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Prime Minister

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

You may like to
glance at the under-lined
passages of the
despatch about the

12 December 1985

Right in France.

Dear Charles,

CDP
13/12.

The French Political Scene: Anxieties and Ambitions

I enclose advance copies of two despatches we have just received from Sir John Fretwell. They may be of interest to the Prime Minister.

Yours ever,

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SUMMARY

THE FRENCH POLITICAL SCENE:
ANXIETIES AND AMBITIONS ON THE RIGHT

1. Opinion polls and the Socialists' record in government encourage the Right (RPR and UDF) to think that the March elections will give them back control of the National Assembly. But they are uncertain of holding on to their apparent lead, and torn by differences of personalities and policies. (Paras 1-7.)

2. Barre, Chirac and Giscard all hope to use an election victory by the Right to their own advantage. Barre rejects the idea of a right-wing government "cohabiting" with Mitterrand, arguing that if the Right win substantially, Mitterrand should resign. He calculates that with his level of personal support he would be well placed to win the ensuing Presidential election. If cohabitation is nonetheless attempted and works as badly as he predicts, he would still hope to be well placed for a later contest. (Paras 9-12.)

3. Chirac also hopes for a convincing victory, with a strong RPR showing, to force Mitterrand to call on him to be Prime Minister. He would probably introduce energetic, radical policies: economic liberalism at home, spirited defence of French interests abroad. He hopes these policies would prove popular enough for him to overtake Barre. If they seem not to be achieving this result, he might try to provoke a show-down with Mitterrand. But it is not certain

/that



that the electorate would be behind him if he did so.

(Paras 13-19.)

4. Giscard would prefer a hung outcome. He has come up a long way from defeat in 1981, and now speaks firmly in favour of cohabitation. He hopes that if Mitterrand felt it appropriate to choose a Prime Minister from the centre, who could attract support also from some of the Socialists, he might call on Giscard. But Giscard's public appeal remains limited; and there are others who could fit that bill. (Paras 20-24.)

5. The Presidential election campaign will start as soon as the legislative elections are over. The Right will need to make a success of Government, whoever the Prime Minister, if they are to regain the Presidency in 1988. Policy differences, personal rivalries, and Mitterrand's manoeuvrings may all pose problems for them: hence their nervousness. (Paras 25-27.)