

WORLD

PORTUGAL

Concern over premier's alleged Marxist ties

Like a rudderless vessel being buffeted by stormy seas Portugal's ship of state is in serious risk of crashing on the dangerous rocks ahead. Indeed any hope political analysts might have left of charting the course the country is taking have been shattered by its erratic behaviour.

President Ramalho Eanes announced the dissolution of Parliament on Friday July 13. Two weeks later, parliamentarians were not only sitting pretty but passing controversial laws such as the Amnesty Bill which had previously been vetoed by the president.

Looking for an independent premier to lead a caretaker government until next October's stop-gap general elections, Eanes summoned Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo, Portugal's ambassador to Unesco, from Paris. Independent she may be but leading right-wing leaders at once claimed that she is a notorious left-winger who may rig the elections in favour of the Socialist-Communist bloc.



Pintasilgo: Portugal's woman prime minister

Shortly after her arrival in Lisbon Pintasilgo added to the general confusion by displaying indecisiveness in her first television interview. She admitted to being "unpredictable" and kept stressing that hers would be a "100-day government".

For the majority of Portuguese, Pintasilgo's most disturbing feature is her alleged connections with Marxist theoretician Melo Antunes, who is generally believed to be the *eminence grise* of the regime and Eanes' political mentor.

Eighteen months of unprecedented political turmoil lie ahead for the Portuguese. Four

major elections are scheduled at a time when the country's spiralling rate of inflation threatens to set an all time record. Next October the Portuguese go to the polls for legislative elections; in December the country will be in uproar as thousands of candidates fight for seats in local elections; in October next year the drama of general elections will be on again; in early 1981 the presidential elections arrive.

While voters face these crucial issues, a dramatic clash has broken out between the largest Portuguese party, the Socialists led by resilient Dr Mário Soares, and Eanes supported by the majority of the armed forces. The bitter bone of contention is the Amnesty Bill for political and military offences since the April 25 1974 coup.

When first tabled in parliament by the Socialists the Bill was passed by the so-called majority of the left. Next, it got the nod of the leftist-dominated Council of the Revolution by a 10-9 vote. Eanes used his power of veto and everybody hoped the matter had been closed. Not so. In an open challenge to Eanes, the Socialists brought it up again in parliament. Communists and Socialists pooled their majority vote to overrule Eanes' veto.

It is in this scenario of irreconcilable rivalries and antagonisms that Pintasilgo will be steering the country to interim general elections. Eanes has often been blamed for the ambiguity of his decisions. Only he knows why he should appoint, at this stage, a woman premier allegedly aligned with his opponents.

Indeed right-wing circles predict that her "100-day government" will in fact be a "Socialists/Melo Antunes government". What worries anti-Marxists most is the capacity for manipulation of voters of an incumbent prime minister who controls most of the mass media.

Another striking anomaly is Pintasilgo's requirement to submit her cabinet's programme for the approval of a parliament which in all logic should no longer be there. Socialists and Communists command 141 votes; the newly formed Democratic Alliance (Centre Democrats, Social Democrats and Monarchists) can pool only 77 votes. There is also a floating vote (45) of bitterly squabbling Socialist and Social Democrat dissidents which can swing either way.

If the Pintasilgo cabinet gets the go-ahead in parliament, it will have to thank the "majority of the left". And political favours are not for free.

Things could not be worse. But the political class has no reason to worry. In fact it is doing

better than ever. Political battles are fought in the plushest restaurants and cocktail bars while the contestants nibble caviar and sip champagne. The man-in-the-street grumbles at the soaring cost of living. Nobody expects him to do more than just go on grumbling.