

Portugal before the presidential election

by Laurent Murawiec

In January, Portugal will enter the third phase of its existence as a republic: After the revolutionary tempests of 1974-75 and the 10 years of stabilization under President Ramalho Eanes, the respected moderate general will step down after two mandates, and the outcome of the presidential elections will shape the country's political physiognomy for the period ahead.

Following the Oct. 15 parliamentary elections, the new parliament differs sharply from its predecessors, since the long-dominant Socialist Party (PS) of U.S. State Department-ally Mario Soares has taken a drubbing, and fallen to second place; it has been replaced as premier party by the right-of-center electoral coalition, the Social-Democrats of the PSD, whose young leader Anibal Cavaco Silva has been sworn in as prime minister. Additionally, the party newly formed at the behest of President Eanes, the Renovators (PRD), has taken a strong third place, way ahead of the declining Communist Party of die-hard Stalinist Alvaro Cunhal. After his electoral victory, Cavaco Silva, a British-educated economist, using his party's pivotal parliamentary position, chose an alliance with the right-wing losers at the polls, the Democratic-Christian Social Center Party (CDS), by selecting a former leader of that party, Diogo Freitas de Amaral, as his presidential candidate.

The President's new party, the Renovators, which had gained slightly less than 18% of the national vote, forthwith split into a series of rival factions, and escaped out of control of Eanes. His favored candidate, Col. Costa Braz, former government minister and current head of the Anti-Corruption Office—not a small job under the Socialist rule of Soares—was rejected by the PRD, and had to withdraw his candidacy—a severe defeat for the President. Undaunted by the failure, Eanes then encouraged the candidacy of dissident Socialist leader Salgado Zenha, a sworn opponent of Soares, and one who had largely contributed to Eanes's own electoral victory in 1980. Repaying a past debt, the President issued an official letter of “total and unreserved support” for Zenha, a frequent guest at Lisbon's overstuffed Soviet embassy.

Zenha will draw votes away from Soares, who is a de-

clared, if hopeless candidate after his party's rout in the parliamentary elections, but also from the Communist candidate, a bureaucratic non-entity by the name of Angelo Veloso—a pro forma candidate imposed by Cunhal, but one who could throw in the towel in favor of Zenha, as the Communist leader stated that “a rapprochement with the party of Eanes is possible,” and declared himself “ready to ally with the new party” whose “viability is necessary.” Given the fact that the Renovators are a mixture of veterans from all other parties, from the old revolutionary Movement of the Armed Forces (MFA) to newcomers in active politics, the Communist Party, whose power in Portugal goes far beyond the simplicities of electoral arithmetic, has sent in numerous submerged agents and sleepers. Communist support was critical to enable President Eanes to be re-elected in 1980, and this debt has not stopped producing interest. The PRD itself, dazzled by an unexpectedly large electoral triumph, and devoid of proper organization, has splintered into contending factions, and its continued existence is by no means assured.

A presidential victory of Freitas de Amaral, who is presently visiting the King of Spain, his old friend Helmut Kohl, and his role-model Margaret Thatcher, appears the likeliest. He is also polishing up a centrist image to superimpose on a past profile tending much farther to the right—in a country where the corporatist dictatorship of Dr. Salazar was still in power 11 years ago. Freitas de Amaral is backed by the Church. His rumored connections to the Opus Dei order are not irrelevant to such support.

The government's program

Neither Prime Minister Cavaco Silva, whose government program was announced on Nov. 15, and barely goes beyond bland generalities, nor Freitas de Amaral, has given any significant content to their proclamations. The general orientation of this potential duet calls for a disinflation of the swollen government bureaucracy, privatization of parts of the nationalized sector, “less state, but a better state,” boosting private initiative—a re-hash of the worn-out clichés of “Reaganomics” and Margaret Thatcher's recipes. The issue of oppression of Portugal by the International Monetary Fund has been very carefully avoided. Nor does the government program take up the question of urgent investment in infrastructure and energy which prefigure economic recovery in a country that has suffered colonial wars, revolution, strikes, socialist bureaucratization, oil crises, and the world economic depression.

From the flow of electoral hot air, a few points can be excerpted, such as Cavaco's promise that, at long last, Portugal will rebuild its intelligence service and Freitas de Amaral's statement of support for the Strategic Defense Initiative. But once the electoral dust settles, after the Dec. 15 local elections and the presidential vote in January, the brutal realities of a backward, devastated economy, will have to be faced.