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MY TELNO 763: CANADIAN FEDERAL ELECTION

SUMMARY

1. POLLS CONDUCTED AFTER THE TV DEBATES BETWEEN THE PARTY LEADERS SHOW MAJOR GAINS FOR THE LIBERALS, WITH THE OUTCOME OF THE ELECTION NO LONGER ASSURED. THE LIBERAL LEADER HAS SUCCEEDED IN FOCUSING PUBLIC OPINION ON THE FREE TRADE AGREEMENT AND, UNLESS MULRONEY CAN ALLAY THE FEARS, ON WHICH TURNER HAS SUCCESSFULLY PLAYED, HE MAY WELL FAIL TO WIN AN OVERALL MAJORITY.

DETAIL

2. YOU MAY LIKE TO HAVE AN UPDATE ON THE CANADIAN ELECTION SCENE PRIOR TO THE CANADIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER'S CALL ON THE PRIME MINISTER ON 1 NOVEMBER.

3. JOHN TURNER, THE LIBERAL LEADER, IS NOW SEEN AS THE CLEAR WINNER OF THE TV DEBATES BETWEEN THE THREE PARTY LEADERS ON 24 AND 25 OCTOBER AND AS HAVING BOTH WON THE ARGUMENT AND FOCUSED NATIONAL ATTENTION ON THE FREE TRADE AGREEMENT WITH THE US TO THE VIRTUAL EXCLUSION OF OTHER ISSUES. IN DOING SO HE HAS SUCCEEDED IN CAPITALISING ON THE HISTORIC AND DEEPLY FELT CANADIAN FEARS OF ABSORPTION BY THE US AND IN DEPICTING MULRONEY AS QUOTE YIELDING THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM UNQUOTE.

4. IN THE THREE MOST RECENT POLLS SUPPORT FOR THE LIBERALS HAS RISEN SHARPLY. A CANADIAN TELEVISION (CTV) POLL PUBLISHED ON 30 OCTOBER PUT THE LIBERALS IN THE LEAD FOR THE FIRST TIME WITH 39 PER CENT OF THE VOTE, THE CONSERVATIVES AT 35 PER CENT AND THE NDP AT 23 PER CENT. AN ANGUS REID POLL THE PREVIOUS DAY PUT THE LIBERALS AND THE CONSERVATIVES TOGETHER IN FIRST PLACE, EACH WITH 35 PER CENT OF THE VOTE, AND THE NDP AT 28 PER CENT. GALLUP, PUBLISHED TODAY, IS RATHER LESS DRAMATIC AND SHOWS THE CONSERVATIVES STILL IN THE LEAD WITH 38 PER CENT (DOWN 2 POINTS), FOLLOWED BY THE LIBERALS WITH 32 PERCENT (UP 4 POINTS) AND THE NDP AT 27 PER CENT.

5. ALL THE POLLS ARE AGREED ON THE EXTREME VOLATILITY OF VOTING

INTENTIONS, ESPECIALLY AMONG LIBERAL SUPPORTERS OF WHOM ALMOST 30 PER CENT OF THOSE QUESTIONED IN THE CTV POLL SAID THEY MIGHT CHANGE THEIR MINDS BEFORE THE ELECTION. TRANSLATED INTO SEATS IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, THE GALLUP POLL WOULD STILL GIVE THE CONSERVATIVES A SMALL OVERALL MAJORITY. BUT THE MARGIN OF ERROR IS SUCH THAT EVEN A SLIGHT SHIFT IN THE POPULAR VOTE COULD CHANGE THIS.

6. THE EFFECT OF THIS SUDDEN CHANGE IN LIBERAL FORTUNES ON THE MORALE OF THE PARTY WORKERS AND ON TURNER HIMSELF HAS BEEN ELECTRIFYING. UNTIL A WEEK AGO, TURNER LOOKED LIKE A CERTAIN LOSER AND THERE WAS WIDESPREAD SPECULATION THAT HE MIGHT EVEN BE DUMPED BY HIS OWN PARTY WHILE THE ELECTION WAS IN PROGRESS. ALL THIS HAS NOW CHANGED AND THE ELECTION RESULT IS SEEN AS WINNABLE, WITH THE LIBERALS CLOSING RANKS BEHIND THEIR LEADER. FOR THE CONSERVATIVES, IT WILL NO LONGER BE ENOUGH TO REST ON THEIR RECORD AND SEEK TO STAY ALOOF: MULRONEY MUST EITHER WIN THE DEBATE ON FREE TRADE OR RISK DEFEAT AT THE POLLS. AT OTTAWA DINNER TABLES TURNER SUPPORTERS, WHO HAVE BEEN LYING VERY LOW IN RECENT WEEKS, ARE NOW REDISCOVERING THEIR OLD LOYALTIES.

7. FOR THE CANADIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER PERSONALLY, WHO IS A FORMER LIBERAL MINISTER BUT ALSO A FIRM SUPPORTER OF THE FREE TRADE AGREEMENT AND A MULRONEY NOMINEE, A TURNER VICTORY WOULD BE HIGHLY EMBARRASSING AND COULD EVEN COST HIM HIS JOB.

8. FCO PLEASE ADVANCE TO PRIVATE SECRETARY/NO 10 DOWNING STREET.

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