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THE NEW FRENCH COUNCIL OF MINISTERS : MIP5

COMMENT

1. THIS IS A GOVERNMENT IN WHICH THE PRESIDENT'S MEN HAVE VIRTUALLY ALL THE IMPORTANT POSTS (PRIME MINISTER, FINANCE, INTERIOR AND DEFENCE). NEVERTHELESS MITTERRAND HAS KEPT PLACES FOR THE OTHER MAIN TENDENCIES IN THE SOCIALIST PARTY. THE RETURN OF CHEVENEMENT AND THE PROMOTION OF MME BOUCHARDEAU RESTORE THE DIMINISHED CERES AND LEFT-WING REPRESENTATION.

2. CHEYSSON MAY BE SURPRISED AND RELIEVED TO FIND HIS TENURE AT THE QUAI D'ORSAY EXTENDED. IT WAS WIDELY PREDICTED THAT DUMAS WOULD TAKE OVER THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO. BUT IT MAY BE THAT THE IMPRESSIVE JOB DUMAS DID AS MINISTER FOR EUROPE DURING THE FRENCH PRESIDENCY AND HIS EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE AS GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN (ALTHOUGH HE HAS HELD THE JOB LESS THAN A MONTH) LED MITTERRAND TO INSIST THAT HE SHOULD STAY PUT FOR THE TIME BEING.

3. ROCARD WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY BE DISAPPOINTED TO CONTINUE AT AGRICULTURE. HE HAD MADE NO SECRET OF HIS WISH TO MOVE AND WAS WIDELY RUMOURED TO HAVE SET HIS SIGHTS ON SUCCEEDING DELORS AS MINISTER OF FINANCE. MITTERRAND WOULD PROBABLY HAVE REJECTED ANY SUCH MOVE IN ORDER TO KEEP AN OLD RIVAL AWAY FROM SUCH A KEY POSITION. HOWEVER, THE APPOINTMENT OF BEREGOVY TO TAKE DELORS' PLACE IS SOMETHING OF A SURPRISE. HE HAS HAD SOME SUCCESS IN BRINGING THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACCOUNT INTO ORDER, BUT DURING THE INTERNAL GOVERNMENT DEBATES ON ECONOMIC POLICY IN 1982 AND EARLY 1983 HE MADE LITTLE SECRET OF HIS OPPOSITION TO DELORS AND HIS CERTAINTY THAT THE POLICY OF RIGOUR WOULD FAIL. HE HAS PRESUMABLY REVISED HIS OPINIONS SINCE THEN.

4. FABRIS HAS SPLIT HIS FORMER RESPONSIBILITIES FOR INDUSTRY AND RESEARCH BETWEEN MME CRESSON AND CURHEN (A TECHNICIAN), ALTHOUGH MME CRESSON HAS BEEN MADE RESPONSIBLE FOR "INDUSTRIAL REDEPLOYMENT" RATHER THAN SIMPLY "INDUSTRY". IT IS TOO SOON TO KNOW WHAT DIFFERENCE, IF ANY, THE CHANGE OF TITLE IMPLIES. BUT AS FAR AS MME CRESSON IS CONCERNED, THE COMBINATION OF THE EXTERNAL TRADE AND INDUSTRY PORTFOLIES REPRESENTS A PROMOTION, DESPITE A SOMEWHAT UNEVEN RECORD DURING THE LAST ADMINISTRATION.

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5. A SURPRISING SURVIVOR IS DEFFERRE. BUT HE LOSES HIS HOLD ON THE REINS OF POWER AS MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR AND DECENTRALISATION, AND ALTHOUGH GIVEN FORMAL PROMOTION TO THE RANK OF 'MINISTRE D'ETAT'. HE NOW HAS MUCH REDUCED RESPONSIBILITIES. HIS FORMER POST HAS BEEN ASSUMED BY PIERRE JOXE, THE LEADER OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY GROUP IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, ANOTHER INTIMATE OF MITTERRAND, WHO RETURNS TO THE GOVERNMENT HAVING BRIEFLY BEEN MINISTER OF INDUSTRY IN 1981.

6. THE APPOINTMENT OF CHEVENEMENT (LEADER OF THE LEFT WING CERES FACTION OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY, MINISTER FROM 1981 - 1983, AND CONSTANT CRITIC OF DELORS' AUSTERITY PROGRAMME) AS MINISTER OF EDUCATION IS ATTRIBUTABLE TO MITTERRAND'S NEED TO ENSURE THAT THE LEFT WING OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY IS ON BOARD, ESPECIALLY NOW THAT THE COMMUNIST PARTY HAS ALL BUT LEFT THE SHIP. BUT CHEVENEMENT HAS BEEN GIVEN A DIFFICULT PORTFOLIO. IT WILL FALL TO HIM TO HANDLE THE CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM.

7. AS FAR AS THE UK IS CONCERNED, THE FACT THAT CHEYSSON, DUMAS, HERNU AND ROCARD REMAIN IN PLACE WILL REDUCE THE IMPACT OF THE CHANGES ON OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS.

8. WE RECOMMEND THAT BRITISH MINISTERS SHOULD SEND BRIEF MESSAGES TO THEIR OPPOSITE NUMBER WHERE THESE ARE NEW IN THEIR FUNCTIONS OR WHERE A MINISTER HAS ASSUMED A MAJOR NEW RESPONSIBILITY (EG QUILES FOR TRANSPORT). WE AM SURE IT WOULD ALSO BE APPRECIATED IF THE CHANCELLOR WERE TO SEND DELORS A FAREWELL MESSAGE.

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FCO/WHITEHALL (PALACE)

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