

RESTRICTED
FM OTTAWA
TO IMMEDIATE FCO
TELNO 806
OF 172030Z NOVEMBER 88
INFO ROUTINE WASHINGTON
INFO SAVING MONTREAL, TORONTO, EDMONTON, VANCOUVER

MY TELNO 794: CANADIAN FEDERAL ELECTION

SUMMARY

1. LAST LAP OF A ROLLER-COASTER CAMPAIGN. THE ONLY CERTAINTY IS THAT THE NDP WILL NOT ACHIEVE THEIR DECLARED AMBITION OF BECOMING THE OFFICIAL OPPOSITION. TOUCH-AND-GO FOR THE CONSERVATIVES. A LIBERAL/NDP COALITION NOT TO BE TOTALLY EXCLUDED.

DETAIL

2. IN THIS ELECTION, FORECASTING IS A MUG'S GAME. ALL CANADIAN COMMENTATORS AGREE THAT THE SWINGS OF OPINION DURING THE CAMPAIGN ITSELF HAVE BEEN UNPRECEDENTED. IT WOULD THEREFORE BE RASH TO EXCLUDE ANOTHER LAST-MINUTE CHANGE. THE EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THAT THE CONSERVATIVES HAVE BEEN ABLE TO ALLAY THE WORST FEARS AROUSED BY THE OPPOSITION PARTIES OVER FREE TRADE, WITHOUT DISPOSING EITHER OF AN UNDERLYING UNEASE OR OF SPECIFIC LOCAL CONCERNS. MULRONEY HAS PROBABLY SUCCEEDED IN HOLDING ONTO THE BULK OF THE QUEBEC VOTE, WHERE HE NEEDS TO TAKE A MINIMUM OF 50 SEATS (OUT OF 75) IF HE IS TO HAVE ANY HOPE OF SECURING A MAJORITY GOVERNMENT. THE CONSERVATIVES HAVE ALMOST CERTAINLY LOST GROUND IN THE ATLANTIC PROVINCES AND ARE UNLIKELY TO TAKE MORE THAN 16 OF THE 32 SEATS THERE. IN THE PRAIRIES, CONSERVATIVE STRENGTH IN ALBERTA SHOULD ENSURE THAT THEY GET AT LEAST 33 OF THE 55 SEATS. IN BRITISH COLUMBIA A LATE LIBERAL SURGE MAY HAVE THE PARADOXICAL EFFECT OF SAVING SOME CONSERVATIVE SEATS FROM THE NDP, RESULTING IN A SCORE OF UP TO 14 OUT OF 32 SEATS. THE THREE SEATS AVAILABLE TO THE YUKON AND NORTH WEST TERRITORIES WILL PROBABLY GO TO OPPOSITION PARTIES. THAT LEAVES THE CONSERVATIVES NEEDING AT LEAST 35 OF ONTARIO'S 99 SEATS TO WIN A MAJORITY. NO ONE IS WAGERING MUCH THAT THEY CAN ACHIEVE THIS. CLOSE COMPETITION BETWEEN THE THREE MAIN PARTIES AND THE UNCERTAIN IMPACT OF FRINGE PARTIES (IN GENERAL, TO THE DISADVANTAGE OF THE CONSERVATIVES) ARE THE MAIN COMPLICATIONS. AS THE HEAD OF ONE POLLING ORGANISATION PUT IT: THE VOTERS ARE IN A USED CAR LOT AND KNOW THEY HAVE TO BUY A CAR. AT PRESENT THEY ARE GOING ROUND KICKING THE WHEELS OF THOSE ON OFFER.

3. SO THE CONSERVATIVES COULD SCRAPE HOME WITH AN OVERALL MAJORITY OR, IF THEIR RECENT REVIVAL CONTINUES (AND THEIR LAST-MINUTE ADVERTISING BLITZ PROVES WELL-DIRECTED) DO EVEN BETTER. I THINK THEY SHOULD JUST MAKE IT. BUT IT IS ALSO VERY POSSIBLE THAT THEY WILL FALL SHORT. WHAT HAPPENS THEN DEPENDS ON HOW THE THREE PARTIES ARE PLACED. SOME OF THE PERMUTATIONS ARE CONSIDERED IN MIFT. MY SECOND IFT LOOKS AT THE MAIN CAUSES OF CONCERN TO US IN THE LIBERAL PLATFORM. SUCH WOULD OF COURSE DEPEND ON THE CHARACTER OF ANY DEAL THEY MIGHT DO WITH THE NDP. MEANWHILE ALL THAT CAN BE SAID WITH ANY CONFIDENCE IS THAT THE NDP WILL NOT FORM THE OFFICIAL OPPOSITION AND THAT, DESPITE CURRENT PROTESTATIONS TO THE CONTRARY, A LIBERAL/NDP COALITION IS NOT TO BE EXCLUDED.

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