

GRS 610

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FM CANBERRA 050005Z JUN 81

TO ROUTINE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 243 OF 5 JUNE

VISIT BY MR STREET : BACKGROUND

1. MR STREET'S UK VISIT COMES AT THE END OF A HECTIC THREE-WEEK PERIOD IN AUSTRALIAN POLITICS. THE COALITION HAVE BEEN UNDER PRESSURE BOTH IN PARLIAMENT, TRYING TO PUSH THROUGH LEGISLATION BEFORE THE END OF JUNE, WHEN THEY LOSE CONTROL OF THE SENATE; AND IN THEIR RELATIONS WITH THE STATES, WHERE A CONFRONTATION HAS DEVELOPED OVER THE LEVEL OF FEDERALLY-FUNDED STATE REVENUE. TWO STATE LIBERAL LEADERS (MR HAMER, PREMIER OF VICTORIA, AND MR MASON, OPPOSITION LEADER IN NSW) HAVE ALSO BEEN REPLACED, WHILE SIR C COURT (WA) AND MR BJELKE-PETERSEN (QLD) LOSE NO OPPORTUNITY TO FURTHER THE INTERESTS OF THEIR STATES IN FEDERAL MATTERS. IN VICTORIA, MR STREET'S HOME STATE, MR HAMER STOOD DOWN NOT LONG BEFORE HE WAS DUE TO RETIRE, IN THE FACE OF CONCERTED OPPOSITION TO HIS STYLE OF GOVERNMENT AND QUOTE LACK OF LEADERSHIP UNQUOTE. HIS SUCCESSOR (THE FORMER DEPUTY PREMIER) MR LINDSAY THOMPSON WAS ELECTED IN SPITE OF VERY STRONG SUPPORT IN THE PARTY FOR MR BORTHWICK (HEALTH MINISTER). HE HAS BEGUN HIS PREMIERSHIP BY EMPHASISING THAT A POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS VICTORIA BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WILL BE ESSENTIAL IF THE LIBERALS ARE TO WIN THE STATE ELECTION DUE IN MAY. THE GOVERNMENT PUSHED THROUGH THE TWO-AIRLINE AGREEMENT IN SPITE OF OPPOSITION FROM 8 BACKBENCHERS AND 3 SENATORS WHO CROSSED THE FLOOR.

2. IN CONTRAST TO THE SESSIONS IN PARLIAMENT, THE LIBERAL PARTY CONVENTION LAST WEEK GENERATED CHARACTERISTICALLY LITTLE HEAT, AND PROVIDED THE OPPORTUNITY FOR DEMONSTRATIONS OF PARTY UNITY IN THE FACE OF AMOST UNPRECEDENTED UPHEAVALS. MR HAMER ATTENDED, AND WAS RECEIVED AS THOUGH HE WAS STILL A SIGNIFICANT FIGURE ON THE LIBERAL PLATFORM. THE NEW OPPOSITION LEADER IN NSW, MR MACDONALD, WAS ALSO PROMINENT THOUGH HIS ELECTION HAD NOT THEN BEEN DECLARED.

3. ALTHOUGH DOMESTIC POLITICS MAY BE UNUSUALLY VOLATILE, FOREIGN AFFAIRS ARE PERHAPS CALDER. AS YOU KNOW, MR STREET WILL BE DELIVERING THE INVITATION TO CHOGM AND A NUMBER OF OTHER MINISTERS ARE ALSO VISITING EACH OF THE OTHER COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES FOR THIS PURPOSE: THIS HAS RAISED ORCHESTRATED OPPOSITION HOWLS OVER THE EXCESSIVE COST OF THIS EXERCISE, NOT TO MENTION CHOGM ITSELF. IN AN EFFORT TO PROTECT THE LATTER EVENT, MR STREET HAS TRIED TO PUT PRESSURE ON THE NEW ZEALANDERS TO CANCEL THE SPRINGBOK TOUR, BUT HAS HAD TO TREAD CAREFULLY IN VIEW OF THE SENSITIVITY (POSSIBLY ONLY TEMPORARY) WHICH BEDEVILS ANZ RELATIONS AT PRESENT.

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4. A QUEENSLAND ABORIGINAL LEADER IS ORGANISING A MISSION TO VISIT AFRICAN COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES, TO URGE THEM TO BOYCOTT THE BRISBANE COMMONWEALTH GAMES. IF THEY DO NOT WIN SUPPORT FOR A BOYCOTT, THEY CLAIM THEY WILL EMBARRASS AFRICAN COMPETITORS BY DISRUPTING THE GAMES. I THINK THERE IS A GOOD CHANCE THAT THE MISSION WILL BE TALKED OUT OF GOING; BUT WE HAVE CERTAINLY NOT HEARD THE LAST OF SUCH INITIATIVES.

5. THE CURRENT STRIKE BY AUSTRALIAN TELECOMMUNICATIONS UNIONS, POISED TO GET WORSE, MAY REMIND MR STREET OF A SIMILAR STRIKE TWO YEARS AGO (ON THE EVE OF MRS THATCHER'S VISIT HERE) WHEN HE WAS HIMSELF MINISTER FOR INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS. THE STRIKES, IN SUPPORT OF A STRAIGHTFORWARD PAY CLAIM, LACK THE BIZARRE UNDERTONES OF MANY AUSTRALIAN STRIKES; BUT IN A COUNTRY OF AUSTRALIA'S SIZE, TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND AVIATION (CF THE RECENT QANTAS AND DOMESTIC AIRLINE HOSTESSES' STRIKES) ARE FIELDS IN WHICH INDUSTRIAL ACTION, DEPRESSINGLY REGULAR, BY RELATIVELY FEW PEOPLE CAUSES GREAT IRRITATION AND DISRUPTION.

6. AS A VICTORIAN FROM AN OLD VICTORIAN FAMILY, MR STREET WILL BE PARTICULARLY PREOCCUPIED, AND NO DOUBT READY TO TALK ABOUT, THE MESS INTO WHICH THE LIBERALS IN HIS STATE HAVE MANAGED TO GET THEMSELVES. HIS MIND WILL ALSO BE FULL OF THE UNHELPFUL ACTIVITIES OF HIS FELLOW VICTORIAN, AND SUCCESSOR AT INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS, MR PEACOCK. FINALLY, AS A KEEN AND SKILFUL CRICKETER (WHO ONCE PLAYED FOR VICTORIA) HE WILL BE UNDERSTANDABLY ANXIOUS ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE OF THE TOURING TEAM.

MASON

LIMITED
SPD
SIR E. YONDE
MR DONALD

THIS TELEGRAM
WAS NOT
ADVANCED

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