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Mr O Deasy

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Secretary
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Summary

Direct Elections to the European Parliament

1. The House of Commons debate on direct elections to the European Parliament has not helped to dispel the uncertainty which clouds this issue.
2. Both the Government and the Tories are to allow a free vote on the electoral system to be used. The Government, while it has not committed itself to a particular form of elections, and while it is impossible to predict what may happen in the present confused situation, may possibly be moving in the direction of PR based on a regional list system. The Prime Minister will have great difficulty in fulfilling his commitment to direct elections against considerable opposition in the Labour Party. As many as a third of Labour M.P's. may oppose the Bill.
3. The Conservatives too find themselves in a dilemma. While supporting the principle of direct elections, they favour retention of the existing first past the post electoral system which could give them as many as 65 of Britain's 81 seats in the European Parliament. It is possible, however, that at the end of the day they may not oppose the Government's proposals even if they provide for the regional list system.
4. In any event, the Direct Elections Bill is assured of a rough time in the House of Commons and the outlook continues to be uncertain.

Timothy P. Lorman

Counsellor