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R 141856Z JUN 83
 FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4496
 INFO NATO COLLECTIVE
 EUROPEAN POLADS COLLECTIVE
 AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
 AMCONSUL BELFAST POUCH
 AMCONSUL EDINBURGH POUCH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 12717

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
 TAGS: PGOV, UK
 SUBJECT: THE 1983 ELECTION AND THE FUTURE OF BRITISH
 - POLITICS

- 1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.
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- 2. THREE FACTORS ARE CENTRAL:

- THATCHER'S 144 SEAT MAJORITY WILL EFFECTIVELY WITHER
- PARTY COMPETITION IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS. CONFLICT
- WITHIN PARTIES MAY BE MORE PROMINENT, ESPECIALLY WITHIN
- THE LARGE TORY BACKBENCH.

- NEITHER LABOR NOR THE ALLIANCE WILL BE ABLE TO
- CHALLENGE THE TORIES. OPPORTUNITIES FOR POLITICAL
- BREAKTHROUGHS BY EITHER ARE LIMITED. BUT NEITHER
- SHOULD DIE OR CHANGE DRAMATICALLY DURING THE NEXT
- FIVE YEARS.

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- THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTION IS UNLIKELY TO OCCUR MUCH
- BEFORE JUNE 1988. THUS COMPETITION AMONG THE PARTIES
- WILL BE LIMITED TO BYELECTION SKIRMISHES, AND ALARMS
- AND EXCURSIONS OVER POLICIES WITH AN EYE TO THE OPINION
- POLLS.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
 REVIEW AUTHORITY: ERIC W FLEISHER
 DATE/CASE ID: 28 MAY 2003 200101860

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3. THE TORIES: THATCHER'S TRIUMPH WAS ENSURED BY THE FIRST PAST THE POST ELECTORAL SYSTEM, BUT THE TORY SHARE OF THE VOTE FELL FROM 43.9 IN '79 TO 42.4. THATCHER'S MAIN PROBLEM IN THE FUTURE SHOULD BE COPING WITH ECONOMIC REALITY, NOT LABOR OR THE ALLIANCE. AFTER A DECENT INTERVAL, WE LOOK FOR SOME BACKBENCH FACTIONALISM FROM BOTH WETS AND THE RIGHT WING -- ISSUES COULD INCLUDE EMOTIVE SUBJECTS LIKE CAPITAL PUNISHMENT AND RACE RELATIONS. PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES COULD INCREASINGLY BE ARENAS FOR POLITICAL BRAWLING. SOME OF THIS WILL BE INFLUENCED BY THE NATURE OF THE '83 INTAKE (THERE ARE 104 NEW TORY MP'S) WHICH AT FIRST GLANCE LOOKS HARD-EYED; HOWEVER, MANY OF THEM REPRESENT MARGINAL OR NORMALLY LABOR SEATS. HOPING TO SURVIVE POLITICALLY, SOME MAY START TO FLIRT WITH WET IDEAS BUT WILL BE RELUCTANT TO CROSS THATCHER WHO ALSO HAS SOME CONTROL OVER THEIR FUTURES.

4. WITH ALL HER INTENSITY, STAMINA, AND SAVVY SO EVIDENT IN THE CAMPAIGN, THATCHER DOMINATES THE TORY STATE. SHE CONTINUES TO ENJOY A GREAT CREDIBILITY IN THIS COUNTRY. HER CONVICTION, PATRIOTISM, AND FALKLANDS SUCCESS MADE MANY BRITONS FEEL PROUD AND MORE READY TO SWALLOW HER TOUGH ECONOMIC MEDICINE, AND SHE IS ADEPT AT GETTING HER DOMESTIC OPPONENTS TO MAKE CRIPPLING ERRORS. HER PERSONAL PERFORMANCE OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS WILL HEAVILY DETERMINE WHAT HAPPENS TO THE TORIES.

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5. LABOR: '83 WAS A DEBACLE FOR LABOR. POIGNANT STATISTICS INCLUDE: LOWEST NATIONAL SHARE (27.8 PERCENT) OF THE POPULAR VOTE SINCE 1918, LOWEST PER LABOR CANDIDATE SHARE SINCE 1900, AND MORE DEPOSITS LOST THAN THE COMBINED LABOR TOTAL IN ALL ELECTIONS SINCE WORLD WAR II. LABOR HAS BEEN DRIVEN BACK INTO ITS NORTHERN/MIDLAND AND CLYDE-SIDE STRONGHOLDS. INDEED ACROSS THE SOUTH IT FINISHED A BAD THIRD. THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM GAVE LABOR 209 PARLIAMENTARY SEATS, AND LABOR JUST AVOIDED THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DISASTER OF FINISHING BEHIND THE ALLIANCE IN POPULAR VOTE. WHILE THE LEADERSHIP ISSUE MAY BE SETTLED IN OCTOBER, LABOR'S REAL BATTLES CONCERN POLICIES AND THEY SHOULD CONTINUE, INCLUDING OVER NEW QUESTIONS, E.G., THE NATURE AND ADVISABILITY OF EXTRA PARLIAMENTARY ACTIVITY.

6. ALLIANCE: DESPITE THE BEST THIRD PARTY PERFORMANCE IN VOTE SHARE SINCE 1923, THIS ELECTION WAS A DISAPPOINTMENT FOR THE ALLIANCE; NONETHELESS, IT DID WELL ENOUGH TO

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ASSURE SURVIVAL. SEVEN SDP MP'S STUMBLER OUT OF THE RUBBLE, INCLUDING TWO OF THE GANG OF FOUR. IF THESE TWO, OWEN AND JENKINS, HAD BEEN DEFEATED THE SDP MIGHT HAVE DISAPPEARED OR MERGED WITH THE LIBERALS. BUT IN FACT, THE PRESENCE OF THE SDP ENHANCED THE ALLIANCE VOTE AND JUSTIFIED THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF SEPARATE PARTIES UNDER A SINGLE UMBRELLA. THE ALLIANCE OUTLOOK IS CLOUDY, BUT AT A MINIMUM, OWEN AND STEEL SHOULD PROVIDE THATCHER WITH SOME FEISTY VERBAL OPPOSITION.

7. IN SHORT, THERE COULD BE LESS CHANGE IN BRITISH POLITICS OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS THAN SOME EXPECT. TORY DOMINATION OF PARLIAMENT WILL NOT CHANGE THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY. WHILE BADLY WOUNDED, LABOR AND THE ALLIANCE SHOULD SURVIVE, ENDURE, BUT NOT PROSPER. OTHER THAN THE FIFTEEN OR SO BY-ELECTIONS WHICH SHOULD OCCUR OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS, THERE ARE LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE

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OPPOSITION PARTIES TO GRAPPLE WITH THE TORIES, ALTHOUGH THERE MAY BE DIPS IN THE POLLS AND RHETORICAL VICTORIES. IT IS DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE HOW ANY NEW LEFT/CENTER CONTENDER TO TORY PREEMINENCE CAN EMERGE IN THESE CONDITIONS.

8. IN THE MEANTIME, THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL EVOLUTION OF THE BRITISH ELECTORATE IS LIKELY TO CONTINUE IN FAIRLY PREDICTABLE WAYS:

-- DECLINE IN THE PROPORTION OF HEAVY INDUSTRY WORKING CLASS AND REDUCED ALLEGIANCE TO LABOR, E.G., IN '83 ONLY 40 PERCENT OF TRADE UNION MEMBERS VOTED LABOR.

-- EXPANSION OF THE MIDDLE CLASS, ESPECIALLY SERVICE
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INDUSTRIES, AND CONTINUED GROWTH IN THE SOUTH.

-- A MORE FLUID, LESS REFLEXIVELY COMMITTED ELECTORATE E.G., IN '64, 44 PERCENT OF VOTERS DESCRIBED THEMSELVES AS "STRONGLY" COMMITTED TO A PARTY, IN '79 THE PROPORTION WAS 21 PERCENT.

BUT THOSE ARE LONG-TERM TRENDS WHICH SHOULD BENEFIT THE TORIES AND THE ALLIANCE AND CAUSE LABOR EVEN GREATER PROBLEMS THAN IT FACED IN 1983. LOUIS

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