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## December in Portugal

Portuguese President Antonio Ramalho Eanes, presiding over a country caught in a bewildering tangle of economic, political and constitutional problems, has dissolved Parliament and called a general election for December 2, a year ahead of schedule. But it would take an act of faith to believe that Portugal's problems will be any closer to solution after the votes are counted than they are now.

It may offer some insight into the nature of Portugal's problems to recall that the current crisis began, formally, in March of this year, when a senior cabinet minister resigned his office, slamming the door on the way out, and accusing President Eanes of denying him the support he needed to do his job in defiance of the constitution.

The minister was Augusto Ferreira do Amaral, who represented the right-wing Popular Monarchist Party in a coalition Government. His job, as Minister of Agricultural Reconstruction, was to dismantle the land reform which Portugal's revolutionary constitution solemnly promises to defend.

Portugal's constitution leans strongly toward the left. It was drafted while the left still dominated the Armed Forces Movement that replaced the dictatorship. And its three cardinal principles are the nationalization of the means of production, the breakup and redistribution of the large agricultural landholdings, and, for labor, the right to form unions and to strike. The constitution could be amended by a two-thirds vote of the Parliament originally scheduled to have been elected in 1980. But such an amendment could not, constitutionally, alter "the principle of the collective appropriation of the principal means of production."

But in practice Portugal is a conservative, capitalist society, pulling back firmly from the early socialist experiments in the nationalization of banks and some haphazard land reform, most of it carried out by groups of landless farm laborers acting on their own initiative. Even the Socialist Party has conceded that it is necessary, for the sake of access to urgently needed assistance from the

International Monetary Fund, to woo back the capital, domestic and foreign, that flooded out of the country in the months after the fall of the dictatorship. And that essentially means moving toward the conditions that made Salazar's Portugal so attractive to investment: incentives and security for the investor, austerity for the urban worker and the rural farmhand.

The first democratic Government to take office since the revolution, that of Socialist Mario Soares, was crushed between the anger aroused on the left by its retreat from socialism and the impatience of a burgeoning right wing that felt the retreat was moving too slowly. Two more conservative premiers, the right-wing

Alfredo da Costa, and the more moderate Carlos Alberto da Mota Pinto, also tried and failed to hold together a working coalition.

Finally, in July, after the Mota Pinto Government fell, President Eanes gave the thankless job of heading an interim government to Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo, a brilliant engineer and diplomat admired by the moderate left but feared by the increasingly immoderate right as a radical "Third Worldist". Her job was to get an austerity budget through Parliament to clear the decks for the election that has now been called.

The big question mark of the election will be the strength of the Democratic Alliance, a coalition of right-wing and centre-right parties, which hopes to gain the parliamentary power for a major overhaul of the constitution. If they did they would then be up against the constitution itself which forbids any change in the basic principle of "collective appropriation".

Thus it seems almost a certainty that President Eanes, and the military Council of the Revolution, whose responsibility is to ensure that the constitution is observed, will have a constitutional crisis on their hands next year — the year, as it happens, that the term of President Eanes expires and the country plunges into a new presidential election.