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FM CAPE TOWN

TO PRIORITY FCO

TELNO 103

OF 271000Z FEBRUARY 87

INFO ROUTINE PRETORIA, JOHANNESBURG

INFO SAVING CAPE TOWN CONSULATE, DURBAN

MY TELNO 40: SOUTH AFRICAN ELECTION: THE RIGHT WING

SUMMARY

1. DESPITE A GROWING CHALLENGE FROM THE LEFT, THE RULING NATIONAL PARTY ENTERS THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN INTENT MAINLY UPON KEEPING THE RIGHT AT BAY. YET RIGHT WING PARTIES ARE STILL COMPETING AGAINST THEMSELVES. WINNING SEATS FROM THE NP WILL DEPEND CRUCIALLY ON WHETHER THE RIGHT WING VOTE IS SPLIT IN THE CONSTITUENCIES.

DETAIL

2. THE RIGHT WING CONSISTS OF ONE MEDIUM-SIZED POLITICAL PARTY, THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY (CP) WHICH HAS 17 OF THE 166 DIRECTLY ELECTED WHITE SEATS, AND ONE TINY PARTY, THE HERSTINGTE NATIONAL PARTY (HNP) WITH ONE SEAT GAINED IN A BY-ELECTION IN 1985. BEHIND THEM IS THE AFRIKANER WEERSTANDS BEWEGING (AWB), A MILITARIST PRESSURE GROUP WITH A HITHERTO DORMANT POLITICAL PARTY ATTACHED.

3. FIRST THE HNP IN 1969 AND THEN THE CP IN 1982 WERE CREATED FROM DEFECTIONS FROM THE MAINSTREAM NATIONAL PARTY (NP) IN PROTEST AGAINST THE LATTER'S DEVIATION FROM PURE APARTHEID. IN THE LAST ELECTION (1981), THE HNP GAINED 15 PER CENT OF THE TOTAL VOTE BUT NOT A SINGLE SEAT. THE CP CAME INTO BEING A YEAR LATER, WHEN 17 NP MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT CROSSED THE FLOOR (A MERE 3 OF WHOM HAVE SUBSEQUENTLY BEEN RE-ELECTED ON A CONSERVATIVE TICKET). THE HNP NOW HAS ONLY 2-3 PERCENT POPULAR SUPPORT AGAINST THE 15 PERCENT PLUS ENJOYED BY THE SLIGHTLY LESS EXTREME CP.

4. BOTH THESE RIGHT WING PARTIES CALL FOR PARTITION AND AN AFRIKANER STATE. THEY OPPOSE THE GOVERNMENT'S REFORM PROGRAMME ROOT AND BRANCH. THEIR STANCE HAS THE ATTRACTION OF HARD CLARITY: THE AFRIKANERS ARE A NATION, THEY HAVE A RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION LIKE OTHER NATIONS, THIS CAN ONLY BE ACHIEVED IN A WHITE-RULED STATE, AND PARTITION IS THEREFORE NECESSARY. BLACKS WILL BE LEFT TO LOOK AFTER THEMSELVES AS CITIZENS OF INDEPENDENT HOMELANDS.

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RIGHT

RIGHT WING SUPPORT

5. GROWTH IN RIGHT WING SUPPORT CAN BE TRACED BACK TO 1979 AFTER P W BOTHA'S CALL TO 'ADAPT OR DIE'. THE OUTBURST OF TOWNSHIP VIOLENCE AT THE END OF 1984 GAVE A NEW IMPETUS, FURTHER BOOSTED BY ECONOMIC RECESSION AND REACTION TO THE GOVERNMENT'S EMERGING REFORM PROGRAMME, WHICH THE FOLLOWING YEAR HELPED TO GIVE THE HNP ITS FIRST SEAT. THE RIGHT KEPT IN THE HEADLINES THROUGHOUT THE FIRST HALF OF 1986 NOTABLY BY THE BREAK-UP OF NP MEETINGS BY AWB ROUGH-NECKS. SINCE THEN THE BAND WAGON HAS LOST SOME MOMENTUM AS P W BOTHA'S HAWKISH POLICIES STOLE THE RIGHT'S THUNDER. OPINION POLLS SHOW WHITE SUPPORT FOR THE RIGHT WING PARTIES STAYING OBSTINATELY THE 20 PER CENT MARK.

6. NEVERTHELESS THE CHALLENGE FROM THE RIGHT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN A MAJOR FACTOR IN THE HARDENING OF P W BOTHA'S STANCE AND IN HIS DECISION TO HOLD AN EARLY ELECTION FOR WHITE VOTERS. THERE WERE SIGNS OF CONSERVATIVE-MINDED ELEMENTS WITHIN THE NATIONAL PARTY ITSELF BEGINNING TO BE AFFECTED.

7. RIGHT WING STRENGTH LIES IN TRADITIONAL AFRIKANER AREAS LEFT BEHIND AS THE NP HAS MOVED TO A MORE PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO APARTHEID. THE HEARTLAND IS IN TRANSVAAL, AND ESPECIALLY AMONG:

A) FARMERS OF THE NORTH ONLY NOW RECOVERING FROM YEARS OF DROUGHT AND UNDER THREAT OF SPORADIC GUERRILLA ACTIVITY

B) BLUE-COLLAR WORKERS HIT BY UNEMPLOYMENT AND BY BLACK COMPETITION FOR JOBS:

C) THE OLDER GENERATION OF CIVIL SERVANTS LOYAL TO THE PERCEIVED WISDOM OF EARLIER YEARS.

POCKETS OF SUPPORT ALSO EXIST IN ADJACENT AREAS OF THE ORANGE FREE STATE, NORTHERN NATAL AND NORTHERN CAPE. THE CP HAS ATTRACTED SOME SYMPATHISERS AMONG ENGLISH-SPEAKERS (PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO CAME TO SOUTH AFRICA FROM RHODESIA) AS WELL AS IN THE PORTUGUESE AND GREEK COMMUNITIES

ELECTION PROSPECTS

8. THE RIGHT WING PARTIES INTEND TO MAKE A CENTRAL ISSUE OF REFORM. THEY WILL CHARGE THE GOVERNMENT WITH HAVING A SECRET AGENDA AND CHALLENGE THEM TO SPELL OUT THEIR INTENTIONS. AFRIKANERDOM IN DANGER WILL BE THE CRY. THEIR OTHER MAIN ISSUE WILL BE THE RECESSION, WITH ACCUSATIONS THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAVE NEGLECTED THE SUFFERING FARMERS AND ARE UNABLE TO COPE WITH UNEMPLOYMENT. LAW AND ORDER, AND HIGH TAXATION OF WHITES TO FINANCE BLACK ADVANCEMENT, WILL ALSO FEATURE STRONGLY. THERE WILL BE PLENTY OF SYMPATHETIC LISTENERS. BUT HOW FAR THIS CAN BE TRANSLATED INTO A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF SEATS FOR RIGHT WING CANDIDATES IS QUESTIONABLE

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9. NEITHER THE CP NOR (STILL LESS) THE HNP CAN EASILY PROJECT THEMSELVES AS A CREDIBLE ALTERNATIVE GOVERNMENT. THEY OFFER POLICIES WHICH HAVE BEEN LARGELY TRIED IN THE PAST AND SEEN TO FAIL. THERE IS NO OUTSTANDING LEADER. TREURNICHT (CP) IS A POLITICAL FIGURE OF SOME STATURE, BUT LACKS POPULAR APPEAL. THE INFLEXIBLE MARAIS (HNP) IS A LIABILITY. TERREBLANCHE (AWB) IS A POWERFUL ORATOR BUT HARD TO SEE AS CABINET MATERIAL. GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED TV AND BUSINESS-CONTROLLED PRESS ARE HOSTILE. FUNDS ARE SHORT. THEY WILL ALSO HAVE TO CONTEND WITH THE INSTINCTIVE AFRIKANER RELUCTANCE TO SWITCH VOTES. DISSATISFACTION AMONG THE MORE CONSERVATIVE NP SUPPORTERS MAY WELL BE EXPRESSED IN ABSTENTIONS RATHER THAN IN VOTES FOR A RIGHT WING PARTY.

10. ABOVE ALL, THE RIGHT IS WEAKENED BY INTERNAL FEUDING. NP CANDIDATES WILL LAUGH ALL THE WAY TO THE POLLS IF BOTH CP AND HNP FIELD SEPARATE CANDIDATES OF THEIR OWN FOR 6 MAY, WHICH COULD EVEN LEAD TO NEW RIGHT WING GROUPS JOINING THE FRAY AT THE LAST MINUTE.

11. THE CP HAS BEEN PRESSING FOR A FULL MERGER. THE HNP HAS HELD OUT FOR AN ELECTORAL PACT ONLY AND HAS DEMANDED A SHARE OF SEATS QUITE DISPROPORTIONATE TO ITS STRENGTH. AN ATTEMPT BY TREURNICHT TO FORCE HIS ALLY'S HAND BY CALLING FOR A UNITY CONFERENCE IN JANUARY FAILED AND LEFT THE GAP WIDER THAN EVER. POLICY DIFFERENCES ARE ALSO A PROBLEM ALTHOUGH PERHAPS NOT INSURMOUNTABLE (FOR EXAMPLE OVER TREATMENT OF INDIANS AND STATUS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE). THE REAL OBSTACLES ARE THE HNP'S FEAR OF BEING SWALLOWED UP BEFORE IT CAN GAIN A FIRM FOOTHOLD IN PARLIAMENT, AND EVEN MORE THE LONG-STANDING PERSONAL FEUD BETWEEN TREURNICHT AND MARAIS.

12. THE TWO LEADERS ARE UNDER CONSIDERABLE PRESSURE FROM TERREBLANCHE AND OTHER RIGHTIST FIGURES TO BURY THEIR DIFFERENCES. EVENTUAL AGREEMENT IS STILL POSSIBLE. THIS MIGHT NOT ADD UP TO MUCH MORE THAN GIVING A JOINT GREEN LIGHT TO CONSTITUENCY PARTIES TO WORK OUT THEIR OWN LOCAL PACTS. UNDERSTANDINGS HAVE ALREADY BEEN REACHED IN SOME MARGINAL CONSTITUENCIES.

13. THE CP SEEM BOUND TO LOSE SEVERAL OF THEIR PRESENT SEATS BACK TO THE NP, AND HAVE TO RELY ON GAINING OTHERS ELSEWHERE JUST TO STAND STILL. IN PRIVATE, CP ADVISERS ADMIT THAT IF THE CP AND HNP REMAIN LOCKED IN COMBAT THE CP MIGHT BE RETURNED WITH FEWER SEATS THAN NOW. THE HNP CHAIRMAN TOLD US THAT HIS PARTY MIGHT BE LEFT WITH NO SEATS AT ALL UNLESS A PACT IS PUT TOGETHER. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF THE RIGHT WORK TOGETHER, THEY STAND A CHANCE OF TOPPLING AT LEAST ONE MINISTER IN THE TRANSVAAL (DU PLESSIS, MINISTER OF MANPOWER). THEY EVEN HAVE HOPES FOR THE CONSTITUENCIES OF TWO SENIOR MINISTERS, FW DE KLERK AND VILJOEN (THE FORMER IN PARTICULAR A CONTENDER TO SUCCEED PW BOTHA), ALTHOUGH THESE ARE BOTH LONG SHOTS.

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CONCLUSION

14. MOST AFRIKANERS MAYBE REGARDED AS CONSERVATIVE AT HEART, ESPECIALLY WHEN DANGER AND UNCERTAINTY THREATEN. THE GOVERNMENT KNOW THIS, WHICH IS WHY THEIR ELECTION STRATEGY CONCENTRATES ON THE CHALLENGE THEY FACE FROM THE RIGHT. THEY WOULD SEE LOSS OF SEATS TO THE PFP AND ITS ALLIES ON THE LEFT AS THE LESSER OF TWO EVILS. KEEPING AFRIKANERS TOGETHER COMES FIRST. AT ALL COSTS THE GOVERNING NATIONAL PARTY IS DETERMINED TO AVOID BREAKAWAY PARTIES TO THE RIGHT GAINING GROUND AND THE AFRIKANER COMMUNITY BEING SPLIT DOWN THE VERY MIDDLE.

15. THE CP IS CLAIMING THAT IT COULD REPLACE THE PFP AS THE OFFICIAL WHITE OPPOSITION, AND AT ONE TIME THIS SEEMED WITHIN ITS GRASP. THE COMBINED RIGHT MIGHT STILL PULL THEIR ACT TOGETHER HOWEVER, DIVISIONS NOW SEEM LIKELY TO PREVENT THEM REALISING THEIR POTENTIAL, PARTICULARLY AS GOVERNMENT POLICY IN RECENT MONTHS PRE-EMPTED MUCH OF THEIR ATTACK. OVERALL SUPPORT OF 15-20 PERCENT AMONG THE WHITE ELECTORATE WILL NOT BE ENOUGH FOR THE RIGHT TO ACHIEVE A BREAKTHROUGH.

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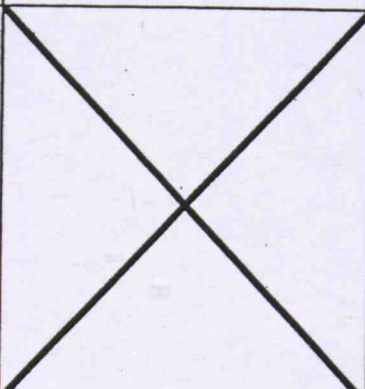
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