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FM CANBERRA 160430Z OCT 80

TO ROUTINE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 570 OF 16 OCTOBER

MY TELNO 539 OF 08 OCTOBER

AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL ELECTION : 18 OCTOBER

1. LABOR'S GOOD SHOWING IN THE OPINION POLLS REPORTED IN MY TUR HAS BEEN MAINTAINED. THE RESULTS PUBLISHED YESTERDAY OF A SURVEY TAKEN LAST WEEKEND, SUPPORTED BY OTHERS BASED ON SURVEYS LAST WEEK, PUT LABOR COMFORTABLY AHEAD. TRANSLATED INTO SEATS, THE SWING WOULD MEAN A LABOR MAJORITY IN TWO FIGURES. AND THE DEMOCRATS WOULD HOLD THE BALANCE IN THE SENATE.

2. THE SURPRISING FAILURE OF THE COALITION TO COUNTER THE ADVERSE SWING SEEMS TO REFLECT A DISENCHANTMENT WITH CONFRONTATIONAL POLITICS AND THUS WITH MR FRASER WHOSE AGGRESSIVENESS CONTRASTS WITH THE RELATIVELY CALM AND REASONED APPROACH PROJECTED BY MR HAYDEN (AND HIS TROIKA COLLEAGUES MR BOB HAWKE AND MR NEVILLE WRAN). AGAIN, THE CONCENTRATION OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY ON SHORTER TERM HELP TO THE FAMILY (COMPARED WITH THE COALITION'S EMPHASIS ON THE LONGER TERM BENEFITS OF RESPONSIBLE DEVELOPMENT) MAY BE CAPTURING SUPPORT (PARTICULARLY OF THE YOUNG MIDDLE CLASS WHOSE GROUP IS A DISPROPORTIONATELY LARGE ONE IN THE MARGINAL METROPOLITAN SEATS).

3. THE PERCENTAGE SWING TO LABOR IS MUCH GREATER THAN MARGINS OF ERROR IN PAST OPINION POLLS. IT IS NOT OF COURSE POSSIBLE TO ESTIMATE THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE OPINION POLLS WILL INFLUENCE THE EVENTUAL (AND COMPULSORY) VOTE OF THE ELECTORATE. PERHAPS THEY HAVE THE GREATEST INFLUENCE OVER THE JOURNALISTS IN WHOSE NEWSPAPERS THEY ARE PUBLISHED. I DETECT A GROWING BELIEF IN A LABOR VICTORY AMONG THE LATTER. THE ELECTION WILL BE WON OR LOST IN MARGINAL CONSTITUENCIES IN MELBOURNE AND SYDNEY, AND I SENSE A STRONGER BELIEF IN MR FRASER'S SURVIVAL IN SYDNEY. THE PUBLIC SERVANTS IN CANBERRA ARE GENUINELY CONFUSED, AS WELL AS APPREHENSIVE OF THE UPHEAVALS, BOTH POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE, WHICH A CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT WOULD MEAN.

4. FOR MYSELF, LIKE MANY OTHERS WITH WHOM I HAVE RECENTLY TALKED, I STILL CANNOT BRING MYSELF TO BELIEVE THAT MR FRASER WILL BE DEFEATED. BUT, AS WAS NOT THE CASE WHEN I LAST REPORTED, I SHOULD NOT NOW BE AT ALL SURPRISED.

MASON

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THIS TELEGRAM
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