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TO PRIORITY FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 949 OF 09 NOVEMBER

INFO SAVING PARIS BMG BERLIN WASHINGTON MOSCOW UKDEL NATO
EAST BERLIN BRUSSELS COPENHAGEN DUBLIN THE HAGUE UKREP BRUSSELS
CICC(G) CGS IN THE FRG

MF

MY TEL NO 945: FDP PARTY CONFERENCE, 5-7 NOVEMBER

1. GENSCHER WAS NARROWLY RE-ELECTED PARTY CHAIRMAN BY 222 VOTES TO 169 WITH 7 ABSTENTIONS. THE CONTRAST WITH 1980, WHEN HE SECURED 90 PER CENT SUPPORT, IS STRIKING. ALTHOUGH HIS RECENT SWITCH OF COALITION PARTNERS WAS APPROVED BY AN EVEN NARROWER VOTE (210:181:7), THE MANNER IN WHICH HE MADE IT, WITHOUT PROPER CONSULTATION OF THE FDP, WAS OVERWHELMINGLY CONDEMNED. GENSCHER'S MAJOR SPEECH WAS A NERVOUS AND UNCONVINCING PERFORMANCE. HIS RE-ELECTION WAS GREETED BY SCENES OF PROTEST UNPRECEDENTED IN GERMAN PARTY CONFERENCES SINCE THE WAR. HE IS STILL IN PLACE, BUT THE CONGRESS WILL PROBABLY HAVE DETRACTED FURTHER FROM HIS ALREADY LOW STANDING WITH THE VOTERS, AT LEAST TEMPORARILY.

2. ALTHOUGH THE CONFERENCE WAS BITTER AND EMOTIVE, A DEFINITE SPLIT IN THE FDP WAS AVOIDED. BUT SOME LEFT WINGERS RESIGNED FROM THE PARTY AND A LEFT WING SPLINTER GROUP MAY SOON BE FORMED. THE DIVISIONS WITHIN THE PARTY, FAR FROM BEING HEALED, WERE PROBABLY MADE DEEPER. THEY ARE LIKELY TO FLARE UP AGAIN AT THE PARTY'S NEXT CONFERENCE IN JANUARY, WHICH IS TO BE DEVOTED TO POLICY FOR THE FEDERAL ELECTIONS SCHEDULED FOR 6 MARCH. SHOULD THE OUTCOME REVEAL CONTINUING DISARRAY, THIS WOULD PROBABLY HARM SIGNIFICANTLY THE PARTY'S CHANCES IN THOSE ELECTIONS.

3. THE RIGHT WING DOMINATED THE DEBATE ON PARTY POLICY. THE CONFERENCE COMMITTED THE FDP TO LASTING COOPERATION WITH THE CDU/CSU. THE LEADERSHIP'S MOTIONS IN ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND HOME AFFAIRS POLICIES WERE ALL APPROVED DESPITE LEFT WING OPPOSITION. ON INF, WHICH I KNOW HAD BEEN CAUSING GENSCHER CONCERN, THE LEADERSHIP'S POSITIONS WERE ALSO SUPPORTED. IN HIS OPENING SPEECH, HOWEVER, GENSCHER HAD UNDERTAKEN TO CONVENE A SPECIAL PARTY CONFERENCE LATE NEXT YEAR (SIMILAR TO THAT ALREADY PLANNED BY THE SPD) WHICH WILL REVIEW THE NEED FOR INF DEPLOYMENT IN THE LIGHT OF THE GENEVA NEGOTIATIONS. HE ALSO UNDERTOOK TO BE BOUND BY THE DECISIONS OF THE CONFERENCE. THIS IS A POTENTIALLY WORRYING DEVELOPMENT IF THE FDP REMAIN IN GOVERNMENT AFTER MARCH, BUT GENSCHER STRESSED THAT THE RUSSIANS WOULD ONLY NEGOTIATE SERIOUSLY IF THEY WERE CONVINCED THAT DEPLOYMENT WOULD TAKE PLACE: AND LEFT WING MOTIONS WHICH SOUGHT TO WEAKEN THE FDP'S COMMITMENT TO DEPLOYMENT WERE DEFEATED.

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4. THE GENERAL VIEW AMONG DELEGATES AT THE END OF THE CONFERENCE WAS THAT THE FDP'S CHANCES OF SURMOUNTING THE 5 PER CENT HURDLE NEXT MARCH AND REMAINING IN THE BUNDESTAG WERE NEGLIGIBLE. BUT THEIR CHANCES IN MARCH SHOULD NOT BE COMPLETELY WRITTEN OFF. SOME VOTERS WILL BE PREPARED TO SUPPORT THE FDP TO PREVENT A CDU/CSU MAJORITY GOVERNMENT WHICH COULD BE DOMINATED BY STRAUSS AS VICE CHANCELLOR OR ALTERNATIVELY A HUNG PARLIAMENT WITH THE GREENS HOLDING THE BALANCE. GENSCHER MADE CLEAR IN HIS SPEECH THAT THE FDP'S ELECTION CAMPAIGN WILL BE DIRECTED AT THIS POTENTIAL. THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY OPEN TO HIM.

5. I SHALL REPORT FURTHER AS THE DUST SETTLES. I THINK THAT THERE IS A CHANCE THAT THE SPECTRE OF FAILURE NEXT YEAR WILL YET, DESPITE THE PERSONAL AND POLICY DIFFERENCES WHICH DOMINATED THIS WEEKEND'S CONFERENCE, EXERCISE A POWERFUL UNIFYING INFLUENCE ON A PARTY FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL.
FCO PLEASE PASS SAVING ADDRESSEES EXCEPT CGS IN THE FRG, BMG BERLIN AND CICC(G)

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