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FM PARIS

TO DESKBY 101200Z FCO

TELNO 589

OF 100753Z JUN 88

MY TELNO 566: FRENCH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS: SECOND ROUND.

SUMMARY

1. LEFT AND RIGHT HAVE POLARISED FOR THE SECOND ROUND ON 12 JUNE. THE SOCIALISTS (PS) HAVE DONE A DEAL WITH THE COMMUNISTS (PCF), AND THE RIGHT WING ALLIANCE (URC) WITH THE FRONT NATIONAL (FN). THE URC/FN DEAL IS A BREAKTHROUGH FOR LE PEN AND COULD BE AN IMPORTANT PRECEDENT. THE PS HAVE BEEN CAMPAIGNING ENERGETICALLY, ANXIOUS TO SECURE AN OVERALL MAJORITY. THEY ARE APPEALING FOR A HIGH TURN OUT, CALLING ON THE COUNTRY TO GIVE MITTERRAND A STABLE MAJORITY WHILE REPUDIATING THE URC/FN LINK-UP. I EXPECT THEM TO WIN AND MITTERRAND TO TRY AGAIN TO WORK TOWARDS A CENTRE-LEFT UNDERSTANDING IN GOVERNMENT.

DETAIL

2. THE CLOSENESS OF THE FIRST ROUND RESULT HAS POLARISED THE ELECTION ALONG TRADITIONAL LEFT/RIGHT LINES, POSTPONING THE DEBATE ABOUT THE FUTURE SHAPE OF FRENCH POLITICS UNTIL AFTER THE SECOND ROUND ON 12 JUNE. ELECTORAL ARITHMETIC HAS PROMPTED THE SOCIALISTS TO CO-OPERATE WITH THE COMMUNISTS: WHERE PCF CANDIDATES DID BETTER THAN THEIR PS RIVALS IN THE FIRST ROUND, THE LATTER HAVE BEEN WITHDRAWN AND VICE VERSA. (IN THEORY THE PCF COULD NOW WIN OVER TWENTY SEATS.) ON THE RIGHT THE SAME ELECTORAL LOGIC HAS PERSUADED THE UNION DU RASSEMBLEMENT ET DU CENTRE (URC) TO DO A LIMITED DEAL WITH LE PEN IN THE MIDI WHICH HAS PRODUCED A STORM OF CONTROVERSY, AND FIERCE ATTACKS FROM THE PS.

3. THE URC WILL GIVE FN CANDIDATES A CLEAR RUN AGAINST THE LEFT IN EIGHT CONSTITUENCIES IN MARSEILLES AND THE BOUCHES-DU-RHONE, IN RETURN FOR LE PEN WITHDRAWING NEARLY ALL OTHER SURVIVING FN CANDIDATES TO THE BENEFIT OF THE URC. APART FROM BARRE, WHO HAS EXPRESSED MISGIVINGS, THE URC LEADERSHIP HAS SOUGHT TO PORTRAY THE DEAL AS A LOCAL ARRANGEMENT OF MINOR SIGNIFICANCE. EVEN THE CENTRIST CDS (PART OF THE URC) HAVE SWALLOWED IT, DESPITE THEIR LONGSTANDING AND OUTSPOKEN HOSTILITY TO LE PEN, HOPING THAT IT WILL ENABLE THEM TO WIN THE THIRTY SEATS THEY WILL NEED TO FORM AN AUTONOMOUS PARLIAMENTARY GROUP IN THE NEW ASSEMBLY.

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4. THIS IS A SIGNIFICANT BREAKTHROUGH FOR LE PEN. THE FACT THAT THE TRADITIONAL RIGHT HAVE BEEN WILLING TO DO A DEAL DURING NATIONAL ELECTIONS CONFERS A NEW RESPECTABILITY ON HIM AND SETS WHAT COULD PROVE AN IMPORTANT PRECEDENT. WHETHER OR NOT HE WINS ANY SEATS IN THE SECOND ROUND (AND HE MAY NOW GET TWO OR THREE) IT MAKES OTHER DEALS MORE LIKELY IN FUTURE, PARTICULARLY IN NEXT YEAR'S MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS WHEN THE FN HOPE TO ENTER THE TOWN HALLS IN FORCE.

5. THE SOCIALISTS HAVE SPENT AN ANXIOUS WEEK, CONSCIOUS THAT THE FIRST ROUND RESULT WAS TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT AND THAT THERE IS A RISK THAT THEY WILL NOT SECURE AN OVERALL MAJORITY IN THE SECOND ROUND. THEIR CAMPAIGN HAS CENTRED AROUND THREE THEMES:-

(I) THE NEED FOR THEIR SUPPORTERS TO GO TO THE POLLS. STUDIES SUGGEST THAT THE PS SUFFERED MORE THAN THE RIGHT FROM THE HIGH LEVEL OF ABSTENTION IN THE FIRST ROUND. BUT THE BOREDOM FACTOR IS STILL STRONG.

(II) THE NEED FOR INSTITUTIONAL COHERENCE BETWEEN PRESIDENT, GOVERNMENT AND PARLIAMENT. MITTERRAND HAS ISSUED AN APPEAL FOR A STABLE MAJORITY ON WHICH HE CAN DEPEND.

(III) THE URC/LE PEN DEAL, WHICH THEY DESCRIBE AS A BETRAYAL OF REPUBLICAN VALUES AND WHICH THEY HOPE WILL PROMPT SOME CENTRIST VOTERS EITHER TO VOTE FOR PS CANDIDATES IN THE SECOND ROUND OR TO ABSTAIN. (ALTHOUGH THE TRADITIONAL RIGHT ARE ARGUING THAT THE URC/FN DEAL IS SYMMETRICAL WITH THE PS/PCF DEAL, THE ELECTORATE MAY NOT SEE IT AS SUCH. THEY ARE USED TO CO-OPERATION ON THE LEFT BUT NOT TO CO-OPERATION BETWEEN THE RIGHT AND THE FN, PARTICULARLY SINCE THE RIGHT HAVE, UNTIL RECENTLY, BEEN ALMOST AS ENERGETIC AS THE SOCIALISTS IN CONDEMNING THE RACIST, ANTI-SEMITIC AND XENOPHOBIC TENDENCIES OF THE FN.)

6. IF THE PS FAIL TO SECURE A MAJORITY, FRANCE WILL BE PLUNGED INTO A PERIOD OF UNCERTAINTY AND PERHAPS RENEWED COHABITATION: THE FACT THAT THIS PROSPECT IS UNWELCOME TO MANY FRENCHMEN SHOULD HELP THE SOCIALISTS. I THINK IT LIKELY THAT THE THEMES THE PS HAVE HIGHLIGHTED THIS WEEK, BACKED UP BY SOME ENERGETIC CAMPAIGNING, WILL BE ENOUGH TO GIVE THEM AN OVERALL MAJORITY ON SUNDAY. THERE IS ALSO A FAIR CHANCE THAT THE CENTRIST CDS WILL DO WELL ENOUGH TO BE ABLE TO FORM AN AUTONOMOUS GROUP IN THE NEW ASSEMBLY (ASSUMING THEIR COURAGE DOES NOT FAIL THEM). IF THIS IS THE OUTCOME, THE BUILDING BLOCKS WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR MITTERRAND TO TRY AGAIN TO CONSTRUCT

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CENTRE-LEFT COOPERATION, ALTHOUGH RECENT EVENTS MAY PERSUADE HIM
THAT HIS BEST CHANCE OF SUCCESS WILL BE TO HASTEN SLOWLY.

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