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cf. Mr. Webb.
Assessments staff.
JIC.

pa. WSO. 24/5.



Miss M Savill
WED
FCO

Your reference

Our reference

Date 25 September 1980

Dear Margaret,

VOTE ON THE ECONOMIC DECREE

1. You will know from our monthly economic report that the economic decree survived a tied vote in the Chamber on 23 September. The closeness of this vote, taken on the general merits of the decree before detailed discussion of its articles, is a clear sign that further troubles may be expected during the decree's passage through the Chamber and the Senate: it must reach the latter by early October if it is to stand much chance of ratification before the 2 month deadline expires on 3 November.

2. The political background is interesting. Cossiga took the advice of the DC and PSI group leaders in the Chamber not to make the vote one of confidence (ie. an open vote where deputies can normally be relied on to vote with their parties), which would have made victory certain. The drawbacks of a confidence vote were that it would be provocative to the opposition and could too easily be interpreted as displaying a lack of confidence in the fidelity of Government deputies: in any case it is not a tactic that could reasonably be used for every vote on the provisions of the decree.

3. At first sight it may be surprising that the Government could not get a clear majority in a normal ballot. The three parties in the coalition between them muster more than half of the votes in the Chamber (and the Senate). But the Christian Democrats have two grave weaknesses. The first is lack of discipline: whereas the PCI can always guarantee a near 100% turnout for essential votes, DC deputies have a poor record of attendance. For this vote, 50 coalition (mostly DC) deputies were absent, half of them without warning or explanation. The second weakness is the refusal of some members (called "sharpshooters") to vote with their party on certain issues when the ballot is secret: this is most disturbing for Cossiga and his party managers. On this occasion the arithmetic suggests there were about 30 "sharpshooters": either Christian Democrats who dislike some aspects of the decree (including the doubtful practice of reintroducing a decree which has already failed once to be ratified by Parliament) or PSI deputies not reconciled to the Craxi line of cooperation with the DC. The best estimate is that the latter comprise at most 20% of the party, perhaps 12 deputies.

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4. The vote also shows the continuing determination of the PCI to seize every opportunity of attacking the Government - the policy restated by Berlinguer in his major speech at Bologna on 14 September. They were not prepared to confine themselves to fighting for the amendments to the decree which they think desirable, even though many of them will admit in private that part of the proposed package makes good economic sense.

5. All in all, little comfort for Cossiga, who seems unlikely to make his chosen economic policy stick and now knows that every Parliamentary vote could turn into a crisis. But since everything is done by mirrors anyway, there is no objective reason why Cossiga should not again get a grip on the situation.

Yours ever,

R N Culshaw

cc: Mrs K Colvin, Research Dept, FCO

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