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Soares hopes his party will now revive glory of Portugal's 1974 Revolution

Socialists' fate crucial to election

Fundação Cuidar o Futuro

From Jill Jolliffe
in Lisbon

IN May, 1974, the Portuguese Socialist leader, Dr Mario Soares, returned to Lisbon from years in exile, to large demonstrations of popular acclaim. If any party reaped the glory of the 1974 "Flower Revolution" it was the Socialists: In Portugal's first free elections in almost half a century they romped in with a convincing 34-seat lead over their nearest opponents, the Popular Social Democrats.

Two years after the elections, in June, 1978, Prime Minister Soares was dismissed by President Eanes after he was unable to reach agreement with his partners in government, the Centre Social Democrats.

In November, 1978, the Socialists suffered a demoralising defeat in local elections in Evora, a traditional Communist stronghold in

● Top: Dr Soares, and left, President Eanes

Alentejo province. Previously the second-strongest party, the Socialists polled little over half their 1976 vote. The lost votes went, on the one hand, to the Communist Party's winning electoral front, the United People's Alliance, and on the other, to the conservative Popular Social Democrats, which moved into second place. The abstention rate rose by 9 per cent.

Although difficult to generalise from a small local poll, the Evora byelection seemed to crystallise a widespread feeling of disillusionment with the Socialist Party, which could be crucial to the outcome of the December 2 elections.

The Socialists attribute their 1978 popularity slump to their term in Government during the most difficult period for the post-revolutionary economy.

There were other factors in the party's loss of support. Since 1974 the Socialists have performed a precarious

balancing act between Left and Right, summed up in their election slogan: "To the Left and the Right, the Socialists represent the frontiers of liberty." The formula has sometimes succeeded, but

AN amnesty came into effect in Portugal yesterday for people facing charges following attempted Right and Left-wing coups in 1975. But people pardoned could still face a review of their conduct by military disciplinary councils. — Reuter.

more often has resulted in a loss of credibility, even among the party's own rank-and-file.

Two examples are obvious. Last year the Socialists formed, with the Popular Social Democrats, a new trade union federation to rival the Communist-led Intersindical. The Communists claim the General Union of Workers is CIA-

funded, through the West German trade unions. Whether or not this is so, many Socialist supporters see it as a breach of basic trade union solidarity.

Agrarian reform was another stumbling block in the way of Socialist conciliation. In 1977 the Socialists sponsored a law to modify the radical agrarian reform programme initiated by the revolution. The "Barreto law" as it was known (after its mover, Antonio Barreto), decreed the return of a proportion of collectivised land to private owners. The law has since played a part in the downfall of several governments and led to growing violence in the southern Alentejo province, culminating in two deaths in late September.

Blamed for the disastrous results, the Socialists moved modifications, designed to increase Parliamentary supervision of land handovers, while retaining the law. The modifications were approved

by Parliament, but last week vetoed by President Eanes on grounds of unconstitutionality. The loss of votes in Evora certainly was a result of the Socialists' agrarian reform policy.

The important election question is who Centrist or disillusioned Socialist voters will choose. The Independent Social Democrat, a recent breakaway group of 36 liberal Parliamentarians from the Popular Social Democrats, decided not to contest the elections because they were unprepared.

The Popular Social Democrats previously drew a proportion of the Centre vote, resting on its founding 1974 reputation as a liberal populist party. That reputation no longer holds true, because of the split, and the party's decision to run in alliance with the Centre Social Democrats (in practice Christian Democrats) and the Right-wing Popular Monarchists, as the Democratic Alliance.