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INFO SAVING HMCBS IN FRANCE

MY TELNO 382: FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: FIRST ROUND.

SUMMARY

1. A SATISFACTORY RESULT FOR MITTERRAND BUT A BAD ONE FOR CHIRAC, WHO WILL BE HIS CHALLENGER IN THE FINAL ROUND. CHIRAC SUFFERED FROM EVE-OF-POLL SET-BACKS, BUT HIS MAIN FAILURE WAS TO DEVISE A COHERENT STRATEGY TO COUNTER LE PEN, WHO IS THE MAIN VICTOR OF THE FIRST ROUND. AN HONOURABLE DEFEAT FOR BARRE, WHO RETAINS INFLUENCE. THE DECLINE OF THE FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY GOES ON.

2. MITTERRAND MUST NOW RALLY THE LEFT AND SOME OF THE CENTRE: CHIRAC MUST RALLY THREE BLOCS OF MUTUALLY ANTIPATHETIC RIGHT WING VOTERS AND GALVANISE A CAMPAIGN ORGANISATION DEMORALISED BY A POOR FIRST ROUND SCORE. MITTERRAND'S LOOKS MUCH THE EASIER TASK. HE IS NOW ODDS-ON FAVOURITE FOR RE-ELECTION.

DETAIL

3. WITH MORE THAN 90 PER CENT OF THE VOTES COUNTED, THE RESULTS IN THE FIRST ROUND OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION HELD YESTERDAY (24 APRIL) ARE:

MITTERRAND (SOCIALIST)	34.1
CHIRAC (RPR)	19.0
BARRE (UDF)	16.5
LE PEN (FRONT NATIONAL)	14.4
LAJOINIE (COMMUNIST)	6.78
WAECHTER (GREEN)	3.78
JUQUIN (DISSIDENT COMMUNIST)	2.1
LAGUILLER (TROTSKYIST)	2.0
BOUSSEL (TROTSKYIST)	0.4

TURNOUT WAS 82 PER CENT, ALMOST IDENTICAL WITH THE FIRST ROUND IN 1981. MITTERRAND AND CHIRAC GO THROUGH TO THE FINAL ROUND ON 8 MAY.

MITTERRAND

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4. FOR MITTERRAND THIS IS A SATISFACTORY RATHER THAN A SPECTACULAR RESULT. HE HAS JUST FALLEN SHORT OF THE MINIMUM TARGET HE SET HIMSELF OF 35 PER CENT BUT HE FIXED THAT FIGURE IN THE EXPECTATION THAT CHIRAC WOULD OBTAIN ABOUT 25 PER CENT. INSTEAD CHIRAC HAS WON LESS THAN 20 PER CENT, GIVING MITTERRAND A COMMANDING 14 PER CENT FIRST ROUND LEAD. THE TASK FOR MITTERRAND NOW IS TO RALLY THE REST OF THE LEFT. HE HOPES TO ATTRACT 80-85 PER CENT OF LAJOINIE'S, JUQUIN'S, LAGUILLER'S AND BOUSSEL'S VOTE, WORTH ABOUT 10-11 PER CENT: TWO-THIRDS OF WAECHTER'S GREEN VOTE WORTH ANOTHER 2 PER CENT: ABOUT 20 PER CENT OF BARRE'S CENTRIST VOTE WHICH WOULD GIVE HIM ANOTHER 2-3 PER CENT: AND 20-25 PER CENT OF THE LE PEN VOTE, ALSO WORTH ABOUT 2-3 PER CENT. IF HE DOES, HE WILL BE RE-ELECTED ON 8 MAY.

CHIRAC

5. FOR CHIRAC THE RESULTS ARE A PERSONAL DISAPPOINTMENT AND A POLITICAL SETBACK. DESPITE AN IMPRESSIVE CAMPAIGN IN WHICH NEITHER EFFORT NOR MONEY HAS BEEN SPARED, HE HAS PERFORMED A LOT LESS WELL THAN EITHER HE OR HIS CAMPAIGN MANAGERS EXPECTED, OR THAN THE POLLS PREDICTED. HE HAS FALLEN SHORT OF THE PSYCHOLOGICALLY IMPORTANT 20 PER CENT MARK, AND HAS IMPROVED ON HIS FIRST ROUND SCORE IN THE 1981 ELECTIONS (WHEN HE WAS ELIMINATED) BY LESS THAN 2 PER CENT.

6. THERE ARE A NUMBER OF POSSIBLE REASONS FOR CHIRAC'S POOR SHOWING. EVE OF POLL VIOLENCE IN NEW CALEDONIA (MY TELNO 390 - NOT TO ALL) AND A BOMBING OUTRAGE IN CORSICA CAME AT A BAD MOMENT FOR A CANDIDATE WHO HAD CAMPAIGNED ON HIS LAW AND ORDER RECORD. CHIRAC MAY ALSO HAVE MISJUDGED HIS PACE IN THE FINAL WEEK OF THE CAMPAIGN, PREFERRING TO CONCENTRATE ON THE MEDIA RATHER THAN ON MEETINGS (MTUR). WHATEVER THE LAST MINUTE EMBARRASMENTS, THE MAIN REASON FOR CHIRAC'S DISAPPOINTMENT IS LE PEN. THE FAILURE OF THE TRADITIONAL RIGHT (PARTICULARLY THE RPR) TO FIND ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS POSED BY LE PEN, AND TO DEFINE A STRATEGY TO DEAL WITH HIM, EMBARRASSED THEM IN THE 1984 EUROPEAN ELECTIONS, IN THE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS OF 1986, AND HAS NOW COMPROMISED CHIRAC'S CHANCES OF THE PRESIDENCY.

7. IT IS NOT IMPOSSIBLE FOR CHIRAC TO WIN ON 8 MAY BUT IT LOOKS VERY DIFFICULT. HE MUST RALLY BARRE'S VOTE AND LE PEN'S. IF HE DOES, AND IF HE PICKS UP A PART OF WAECHTER'S GREEN VOTE (WHICH SEEMS LIKELY) HE COULD JUST SQUEEZE HOME. BUT THE TASK OF UNITING THREE MUTUALLY ANTIPATHETIC RIGHT WING BLOCKS BEHIND HIS LEADERSHIP, WHEN HIS AUTHORITY HAS SUFFERED FROM HIS OWN RELATIVELY POOR SHOWING, WILL REQUIRE EXCEPTIONAL SKILL. THE MORE HE APPEALS TO THE EXTREME RIGHT, THE GREATER THE RISK OF ALIENATING A SIGNIFICANT PART OF BARRE'S

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CENTRE VOTE TO MITTERRAND. ONLY IF CHIRAC CAN FIND SOME WAY OF RESOLVING THIS DILEMMA CAN HE HOPE TO WIN IN TWO WEEKS' TIME.

BARRE

8. BARRE HAS AVOIDED THE HUMILIATION THAT SOME POLLS WERE PREDICTING 2-3 WEEKS AGO. HIS SCORE IS RESPECTABLE, ONLY 3 PER CENT BEHIND CHIRAC, PRESERVING HIS POLITICAL AUTHORITY AND MAKING HIS ATTITUDE TO THE SECOND ROUND RUN-OFF IMPORTANT. HIS SUPPORT, PLEDGED TO CHIRAC LAST NIGHT ONLY FIFTEEN MINUTES AFTER THE POLLS CLOSED, WAS QUALIFIED WITH WARNINGS ABOUT THE NEED TO COUNTER RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA. THE MESSAGE TO CHIRAC - NO DEALS WITH LE PEN - HIGHLIGHTS CHIRAC'S DIFFICULTIES DISCUSSED ABOVE.

LE PEN

9. LE PEN HAS DONE SPECTACULARLY WELL. HIS SUPPORT IS STRONG IN THE SOUTH AND IN THE CITIES BUT GOES WIDER THAN THAT. THE FRONT NATIONAL (FN) CAN NOW CLAIM TO BE A NATIONAL PARTY. THE FIRST ROUND OF THE ELECTIONS IS TRADITIONALLY THE MOMENT WHEN THE ELECTORS VOTE ACCORDING TO THEIR PREJUDICES, SAVING THEIR MORE SOBER JUDGEMENT FOR THE DECISIVE SECOND ROUND. THIS THEY DID YESTERDAY. LE PEN'S TOUGH TALK ON IMMIGRATION, LAW AND ORDER, AND UNEMPLOYMENT HAS APPEAL IN THE SMARTER ARRONDISSEMENTS OF PARIS AS WELL AS IN THE GHETTOS OF MARSEILLES. THOSE WITH FEARS OR GRIEVANCES, FROM THE FAR LEFT (INCLUDING A SIGNIFICANT PROPORTION OF EX-COMMUNIST SUPPORTERS) TO THE EXTREME RIGHT, VOTED FOR LE PEN. HE BENEFITTED FROM MITTERRAND'S DELIBERATE REFERENCES TO THE NEED FOR VOTES FOR IMMIGRANTS, AND FROM THE VIOLENCE IN NEW CALEDONIA AND CORSICA.

10. WHAT LE PEN'S VOTERS DO IN THE SECOND ROUND WILL BE OF CRITICAL IMPORTANCE TO THE OUTCOME. LE PEN SAYS HE WILL MAKE HIS POSITION CLEAR AT A SPECIAL FETE HE IS ORGANISING IN PARIS ON 1 MAY TO COMMEMORATE JOAN OF ARC. THE ODDS ARE THAT HE WILL APPEAL TO HIS SUPPORTERS TO BACK CHIRAC AS THE LESSER OF TWO EVILS, BUT A SIGNIFICANT PROPORTION MAY IGNORE HIS ADVICE. (A FAIR GUESS MIGHT BE THAT HALF MAY SWITCH TO CHIRAC, A QUARTER MAY VOTE FOR MITTERRAND AND ANOTHER QUARTER ABSTAIN.) LE PEN MAY ALSO LINK HIS APPEAL TO CONDITIONS (EG ON IMMIGRATION) WHICH HE KNOWS CHIRAC WILL BE FORCED TO REJECT. IF HE DOES IT WILL BE BECAUSE HE CALCULATES PRIVATELY THAT A MITTERRAND VICTORY WILL BE MORE IN THE LONG TERM INTERESTS OF THE FN THAN A CHIRAC ONE. THE QUESTION OF WHICH ELECTORAL SYSTEM SHOULD BE RETAINED (THE FN BENEFITTED FROM PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION AS INTRODUCED BY THE SOCIALISTS) COULD BE VERY SIGNIFICANT.

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LAJOINIE

11. LAJOINIE'S 6.7 PER CENT MARKS A FURTHER STAGE IN THE DECLINE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY (PCF). (MARCHAIS MANAGED 15.3 PER CENT IN 1981.) THERE IS MINIMAL CONSOLATION IN THE FAILURE OF JUQUIN'S DISSIDENT CHALLENGE TO ATTRACT MORE THAN 2.1 PER CENT, AND THE PCF IS MAKING THE MOST OF IT. BUT THERE COULD WELL BE FURTHER TURBULENCE AHEAD IN A PARTY SHOCKED TO FIND THAT LE PEN HAS ATTRACTED TWICE THE VOTE OF ITS OWN CANDIDATE. THE COMBINED TROTSKYIST VOTE WAS IN LINE WITH EXPECTATIONS. WAECHTER, THE GREEN, HAS DONE A LITTLE BETTER THAN PREDICTED, ALTHOUGH FRACTIONALLY WORSE THAN THE GREEN CANDIDATE IN 1981 WHO SECURED 3.9 PER CENT.

CONCLUSION

12. MITTERRAND'S CHANCES OF RE-ELECTION ON 8 MAY ARE VERY GOOD. HE WILL HAVE TO HOLD HIS OWN IN THE TELEVISED DEBATE THAT HE AND CHIRAC ARE TO HOLD WITHIN THE NEXT FEW DAYS. BUT HIS TASK OF RALLYING THE LEFT WHILE APPEALING TO THE CENTRE LOOKS MUCH EASIER THAN CHIRAC'S OF RALLYING A DISPARATE AND RATTLED RIGHT.

13. A MEASURE OF CHIRAC'S TASK IS THAT, IN THE HISTORY OF THE FIFTH REPUBLIC, NO-ONE WHO HAS OBTAINED LESS THAN 25 PER CENT IN THE FIRST ROUND HAS GONE ON TO WIN THE PRESIDENCY.

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