULE THE GOVERNMENT HAVE LOST TOUCH WITH THE REALITIES OF EVERYDAY LIFE. IT MAY COST THE NP SOME VOTES AND COULD HELP TO TIP THE BALANCE AGAINST THEM IN A FEW CONSTITUENCIES WHERE THEY ARE RUNNING NECK AND NECK WITH THE PROGRESSIVE FEDERAL PARTY (PFP), WHO FROM THE OUTSET HAS BASED THEIR CAMPAIGN ON ATTACKING GOVERNMENT MISMANAGEMENT.

3. THE NP'S MAIN CONCERN, HOWEVER, HAS BEEN TO AVOID BEING OUTFLANKED BY THE EXTREME RIGHT IN THE SHAPE OF THE HERSTIGTE NASIONALE PARTY (HNP). FOR THIS PURPOSE THEY HAVE GONE OUT OF THEIR WAY TO UNDERLINE THAT THEY ARE SECOND TO NONE IN CHAMPIONING THE WHITE MAN'S CAUSE. THEIR SPOKESMEN HAVE PUT GREATER EMPHASIS ON MAKING FAST THAN MAKING CHANGE. IT HAS BEEN DEPRESSING TO HEAR RELATIVELY ENLIGHTENED MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT, SUCH AS DR KOORNHOF, EXPLAINING DEFENSIVELY AT PUBLIC MEETINGS HOW MUCH BETTER OFF UNDER THE NP THE WHITES ARE THAN THE BLACKS. THE QUESTION ARISES WHETHER AND IF SO HOW SOON AFTER SUCH A CAMPAIGN THE PRIME MINISTER WILL BE ABLE TO CLAIM HE HAS A

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MANDATE FOR CHANGE AND GET BACK ON TO THE REFORMING TRAIL. I HOPE AND BELIEVE SO. ABOVE ALL, WILL THE RESULT OF THE ELECTION MAKE HIM ANY MORE INCLINED TO MAKE CONCESSIONS OVER NAMIBIA ? I DOUBT IT. BUT I WILL BE BETTER PLACED TO ANSWER BOTH QUESTIONS AS SOON AS THE DUST HAS SETTLED AFTER TOMORROW.

LEAHY

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