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MY TELNO 597: FRENCH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION RESULTS.

SUMMARY

1. THE SOCIALISTS (PS) WILL BE THE LARGEST PARTY IN THE ASSEMBLY BUT WILL LACK AN OVERALL MAJORITY. WITHIN THE URC, THE UDF HAVE OVERTAKEN THE RPR. THE CENTRISTS HAVE DONE PARTICULARLY WELL. THE COMMUNISTS (PCF) BENEFITTED FROM THEIR SECOND ROUND DEAL WITH THE PS: THE FRONT NATIONAL (FN) DID NOT BENEFIT FROM THEIRS WITH THE URC.

2. MITTERRAND NOW HAS A NUMBER OF OPTIONS. A PS-PCF GOVERNMENT IS VERY UNLIKELY. HE IS MUCH MORE LIKELY TO TRY TO ENGINEER A PS-CENTRIST COALITION PROBABLY, BUT NOT CERTAINLY, LED BY ROCARD. POLITICAL ARITHMETIC AND LOGIC POINT IN THIS DIRECTION. IT NOW REMAINS TO BE SEEN IF THERE IS THE POLITICAL WILL.

3. A PERIOD OF POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY FOR FRANCE.

DETAIL

4. THE RESULT OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS HELD OVER TWO ROUNDS ON 5 AND 12 JUNE IS:-

PCF (COMMUNISTS)	:	27 SEATS	
PS (SOCIALISTS AND ALLIES)	:	276 SEATS	-
URC (UDF AND RPR COMBINED)	:	271 SEATS	-
FN (FRONT NATIONAL)	:	1 SEAT	
TOTAL	:	575 SEATS	(THERE ARE TWO OUTSTANDING SEATS IN FRENCH POLYNESIA WHICH DO NOT COMPLETE VOTING UNTIL LATER THIS MONTH)

THE ABSTENTION RATE WAS 30.11 PER CENT, HIGH BY FRENCH STANDARDS, A

REFLECTION OF THE POLITICAL FATIGUE FELT BY THE ELECTORATE AFTER MONTHS OF CAMPAIGNING FOR PRESIDENTIAL AND THEN LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS.

THE SOCIALISTS

5. ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE DONE MUCH BETTER THAN IN 1986 THE RESULT IS A DISAPPOINTMENT FOR THE SOCIALIST PARTY WHICH BEGAN THE CAMPAIGN CONFIDENT OF WINNING COMFORTABLY MORE THAN THE 289 SEATS NEEDED FOR A CLEAR MAJORITY. INSTEAD THEY WILL BE AT LEAST 10-12 SEATS SHORT (DEPENDING ON THE OUTCOME IN POLYNESIA). NEVERTHELESS THEY HAVE GAINED OVER 60 SEATS AND WILL BE BY FAR THE LARGEST PARTY, AND NARROWLY THE LARGEST GROUP, IN THE NEW ASSEMBLY. THE NEW GOVERNMENT IS BOUND TO BE FORMED AROUND THEM.

THE URC

6. THE URC HAS SURPRISED ITSELF BY THE STRENGTH OF ITS OWN SHOWING. THE UDF AND RPR HAVE LOST SOME 20 SEATS COMPARED WITH 1986, BUT HAVE BEEN BEATEN ONLY NARROWLY WHEN THEY WERE BRACED FOR DISASTER. A STRIKING FEATURE IS THE REDISTRIBUTION OF FORCES WITHIN THE TRADITIONAL RIGHT: THE UDF WITH 130 SEATS HAVE OVERTAKEN THEIR RPR PARTNERS WHO WON 128. THIS IS A FURTHER SETBACK FOR THE GAULLISTS IN THE WAKE OF CHIRAC'S PRESIDENTIAL DEFEAT. SEVERAL OLD GAULLISTS HAVE LOST THEIR SEATS, INCLUDING MESSMER, FORMER PRIME MINISTER AND RPR GROUP LEADER IN THE LAST ASSEMBLY. A SHARP DEBATE WITHIN THE RPR ABOUT THE FUTURE OF GAULLISM IS NOW IN PROSPECT. (FOR DETAILS OF OTHER PROMINENT CASUALTIES, SEE SEPARATE TELEGRAM, NOT TO ALL.)

7. THERE HAS ALSO BEEN A REDISTRIBUTION OF FORCES WITHIN THE UDF ITSELF. TO THE SURPRISE OF ITS LEADERS THE CENTRIST CDS HAS WON 49 SEATS, SLIGHTLY INCREASING ITS PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION AT ELECTIONS WHEN THE PARTY FEARED IT MIGHT FALL SHORT OF THE 30 SEATS NEEDED FOR OFFICIAL GROUP STATUS IN THE ASSEMBLY. THIS IS BOTH AN OPPORTUNITY AND A DILEMMA: WITH THESE 49 SEATS THEY COULD BREAK AWAY FROM THEIR CURRENT ALLIES AND JOIN THE PS IN A CENTRE-LEFT COALITION. BARRE AND MME VEIL ARE ENCOURAGING A HESITANT MEHAIGNERIE IN THIS DIRECTION WHILE GISCARD, WHO IS ANXIOUS TO HOLD THE WHOLE UDF GROUPING TOGETHER IN THE HOPE OF ESTABLISHING HIS LEADERSHIP OVER IT, IS TRYING TO PREVENT A CENTRIST BREAK-AWAY. THE CDS LEADERSHIP IS DUE TO MEET TOMORROW (14 JUNE) TO DEBATE THE NEXT MOVE.

THE PCF

8. FOR THE COMMUNISTS THE ELECTION OF 27 DEPUTIES HAS BROUGHT UNEXPECTED RELIEF. THEY HAVE LOST 8 SEATS, AND HAVE FALLEN BELOW

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THE 30 SEAT LEVEL NEEDED FOR PARLIAMENTARY GROUP STATUS, BUT THEY HAVE DONE MUCH BETTER THAN THEY EXPECTED A MONTH AGO. THEY APPEAR TO HAVE BENEFITTED FROM A COMPARATIVELY LOW RATE OF ABSTENTION AMONG PCF SUPPORTERS, AND FROM THE STRONG SHOWING OF LOCALLY POPULAR CANDIDATES IN THE FIRST ROUND WHO BENEFITTED FROM THE PS/PCF AGREEMENT IN THE SECOND. IT IS A MEASURE OF HOW LOW EXPECTATIONS HAVE FALLEN THAT THE COMMUNISTS SHOULD PRESENT WHAT IN HISTORICAL TERMS IS A BAD RESULT AS SOME SORT OF VICTORY. MARCHAIS WILL NO DOUBT SEEK TO EXPLOIT IT TO SILENCE CRITICS IN THE PARTY EMBOLDENED BY LAJOINIE'S DISMAL PERFORMANCE IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS.

THE FN

9. THE RESULT IS A SHARP SETBACK TO LE PEN'S HOPES THAT THE FN WOULD QUICKLY CAPITALISE ON HIS 14.4 PER CENT PRESIDENTIAL SCORE. THE FN HAS SUFFERED FROM THE RETURN TO A SYSTEM OF MAJORITY VOTING, AND FROM ITS LACK OF STRONG LOCAL BASTIONS (UNLIKE THE PCF). LE PEN'S ATTEMPT TO IMPOSE HIMSELF AND HIS LIEUTENANTS IN MARSEILLES AND THE BOUCHES-DU-RHONE HAS FAILED: THE ONLY FN DEPUTY (MME YANN PIAT) WAS ELECTED FOR VAR. NEVERTHELESS A NUMBER OF FN CANDIDATES POLLED STRONGLY IN THE MIDI. (LE PEN'S SECOND ROUND SCORE WAS 43 PER CENT), AND THE PARTY'S 9.6 PER CENT NATIONALLY IS THE SAME AS IN 1986 (WHEN PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION GAVE IT 35 SEATS). LE PEN WILL ALSO BE PLEASED WITH THE CO-OPERATION AGREEMENT HE NEGOTIATED WITH THE URC BEFORE THE SECOND ROUND, WHICH COULD WELL SET A PRECEDENT FOR NEXT YEAR'S MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS.

MITTERRAND

10. LAST MONTH MITTERRAND SAID IT WOULD BE UNHEALTHY IF ONE POLITICAL PARTY WERE TO ENJOY ALL POLITICAL POWER IN FRANCE: LAST WEEK HE APPEARED TO CONTRADICT HIMSELF AND APPEALED FOR A CLEAR PS MAJORITY. THE ELECTORATE HAS SHOWN ITSELF PERSUADED BY HIS FIRST, RATHER THAN SECOND, THOUGHTS.

11. HE NOW HAS A NUMBER OF OPTIONS (NOT ALL OF WHICH ARE IN HIS POWER TO IMPOSE):-

(I) A PS-PCF COALITION WHICH WOULD BE A RETURN TO THE 1981 UNION OF THE LEFT FORMULA:

(II) A PS MINORITY GOVERNMENT WHICH MIGHT SURVIVE FOR SOME TIME GIVEN THE IMPORBABILITY THAT THE PCF WOULD MAKE COMMON CAUSE WITH THE RIGHT TO BRING IT DOWN IN PARLIAMENT:

(III) A CENTRE-LEFT COALITION BUILT AROUND THE PS AND A CDS

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DETACHED FROM THE UDF:

(IV) A GRAND COALITION COMPOSED OF THE PS AND THE UDF (AND PERHAPS EVEN ELEMENTS OF THE RPR).

12. A RETURN TO THE UNION OF THE LEFT (I) IS VERY UNLIKELY. MITTERRAND HAS NO WISH TO TURN BACK TO THE COMMUNISTS, AND THE PCF NO WISH TO REJOIN THE PS IN GOVERNMENT AFTER ITS EXPERIENCES BETWEEN 1981-84. MARCHAIS' AIM NOW WILL BE TO TRY TO EXPLOIT ON THE LEFT THE MOVEMENT BY THE SOCIALISTS TOWARDS THE CENTRE.

13. MINORITY GOVERNMENT (II) OR GOVERNMENT WITH THE CDS (III) IS MUCH MORE LIKELY WITH ONE PERHAPS LEADING TO THE OTHER. MITTERRAND'S PREFERENCE MAY WELL BE FOR A PS-CDS COALITION ON THE BASIS OF AN AGREED PROGRAMME. AS A TRANSITIONAL STEP, HE MAY OPT FOR MINORITY GOVERNMENT WHILE HE WAITS TO SEE IF THE CDS AND ASSORTED BARRISTES CAN BE TEMPTED TO JOIN THE GOVERNMENT LATER IN THE SUMMER OR IN THE AUTUMN. HE WILL PROBABLY, BUT NOT CERTAINLY, KEEP ROCARD ON AS PRIME MINISTER IN THE HOPE THAT HE CAN REACH AN AGREEMENT WITH THE CENTRISTS, BUT HE MIGHT SACRIFICE HIM IN FAVOUR OF EG DELORS OR BARRE, IF THIS WERE THE PRICE OF CDS PARTICIPATION. ONLY IF HE IS PERSUADED THAT THE CENTRISTS WILL NOT BREAK NEW POLITICAL GROUND ON THEIR OWN IS HE LIKELY TO CONTEMPLATE A GRAND COALITION. (FOR A DESCRIPTION OF THE POLITICAL TIMETABLE IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS SEE SEPARATE TELEGRAM.)

CONCLUSION

14. THIS IS NOT THE RESULT THE OPINION POLLS PREDICTED NOR WHAT MITTERRAND EXPECTED (NOR WHAT I DID, FOR THAT MATTER): AND YET IT MAY NOT BE A BAD ONE FROM HIS POINT OF VIEW. THE ELECTORATE HAVE DENIED THE SOCIALISTS AN OUTRIGHT MAJORITY, BUT THEY HAVE STRENGTHENED THE CENTRISTS WHO COULD COMBINE WITH THEM TO PROVIDE ONE. THE NEW PARLIAMENTARY ARITHMETIC THEREFORE MAKES A COMPELLING CASE FOR THE POLITICAL OPENING THAT MITTERRAND HAS BEEN ADVOCATING SINCE HE BEGAN HIS RE-ELECTION CAMPAIGN. THE QUESTION NOW IS WHETHER THERE IS THE POLITICAL WILL TO MAKE IT REALITY.

15. FRANCE'S PARTNERS HOWEVER WILL HAVE TO EXPECT A PERIOD OF UNCERTAINTY WHICH COULD STRETCH FORWARD FROM TORONTO (WHERE MITTERRAND WILL UNDOUBTEDLY HAVE OTHER THINGS ON HIS MIND) AS FAR AS HANOVER OR EVEN FURTHER.

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