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INFO SAVING HM CGS IN FRANCE

MY TELNO 481: FRENCH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS.

SUMMARY

1. AT THE START OF THE OFFICIAL CAMPAIGN, THE SOCIALISTS (PS) ARE SO CONFIDENT THAT THEY ARE OFFERING NOT TO CONTEST SOME SEATS WHERE NON-SOCIALISTS ARE STANDING WHO ARE SYMPATHETIC TO MITTERRAND. THE UDF AND RPR HAVE CLOSED RANKS AND FORMED THE URC TO FIGHT THE ELECTIONS ON THE BASIS OF NO DEALS WITH THE PS AND NONE WITH THE FRONT NATIONAL (FN). GISCARD IS THE MOVING FORCE BEHIND URC BUT IT DOES NOT FOLLOW THAT HE WILL BE THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION ONCE THE ELECTIONS ARE OVER. LE PEN HAS REACTED ANGRILY TO THE URC'S EXCLUSION OF DEALS WITH THE FN AND IS THREATENING WRECKING TACTICS. BOTH THE FN AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY (PCF) WILL LOSE A LOT OF SEATS. TWO WEEKS BEFORE THE FIRST ROUND A CONVINCING PS VICTORY SEEMS INEVITABLE.

DETAIL

2. THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION CAMPAIGN BEGINS OFFICIALLY THIS WEEKEND. THE SOCIALISTS ARE IN CONFIDENT MOOD, BUOYED UP BY POLLS WHICH PUT THEIR SUPPORT AT OVER 40 PER CENT (THEIR BEST LEVEL EVER), AND WHICH PROMISE THEM AN OUTRIGHT MAJORITY IN THE ASSEMBLY. SO SURE ARE THEY OF VICTORY THAT THEY HAVE OFFERED NOT TO CONTEST 40-50 SEATS WHERE NON-SOCIALISTS STAND WHO ARE WILLING BOTH TO ENDORSE MITTERRAND AND DENOUNCE LE PEN. THE OFFER IS AIMED PARTICULARLY AT THE CENTRIST CDS WHOM MITTERRAND HOPES EVENTUALLY TO ENTICE INTO GOVERNMENT. THE LATTER HAVE SPURNED THE PROPOSAL, ALTHOUGH THERE ARE SIGNS THAT ONE OR TWO CDS CANDIDATES WILL BREAK PARTY RANKS AND ACCEPT THE PS' OFFER.

3. DEMORALISED AFTER CHIRAC'S DEFEAT, THE PARTIES OF THE TRADITIONAL RIGHT HAVE CLOSED RANKS. URGED ON BY GISCARD, THE UDF AND RPR HAVE FORMED AN UMBRELLA ORGANISATION TO FIGHT THE ELECTIONS CALLED QUOTE UNION DU RASSEMBLEMENT ET DU CENTRE UNQUOTE (URC) WHICH WILL PUT FORWARD A JOINT CANDIDATE IN EACH CONSTITUENCY. THE BASIS OF THE ARRANGEMENT IS A PROMISE BY THE CENTRISTS TO RESIST MITTERRAND'S

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BLANDISHMENTS, AND BY THE RPR TO RESIST LE PEN'S.

4. GISCARD HOPES THAT HE WILL NOW BE ABLE TO ESTABLISH HIMSELF AS LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION. IN THE SHORT TERM HE MAY SUCCEED: CHIRAC'S AUTHORITY IS DIMINISHED BY DEFEAT AND BARRE PREFERS TO BE A POINT OF REFERENCE RATHER THAN A PARTY LEADER. (BARRE HAS IRRITATED THE RIGHT IN RECENT DAYS BY REPEATING HIS WELL-KNOWN VIEW THAT A DISSOLUTION SHOULD FOLLOW A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, THAT MITTERRAND WAS THEREFORE SENSIBLE TO DISSOLVE AND THAT HE COULD EXPECT TO SECURE A WORKING MAJORITY: BOTH ASSERTIONS MAY BE TRUE BUT NEITHER IS WELCOME TO THE MEMBERS OF URC AT THE START OF AN ELECTION CAMPAIGN.) GISCARD'S CHANCES, HOWEVER, OF RETAINING THE LEADERSHIP OF THE RIGHT AFTER THE ELECTIONS ARE MUCH MORE DOUBTFUL. THE CDS STILL HOPES THAT IT WILL BE POSSIBLE EVENTUALLY TO CONSTRUCT AN AUTONOMOUS CENTRE GROUPING, WHICH COULD IN DUE COURSE SWITCH ALLEGIANCES AND WORK WITH THE PS. AND AMONG OTHER URC PARTICIPANTS IT IS HARD TO SEE CHIRAC OR LEOTARD ACCEPTING GISCARD'S TUTELAGE FOR LONG.

5. LE PEN, WHO PROPOSED A UNITED FRONT OF THE UDF, RPR AND FN FOR THE ELECTIONS, REACTED ANGRILY TO THE URC DECISION TO REJECT ALL DEALS WITH HIM. HE HAS SAID THAT HE WILL MAINTAIN FN CANDIDATES IN THE SECOND ROUND RUN-OFF ON 12 JUNE, EVEN WHERE THIS IS LIKELY TO LEAD TO THE RIGHT'S DEFEAT AND THE ELECTION OF A PS DEPUTY. IF HE MAKES GOOD HIS THREAT (AND CANDIDATES MUST SCORE 12.5 PER CENT IN THE FIRST ROUND TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR THE SECOND), THIS COULD COST THE URC A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF SEATS TO THE BENEFIT OF THE PS. HIS HOSTILITY IS LIKELY TO BE MOST DAMAGING LATER ON IN DEPARTMENTAL AND COMMUNAL ELECTIONS AND THAT THREAT SHOULD NOT BE UNDERESTIMATED.

6. THE REINTRODUCTION OF MAJORITY VOTING OVER TWO ROUNDS MEANS THAT THE FN WILL HAVE A STRUGGLE TO HOLD ON TO ANY OF THE 35 SEATS IT WON IN MARCH 1986 UNDER THE SYSTEM OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION. BUT THERE ARE SOME AREAS WHERE IT IS IN WITH A CHANCE. MARSEILLES, WHERE LE PEN SCORED NEARLY 30 PER CENT IN THE FIRST ROUND OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, IS ONE OF THEM, WHICH IS WHY LE PEN HAS DECIDED TO CONTEST A MARSEILLAISE CONSTITUENCY NEXT MONTH. IF HE DOES WELL, HE WILL BE ENCOURAGED TO STAND FOR MAYOR OF MARSEILLES AT NEXT YEAR'S MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS.

7. THE COMMUNIST PARTY CAN ALSO EXPECT TO LOSE MANY OF ITS SEATS, ALMOST CERTAINLY FAILING, FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE THE WAR, TO SECURE THE 30 SEATS NEEDED FOR OFFICIAL GROUP STATUS IN THE ASSEMBLY. EVEN MARCHAIS' SEAT IS NOW CONSIDERED TO BE MARGINAL.

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8. TWO WEEKS BEFORE THE FIRST ROUND, THERE IS A GENERAL ASSUMPTION, CONFIRMED BY THE LATEST OPINION POLLS, THAT A SOCIALIST MAJORITY IS INEVITABLE, EVEN IF THAT DOES NOT MEAN THAT FRENCH PUBLIC OPINION HAS SWUNG DRAMATICALLY TO THE LEFT. MITTERRAND IS INDEED, PARADOXICALLY, THE BENEFICIARY OF CAUTION AND CONSERVATISM. THE URC HAS BEEN FORMED BY THE RIGHT IN AN ATTEMPT TO LIMIT THE DAMAGE, BUT THERE WILL HAVE TO BE A SHARP CHANGE OF PUBLIC MOOD IF THEY ARE TO AVOID A HEAVY DEFEAT.

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