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FM CANBERRA 210235Z FEB 83
TO IMMEDIATE FCO
TELEGRAM NUMBER 74 OF 21 FEBRUARY
INFO SAVING BRISBANE, MELBOURNE, PERTH, SYDNEY

MF

MY TEL NO 56: AUSTRALIAN GENERAL ELECTION

SUMMARY

JUST OVER HALF WAY THROUGH THE CAMPAIGN, I NOW FOR THE FIRST TIME RATE THE LABOR PARTY'S CHANCES AS BETTER THAN EVENS.

1. THE WEEKEND JUST PAST MARKED ROUGHLY THE MID-POINT IN THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN. IT WAS DISTINGUISHED, FIRST, BY CONTINUED SHOCK OVER THE BUSH-FIRE LOSS OF LIFE, AND A CONSEQUENT DIMINUTION IN CAMPAIGNING; AND SECOND AND MORE IMPORTANTLY BY A SURPRISINGLY EASY WIN FOR THE LABOR PARTY IN THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN STATE ELECTION ON 19 FEBRUARY, WHERE THEY ACHIEVED AN 8 PERCENT, AND WERE WIDELY THOUGHT UNLIKELY TO ACHIEVE IT.

2. MIPTS REPORT THE PROGRESS OF THE CAMPAIGN SO FAR, AND THE REACTIONS OF THE PRESS.

3. THE ALP HAVE KEPT WELL AHEAD IN THE OPINION POLLS, AS THEY USUALLY DO AT THIS STAGE. BUT MOST OBSERVERS ARE LOOKING FOR A GRANDSTAND FINISH BY THE HIGHLY PROFESSIONAL LIBERAL PARTY MACHINE. UNTIL NOW, I HAVE DETECTED AMONGST THE MANY INFORMED AND THOUGHTFUL PEOPLE WHOM MY STAFF AND I HAVE BEEN CONSULTING A BELIEF THAT, WHILE THE RESULT WILL BE EXTREMELY CLOSE, THE LIBERALS SHOULD JUST SCRAPE HOME. THIS IS NOT LEAST BECAUSE OF EXPECTED MISGIVINGS IN THE ACTUAL POLLING-BOOTH ABOUT MR HAWKE'S SUITABILITY, DESPITE HIS POPULARITY, TO BE PRIME MINISTER MISGIVINGS WHICH INCIDENTALLY I SHARE AND WILL EXPLAIN IN DETAIL SHOULD HE WIN.

4. HOWEVER, THESE SOME PEOPLE, AND MOST PRESS COMMENTATORS, AND INDEED I MYSELF, HAD EXPECTED THE LIBERALS TO HOLD WESTERN AUSTRALIA. THAT THEY HAVE LOST, BY A WIDE MARGIN BY AUSTRALIAN STANDARDS, WILL NOT BE ALL THAT IMPORTANT IN TERMS OF WESTERN AUSTRALIAN SEATS IN THE FEDERAL ELECTION, AS IT IS IN NEW SOUTH WALES, AND TO A LESSER EXTENT VICTORIA AND QUEENSLAND, THAT THE BATTLE WILL BE WON OR LOST. BUT IT SEEMS LIKELY TO GIVE THE LABOR PARTY A TREMENDOUS FILLIP THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY, AND THE LIBERAL PARTY WILL HAVE TO FIGHT THAT MUCH HARDER IN THE 12 DAYS NOW LEFT. IT LOOKS AS THOUGH THEIR MAIN ATTACK WILL BE ON THE FORTHCOMING LABOR PARTY TRADE UNION 'ACCORD' ON A PRICES AND INCOMES POLICY. WHICH THEY WILL REPRESENT AS HANDING GOVERNMENT OVER TO THE UNION BOSSES.

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5. I WILL WAIT UNTIL NEARER POLLING DAY BEFORE I NAIL MY COLOURS TO THE MAST ABOUT THE RESULT. BUT IT IS RIGHT THAT I SHOULD REPORT THAT, AFTER THE WESTERN AUSTRALIA ELECTION, I NOW HAVE TO RATE THE LABOR PARTY AT A BETTER THAN EVENS, AS I DID NOT BEFORE.

MASON

STANDARD
SPD
MR DONALD
CABINET OFFICE

COPIES SENT TO
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