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TO PRIORITY FCO
TELEGRAM NUMBER 3195 OF 26 OCTOBER

INFO SAVING CGS USA, UKMIS NEW YORK, NATO POSTS, DUBLIN, MOSCOW

MY TELNO 3159: US PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

SUMMARY

1. LATEST POLLS SHOW PRESIDENT'S LEAD HOLDING FIRM OR EVEN EXPANDING. HE NOW LOOKS TOO FAR AHEAD TO CATCH.

DETAIL

2. THE LATEST OPINION POLLS CONFIRM THAT THE PRESIDENT'S POSITION HAS BEEN MAINTAINED OR STRENGTHENED BY LAST SUNDAY'S TELEVISED DEBATE (MY TUR). THE SURGE IN MONDALE'S SUPPORT AFTER THE FIRST DEBATE HAD ALREADY BEEN HALTED BEFORE THE SECOND. COMMENTATORS ARE AGREED THAT THE PRESIDENT'S COMPOSURE, AND HIS QUIP ABOUT NOT MAKING YOUTH/INEXPERIENCE AN ELECTORAL ISSUE, SEEMS TO HAVE PULLED THE RUG FROM UNDER THE DEMOCRATIC ATTACK ON HIS LEADERSHIP QUALITIES. OPINION POLLS TAKEN IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE DEBATE SHOWED VOTERS SCORING THE CANDIDATES' PERFORMANCE IN IT FAIRLY EVENLY, BUT WITH A SLIGHT EDGE FOR THE PRESIDENT. THE PERCEPTION THAT THE PRESIDENT GAINED FROM THE DEBATE HAS GROWN AS THE WEEK HAS GONE ON, WITH A NEWSWEEK POLL SHOWING HIM SCORING CONSISTENTLY HIGHER MARKS THAN MONDALE ACROSS THE BOARD FOR HIS PERFORMANCE IN HANDLING QUESTIONS ON FOREIGN AND DEFENCE POLICY.

3. A WASHINGTON POST/ABC POLL PUBLISHED ON 25 OCTOBER GIVES THE PRESIDENT A 54%/42% NATIONAL LEAD OVER MONDALE, THE SAME MARGIN AS A WEEK AGO. A HARRIS SURVEY PUBLISHED THE SAME DAY GIVES HIM A 14% LEAD, COMPARED WITH 9% A WEEK AGO. THROUGHOUT THE CAMPAIGN THESE HAVE BEEN THE TWO POLLING ORGANISATIONS REPORTING THE SMALLEST REAGAN LEADS: THAT REMAINS TRUE.

4. THE GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD OF REAGAN SUPPORT REMAINS STRIKING. MONDALE NOW LEADS ONLY IN MINNESOTA AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA (13 OUT OF 538 ELECTORAL COLLEGE VOTES). THE RACE IS CLOSE IN THE INDUSTRIAL NORTH EAST, PARTICULARLY NEW YORK, AND IN THE NORTH WEST. BUT ALTHOUGH THE REAGAN LEAD IN CALIFORNIA IS BELOW 10%, THE DEMOCRATIC ADVANCE THERE SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN HALTED. AND THE REST OF THE MID-WEST (APART FROM MINNESOTA AND POSSIBLY WISCONSIN), WHERE BOTH CANDIDATES HAVE BEEN CAMPAIGNING HARD THIS WEEK, NOW LOOKS SECURE FOR THE PRESIDENT.

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5. REPUBLICAN CONFIDENCE, AND DEMOCRAT PESSIMISM, GROWS. JAMES BAKER, WHITE HOUSE CHIEF OF STAFF, HAS COMMENTED THAT MONDALE NOW NEEDS TO TURN A MILLION VOTERS A DAY FOR VICTORY. ALTHOUGH MONDALE'S OVERALL APPROVAL RATING CONTINUES TO SHOW THE IMPROVEMENT NOTED AFTER THE FIRST DEBATE (IT NOW STANDS AT 53 - 44% FAVOURABLE), THE PRESIDENT'S RATING REMAINS SUBSTANTIALLY HIGHER AT 60 - 36% APPROVAL. SOME OF THE REAGAN CAMPAIGN STAFF ARE OPENLY SAYING THAT IT IS ALL OVER BAR THE VOTING. THIS IS OF COURSE A DANGEROUS PREDICTION IN AMERICAN POLITICS, EVEN WITH ONLY TEN DAYS TO GO. BUT, THOUGH THE PRESIDENT IS NOT YET IN THE WINNER'S ENCLOSURE, IT LOOKS MORE AND MORE LIKE A RACING CERTAINTY.

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