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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-00 COPY-01 ADS-00 INR-10 SS-10 CIAE-00 DODE-00
H-01 IO-15 NSC-01 NSAE-00 HA-08 L-03 LAB-04
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R 071551Z JUN 83
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4226
INFO NATO COLLECTIVE
EUROPEAN POLADS COLLECTIVE
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL BELFAST POUCH
AMCONSUL EDINBURGH POUCH

C O N F I D E N T I A L L O N D O N 1 2 0 2 4

PARIS FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY BURT

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: PGOV, UK
SUBJECT: BRITISH ELECTIONS: FOREIGN AFFAIRS PLAYS
- ALMOST NO ROLE

1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.
2. A STRIKING FEATURE OF THE CURRENT CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN THE ABSENCE OF MUCH SERIOUS DISCUSSION OR INTEREST IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS.
3. DEFENSE, OF COURSE, HAS FEATURED PROMINENTLY. BUT DEBATE WAS ESSENTIALLY INWARD TURNING, SINCE IT FOCUSED ON THE GAULLIST ISSUE OF THE INDEPENDENT DETERRENT RATHER THAN THE QUESTIONS OF CONVENTIONAL DEFENSE AND INF DEPLOYMENTS. ATTENTION WAS ON DISAGREEMENT AMONG LABOR

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LEADERS ABOUT THEIR MANIFESTO'S COMMITMENT TO UNILATERAL NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT. IN THE END, THE TORIES MOWED THEM DOWN AND LABOR RETREATED TO DOMESTIC ISSUES. THE PARTY THAT HAD BEEN CAPTURING ATTENTION BY ITS ATTACK ON THE GOVERNMENT'S SECURITY POLICIES WAS SUDDENLY PUT ON THE DEFENSIVE: FOR THE FIRST TIME IN FOUR YEARS LABOR HAD

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TO PRESENT ITS OWN SECURITY POLICIES AS A SERIOUS ALTERNATIVE. IT WAS A FLOP. IN GROSS TERMS THE PUBLIC AGREED WITH THATCHER: BRITAIN SHOULD BE WELL DEFENDED.

4. LABOR'S PLEDGE TO WITHDRAW FROM THE EC SURFACED AS AN ISSUE, BUT NEVER ACHIEVED BROAD RESONANCE. WE THOUGHT THAT AT SOME STAGE THE TORIES WOULD TRY TO USE IT AGAINST LABOR. THERE WAS THE OCCASIONAL PUNCH, BUT THE ISSUE NEVER CAUGHT FIRE. WE BELIEVE THERE HAS BEEN SOME SHIFT IN PUBLIC SENTIMENT IN RECENT MONTHS, AND AGAIN, A GROWING REALIZATION OF THE REAL-WORLD CONSEQUENCES OF LABOR'S POLICY. MOST BRITONS, WE BELIEVE, ARE SATISFIED TO LEAVE MEMBERSHIP AS IT STANDS. THEY ARE NOT EVEN MUCH CONCERNED ABOUT THE PRECISE FIX ON THE EC BUDGET, SO LONG AS THEY BELIEVE, AS THEY DO, THAT THATCHER WILL POUND THE TABLE AND DEFEND THEIR INTERESTS.

5. THE FALKLANDS CAME UP. BUT HERE AGAIN LABOR'S RETREAT WAS FAST, AS HEALEY APOLOGIZED FOR HIS REFERENCE TO THATCHER'S GLORYING IN SLAUGHTER. (LABOR EDUCATION SPOKESMAN NEIL KINNOCK HAS SINCE STUMBLER BACK INTO THE FRAY, INFURIATING MANY BY HIS CLAIM THAT SOLDIERS DIED TO PROVE THAT THATCHER HAD GUTS.) DAVID OWEN DID EFFECTIVELY FLAG THE LONG-TERM PROBLEM OF FORTRESS FALKLANDS. BUT ON THE FALKLANDS THATCHER WAS IMPREGNABLE, AND LABOR, IF ANYTHING, PROBABLY LOST ITSELF SOME VOTES.

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6. BEYOND THOSE THREE ISSUES, THERE HAS BEEN ALMOST NOTHING ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS:

-- THE U.S., AND THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION HAVE BEEN SCARCELY MENTIONED, DESPITE THE FACT THAT SOME MONTHS AGO MICHAEL FOOT SEEMED TO BE RUNNING AS HARD AGAINST REAGAN AS AGAINST THATCHER.

-- ASIDE FROM THE FALKLANDS, NOTHING ON BRITISH OVERSEAS COMMITMENTS: VIRTUALLY NO MENTION OF GIBRALTAR OR HONG KONG OR BELIZE.

-- NOTHING ON AFRICA OR THE MIDDLE EAST.

7. WHAT ALL THIS INDICATES, WE BELIEVE, IS THAT MOST BRITONS ARE MORE CONCERNED ABOUT THE ECONOMY AND THE FUTURE OF THE WELFARE STATE -- AND ABOUT THE INTERNAL WRANGLING IN THE LABOR PARTY AND THE THREAT FROM THE LABOR LEFT -- THAN ABOUT INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS. THE RETREAT

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FROM EMPIRE HAS LEFT ITS MARK. THATCHER, BECAUSE OF HER TOUGHNESS AND STRONG NATIONALIST CREDENTIALS WAS BY AND LARGE UNASSAILABLE ON FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES. INSOFAR AS BRITONS MAY HAVE BEEN CONCERNED, MOST HAVE FELT THAT THATCHER WOULD TAKE CARE OF THEIR INTERESTS. LOUIS

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