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FM PARIS 181800Z MAY 83

TO ROUTINE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 416 OF 18 MAY

INFO ROUTINE MODUK (DI3 FOR WEST)

INFO SAVING EC POSTS, UKDEL STRASBOURG, CONSULS GENERAL FRANCE

MY SAVING TELNO 38 : UNREST IN FRANCE

SUMMARY

1. STREET DEMONSTRATIONS BY STUDENTS, FARMERS, SHOPKEEPERS AND SMALL BUSINESSMEN, EACH IN SUPPORT OF THEIR SEPARATE GRIEVANCES, HAVE CONTINUED IN PARIS AND ELSEWHERE IN THE PROVINCES OVER THE PAST TEN DAYS. TEMPERS HAVE FREQUENTLY BECOME FRAYED. THERE ARE HOWEVER SIGNS THAT THE HEAD OF STEAM BEHIND THE CURRENT WAVE OF DEMONSTRATIONS MAY BE DECLINING. DURING THIS PERIOD OF UNREST WILD RUMOURS ABOUT PLOTS AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT HAVE BEEN BANDIED ABOUT BY BOTH LEFT AND RIGHT BUT THEY DO NOT DESERVE EITHER THE PROMINENCE OR THE CREDIBILITY GIVEN TO THEM IN THE BRITISH PRESS, NOTABLY TODAY'S DAILY EXPRESS.

DETAIL

2. PHARMACEUTICAL STUDENTS VOTED YESTERDAY TO CONTINUE THEIR STRIKE. MEDICAL STUDENTS HAVE POSTPONED A DECISION WHETHER TO ACCEPT PROPOSALS PUT FORWARD BY GOVERNMENT-APPOINTED MEDIATORS FOR ENDING THEIR THREE MONTH STRIKE. THE GOVERNMENT HAVE MADE LITTLE HEADWAY IN WINNING SUPPORT FOR THEIR UNIVERSITY REFORM BILL. BUT WITH THE APPROACH OF THE EXAMINATION SEASON, STUDENT STRIKERS ARE BEGINNING TO CRUMBLE. THE STUDENT PROTEST MOVEMENT HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY DIVIDED ALONG PARTISAN LINES. MODERATE STUDENTS ARE CLEARLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE INFILTRATION OF THEIR DEMONSTRATIONS BY EXTREME RIGHT-WINGERS. THE GOVERNMENT HAS WITH SOME SUCCESS PLAYED ON THIS ANXIETY. FURTHER DEMONSTRATIONS ARE PLANNED FOR TODAY AND ON 24 MAY WHEN THE BILL HAS ITS FIRST READING IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. LIKE EARLIER DEMONSTRATIONS, THESE MAY WELL DEGENERATE INTO VIOLENCE. THE GOVERNMENT SEEM DETERMINED HOWEVER TO STICK TO THEIR PREVIOUSLY ANNOUNCED PARLIAMENTARY TIME-TABLE.

3. AS REPORTED IN MY TELNO 410 DISCONTENT AMONG FARMERS APPEARS TO BE GOING OFF THE BOIL. SHOPKEEPERS AND SMALL BUSINESSMEN CONTINUED THEIR ACTION AND ON 16 MAY FOR THE THIRD TIME IN UNDER THREE WEEKS, DEMONSTRATED IN PARIS AND THE PROVINCES AGAINST GOVERNMENT 'FISCAL OPPRESSION'. THREE PEOPLE INCLUDING A JOURNALIST WERE INJURED IN A VIOLENT SCUFFLE AT THE END OF THE DEMONSTRATION. TODAY PUBLIC TRANSPORT IN PARIS IS BEING DISRUPTED BY UNION ACTION AND A ONE-HOUR GENERAL STRIKE CALLED BY THE MODERATE FORCE OUVRIERE. BUT FOR THE MOST PART THE UNIONS CONTINUE TO STAND ON THE TOUCH-LINES.

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4. EVER SINCE MITTERRAND'S ELECTION SOME ON THE RIGHT HAVE HOPED THAT SOCIAL UNREST WOULD BEFORE TOO LONG SWEEP THE LEFT FROM OFFICE. THE PRESENT WAVE OF SOCIAL UNREST HAS ENCOURAGED THE EXTREME RIGHT TO BELIEVE THAT THE DAY OF JUDGEMENT IS AT HAND. EXTREME RIGHT-WINGERS HAVE UNDOUBTEDLY PROVOKED SOME OF THE MORE VIOLENT CONFRONTATIONS BETWEEN DEMONSTRATORS AND THE POLICE. DESPITE THE LOOSE TALK IN SOME OPPOSITION CIRCLES, THIS IS A FAR CRY FROM A PLOT TO OVERTHROW THE GOVERNMENT. MOST OPPOSITION LEADERS RECOGNISE THAT THEY HAVE LITTLE TO GAIN FROM SUGGESTING THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL NOT SERVE OUT ITS TERM. THE LEFT ARE READY TO POUNCE ON ANY SUCH SUGGESTION TO ACCUSE THE OPPOSITION OF UNDERMINING THE LEGITIMACY OF THE DEMOCRATICALLY-ELECTED GOVERNMENT.

5. REPORTS IN THE BRITISH PRESS BASED ON AN EDITORIAL IN YESTERDAY'S FIGARO (RIGHT WING) THAT TROOPS ARE ON ALERT TO MOVE INTO PARIS AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE TO PREVENT THE OVERTHROW OF THE GOVERNMENT MISREPRESENT THE FACTS. WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST THAT THE FORCES AVAILABLE TO THE PREFECT OF POLICE, RESPONSIBLE FOR LAW AND ORDER IN THE PARIS REGION, HAVE BEEN REINFORCED. THESE FORCES INCLUDE 9 SQUADRONS OF PARA-MILITARY GENDARMERIE, EACH WITH 85 PERSONNEL STATIONED NEAR VERSAILLES. THEY ARE EQUIPPED WITH AMX13 LIGHT TANKS AND WHEELED ARMoured PERSONNEL CARRIERS, ALOUETTE 2 HELICOPTERS AND PROTECTED LORRIES AND BUSES. WE HAVE BEEN TOLD BY THE MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR THAT IT WAS ONLY NATURAL FOR THESE FORCES TO BE ON CALL DURING A PERIOD OF DEMONSTRATIONS. IN THE FACE OF THE USE OF MOLOTOV COCKTAILS BY DEMONSTRATORS, THE GENDARMES HAVE BEEN TRANSPORTED IN ARMoured PERSONNEL CARRIERS. THERE WAS HOWEVER NO QUESTION OF TANKS ROLLING THROUGH THE STREETS OF PARIS.

FCO PLEASE PASS SAVING DUBLIN ROME LUXEMBOURG BONN THE HAGUE
UKREP BRUSSELS BRUSSELS COPENHAGEN ATHENS AND UKDEL STRASBOURG

FRETWELL

REPEATED AS REQUESTED

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**THIS TELEGRAM
WAS NOT
ADVANCED**

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