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FM CAPE TOWN

TO PRIORITY FCO

TELNO 123

OF 121430Z MARCH 87

INFO ROUTINE PRETORIA, JOHANNESBURG

INFO SAVING CAPE TOWN CONSULATE, DURBAN

MY TELNO 103: SOUTH AFRICAN ELECTION: THE RIGHT WING

SUMMARY

1. RIGHT WING PARTIES FAIL TO AGREE ON ELECTORAL PACT AND NOW SEEM SET TO OPPOSE EACH OTHER. THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY (CP) SEE THEIR OWN PROSPECTS AS BASICALLY UNCHANGED, BUT THE HERSTIGTE NATIONALE PARTY (HNP) COULD FACE EXTINCTION. RIGHT WING DISUNITY BOUND TO HELP NATIONAL PARTY (NP).

DETAIL

2. AFTER SEVERAL DAYS MANOEUVRING AND REPORTS OF IMMINENT AGREEMENT, THE CP AND HNP HAVE FAILED TO AGREE ON A COMPROMISE ELECTORAL PACT. THE LEADERS OF THE TWO PARTIES HAVE ORDERED THEIR RESPECTIVE ELECTION MACHINES TO GO AHEAD WITH THEIR SEPARATE CAMPAIGNS. UP TO 100 SEATS WILL NOW BE CONTESTED BY BOTH CP AND HNP CANDIDATES, WITH A CONSEQUENT SPLIT IN THE RIGHT WING VOTE.

3. SINCE THE FAILURE OF THE UNITY CONFERENCE ON 24 JANUARY TO BRING THE HNP INTO THE CP FOLD (PRETORIA TELNO 20 TO FCO), RIGHT WING HOPES HAVE RESTED ON EFFORTS BY THE MILITANT AWB ORGANISATION TO FIND A COMPROMISE. THE AWB HAVE MEMBERS IN BOTH CAMPS, AND HAVE LED GRASSROOTS PRESSURE FOR A PACT. WITHIN THE LAST WEEK, THE CP LEADER, TREURNICHT, HAD MADE IT KNOWN THAT HE WOULD ACCEPT IN PRINCIPLE A PLAN PUT FORWARD BY TERREBLANCHE, THE AWB LEADER.

4. UNDER THIS PLAN, THE CP WOULD CONTEST THEIR EXISTING 17 SEATS WITHOUT COMPETITION FROM THE HNP. THE HNP WOULD BE ENTITLED TO 10 SEATSN IDENTIFIED AS SAFE FOR THE RIGHT, IN WHICH THE CP WOULD THEN WITHDRAW. IN THE REMAINING SEATS, THE LOCAL PARTIES

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WOULD AGREE WHICH OF THEIR CANDIDATES SHOULD STAND AS A SINGLE CANDIDATE FOR THE RIGHT. AFTER THE ELECTION, THERE WOULD BE MOVES TO ACHIEVE UNITY IN THE SPAN OF ONE PARLIAMENTARY SESSION (IE BY ABOUT THE END OF SEPTEMBER).

5. AS WITH OTHER PROPOSED RIGHT WING PACTS IN THE PAST, AGREEMENT LOOKED TANTALIZINGLY NEAR. BUT THE HNP LEADER, MARAIS, HAVERED OVER THE QUESTION OF UNITY. HE ARGUED THAT THIS WOULD PROBABLY BE ACCEPTABLE BUT WOULD HAVE TO BE RATIFIED BY AN HNP CONGRESS AFTER THE ELECTION. ON 11 MARCH, THE CP GAVE THE HNP AN ULTIMATUM TO ACCEPT IMMEDIATELY CONTESTING TEN SPECIFIC SEATS AGAINST A COMMITMENT TO UNITY BY THE END OF THE YEAR. THIS MARAIS REJECTED, COMPLAINING THAT CP PROSPECTS DIFFERED FROM THE TERREBLANCHE PLAN AND THAT THE ULTIMATUM FINALLY SHOWED THAT THE CP DID NOT WANT COOPERATION.

COMMENT

6. THIS LOOKS LIKE THE END OF THE ROAD FOR EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE A RIGHT WING ELECTION PACT. LOCAL AGREEMENTS ARE STILL A POSSIBILITY IN SOME CONSTITUENCIES. BUT BARRING SOME LAST MINUTE CLIMB-DOWN BY ONE SIDE OR THE OTHER, POSSIBLY WITH RENEWED MEDIATION BY THE AWB, COOPERATION ON A NATIONAL SCALE SEEMS TO BE FINALLY RULED OUT. THIS IS BOUND TO REDUCE RIGHT WING CHANCES IN THE ELECTION.

7. THE CP HAVE ALWAYS BEEN UNWILLING TO MAKE MAJOR CONCESSIONS. THEY CONSIDER THE HNP VERY MUCH A MINOR PARTNER WITH NEGLIGABLE POPULAR SUPPORT, AND SEE NO REASON TO TREAT WITH IT ON THE BASIS OF EQUALITY. CP ANALYSTS TO WHOM WE HAVE SPOKEN BELIEVE IN ANY CASE THAT A PACT WOULD BE FAR MORE FAVOURABLE TO THE HNP. WHEREAS CP VOTERS ARE PREPARED TO VOTE HNP, MOST HNP SUPPORTERS WOULD PREFER TO ABSTAIN RATHER THAN VOTE CP, PART OF THE GENERAL RELUCTANCE AMONG THE SOUTH AFRICAN ELECTORATE TO VOTE TO THE LEFT OF THEIR NATURAL INCLINATION. IT WAS IMPORTANT TO THE CP THEREFORE THAT THE HNP SHOULD COMMIT ITSELF IRREVOCABLY TO UNITY. IN THE FACE OF CONTINUED DITHERING BY MARAIS, TREURNICHT SEEMS TO HAVE LOST PATIENCE.

8. FOR THEIR PART, HNP LEADERS ARE UNDERSTANDABLY WORRIED ABOUT ABSORPTION INTO THE CP. QUITE APART FROM ISSUES OF PRINCIPLE,

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THEY FEAR THAT THE HNP WOULD RAPIDLY LOSE ITS IDENTITY WITHIN A COMBINED PARTY.

9. ALL THIS CAN ONLY HELP THE NP. THE CP CALCULATE THAT THE TERREBLANCHE PLAN COULD HAVE GIVEN THE HNP, WITH CP HELP, ABOUT 7 OR 8 SEATS GAINED FROM THE NP. THE HNP WILL NOW BE LUCKY TO HOLD ON TO THEIR SINGLE SEAT. THE CP, ON THE OTHER HAND, SEE THEIR FORTUNES AS BASICALLY UNCHANGED. THEIR INTERNAL ESTIMATES GIVE THEM AT PRESENT ANYTHING BETWEEN 15 AND 26 SEATS, ALTHOUGH THEY CLAIM THAT CP SUPPORT NATIONWIDE IS UNDERSTATED BY OPINION POLLS AND STANDS AT AROUND 25%.

10. THE CAMPAIGN HAS A LONG WAY TO GO AND THE CP CAN STILL GAIN SOME MOMENTUM. BUT THE BICKERING WITH THE HNP IS BOUND TO CAUSE SOME DISAFFECTION AMONG RIGHT WING SUPPORTERS WHICH COULD RESULT IN DAMAGING ABSTENTIONS, AND COULD DEFLECT ATTENTION FROM THE OVERALL RIGHT WING ATTACK ON THE GOVERNMENT.

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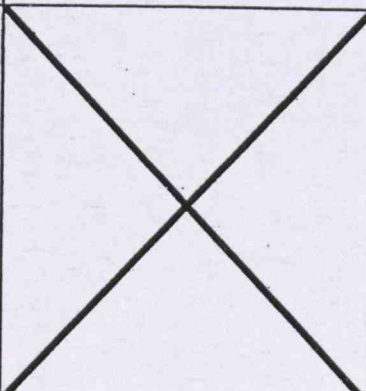
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