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FM WASHINGTON 232358Z SEP 80
 TO PRIORITY FCO
 TELEGRAM NUMBER 4087 OF 23 SEPTEMBER
 INFO UKMIS NEW YORK (FOR S OF S'S PARTY)
 INFO SAVING ALL CGS USA.

*Prime Minister**You might like to
glance at this
assessment of the
television debate**MAP*

MY TELNO 3979: US PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

1. THE FIRST (AND QUITE POSSIBLY THE ONLY) TELEVISED QUOTE PRESIDENTIAL UNQUOTE DEBATE OF THE CURRENT CAMPAIGN TOOK PLACE IN BALTIMORE ON 21 SEPTEMBER. PRESIDENT CARTER HAVING MAINTAINED HIS REFUSAL TO APPEAR WITH REAGAN AND ANDERSON TOGETHER BEFORE HE HAD DEBATED REAGAN ALONE, THE DEBATE WENT AHEAD WITHOUT HIM. IT WAS CARRIED LIVE BY TWO OF THE THREE MAIN TELEVISION NETWORKS AND WAS WATCHED BY AN ESTIMATED 50 MILLION VIEWERS.
2. THERE WAS NO REAL DEBATE AS SUCH. REAGAN AND ANDERSON EACH ANSWERED IN TURN A SERIES OF QUESTIONS FROM A PANEL OF JOURNALISTS. THE QUESTIONS COVERED INFLATION, ENERGY, DEFENCE, PROBLEMS OF INNER CITIES, AND THE ROLE OF CHURCH AND STATE (INCLUDING THE QUESTION OF A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT TO BAN ABORTION WHICH IS FAVOURED BY REAGAN AND OPPOSED BY ANDERSON). NEITHER PARTICIPANT SAID ANYTHING NEW AND THE ABSENCE OF FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS ENABLED EACH OF THEM TO ADDRESS OR IGNORE THE ORIGINAL QUESTION AS HE CHOSE. NEITHER SCORED ANY FORENSIC KNOCK-OUT BLOWS OR MADE ANY GAFFES. EACH THEREFORE WENT AWAY SATISFIED.
3. THE PRESS HAVE CONCLUDED THAT UNINTERRUPTED ACCESS TO A NATIONAL TELEVISION AUDIENCE CAN ONLY HAVE WORKED TO THE BENEFIT OF ANDERSON AND REAGAN AND THAT, BY THE SAME TOKEN, THE PRESIDENT MISSED OUT BY NOT BEING THERE. ANDERSON, AS THE LEAST KNOWN, HAD THE MOST TO GAIN. DESPITE THE SOMETIMES HECTORING TONE OF HIS DELIVERY, HE WAS THE STRONGER ON FACT AND ARGUMENT AND SUCCEEDED IN ESTABLISHING THAT HE DIFFERED FROM REAGAN ON MOST ISSUES. REAGAN, WHO WAS AMIABLY PATRONISING TOWARDS ANDERSON, CAME ACROSS AS THE MORE RELAXED PERFORMER AND FREQUENTLY FELL BACK ON HIS FAMILIAR ONE-LINERS AND ON A WELL WORN EMOTIONAL PERORATION (QUOTE OUR DESTINY CAN BUILD A LAND HERE THAT WILL BE FOR ALL MANKIND A SHINING CITY ON A HILL UNQUOTE ETC).
4. THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS PLAN AT LEAST ONE MORE PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE BEFORE 4 NOVEMBER BUT IT IS AT PRESENT DOUBTFUL WHETHER REAGAN WILL BE PREPARED TO DEBATE ANDERSON ALONE A SECOND TIME AND EQUALLY DOUBTFUL WHETHER HE WILL AGREE TO DEBATE THE PRESIDENT ALONE WITHOUT ANDERSON. THE PRESIDENT HIMSELF ATTEMPTED TO MINIMISE THE IMPACT OF LAST SUNDAY'S DEBATE BEFOREHAND BY HOLDING HIS OWN

*mf**/PLevs*

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PRESS CONFERENCE ON THURSDAY 18 SEPTEMBER. HE USED HIS OPENING PRESENTATION TO GIVE A SKILLFUL RESUME OF HIS ADMINISTRATION'S ACHIEVEMENTS IN FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC AFFAIRS, BUT THE QUESTION PERIOD TURNED SOUR ON HIM. HE WAS CHALLENGED SEVERAL TIMES TO JUSTIFY HIS SUGGESTION IN A RECENT CAMPAIGN SPEECH THAT REAGAN WAS INJECTING QUOTE RACISM AND HATRED UNQUOTE INTO THE CAMPAIGN. IN ATTEMPTING TO EXPLAIN AWAY HIS REMARKS, THE PRESIDENT WAS FORCED TO BACKTRACK. THE OVERALL IMPACT OF THE PRESS CONFERENCE, AND OF THE PRESIDENT'S NON-PARTICIPATION IN SUNDAY'S DEBATE, HAS BEEN TO MAKE HIM LOOK MEAN. BOTH THE PRESS AND REAGAN ARE MAKING GREAT PLAY WITH THIS. BUT CARTER'S CAMPAIGN STYLE WAS MUCH THE SAME FOUR YEARS AGO AND THE REAL TEST FOR THE PRESIDENT MAY WELL BE HOW HE HANDLES EVENTS IN THE REAL WORLD OVER THE NEXT FEW WEEKS.

HENDERSON

*FCO/WHITEHALL
NAD*

THIS TELEGRAM
WAS NOT
ADVANCED

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