

Pintasilgo Faces Hard Task In 100-Day March to Elections

By David Reid

LISBON (Reuter) — Portugal's first woman prime minister, Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo, has described her caretaker task as a 100-day march to general elections in the autumn.

Her conservative opponents, to quote a recent headline, regard it more as a 100-day war, accusing her of lacking the impartiality needed for her delicate mission.

The ferocity of the rightist attacks on the 49-year-old former ambassador to Unesco has astonished most political observers here.

Dr. Francisco sa Carneiro, the mercurial Oporto lawyer who heads the center-right Social Democrats (CDS), denounced President Antonio Ramalho Eanes' choice of Miss Pintasilgo as part of a plan to turn Portugal into a socialist-leaning, Third World-orientated military regime.

Prof. Diogo Freitas do Amaral, leader of the conservative Center Democrats (CDS), said the new premier has Socialist and progressive sympathies and was the worst possible choice for the job.

The two rightist parties, with the small Monarchist Party (PPM) have formed a loose alliance aimed at ending the present left-wing majority in parliament at the next elections.

Judging by recent public statements, however, it seems the election campaign could already have begun with the premier and the president the main targets of the right rather than the Socialists, Portugal's largest party, and the Communists.

Gen. Eanes' decision to dissolve the assembly and call new elections, but to make this subject to parliamentary approval of a caretaker cabinet, was one of his classic "judgments of Solomon."

He has managed at once to displease the right, who urged a speedy dissolution, and the Socialists, who argued that elections could have been averted until they were

constitutionally due next year.

Gen. Eanes decided that elections this autumn were the only democratic way out because of the impossibility of finding a stable coalition in the assembly which emerged from the country's first free elections for half a century.

Socialist leader Mario Soares, who ruled for 18 months after the 1976 elections with a minority government, and then for a further six months in partnership with the Conservatives, said he could have returned to power until 1980 with the help of dissident Social Democrats who broke away from Sa Carneiro last April.

But Gen. Eanes, who dismissed Soares as premier just over a year ago after the collapse of his second government, would have none of it, regarding the combination as too fragile to last.

Demotion of Generals

His ruling recalled his demotion of two top generals last year in what was seen as part of a steady process of ending military involvement in politics.

Both the then army chief of staff, Gen. Vasco da Rocha Vieira, and the leftist military governor of Lisbon, Gen. Vasco Lourenco, lost their jobs and reverted to the ranks of colonel and major respectively.

Again this year Gen. Eanes had to take the tough decision of vetoing a Socialist-sponsored bill of amnesty for those implicated in the abortive right and left-wing coups of 1975, the turbulent year after the revolution which ended half a century of right-wing dictatorship.

Despite loud protests from the armed forces hierarchy, the outgoing assembly exercised its constitutional right and overruled the presidential veto.

Gen. Eanes is now constitutionally bound to promulgate the amnesty — and he has proved a stickler for obeying the 1976 constitution to the letter.

Miss Pintasilgo's success in

organizing fair elections this November could have an important bearing on Gen. Eanes' chances of reelection should he decide to stand again in 1981.

The three major parties which backed his triumphant rise to power in 1976 — Socialists, Social and Center Democrats — have all clashed with him for one reason or another. Ironically the Communists, whose candidate came a bad fourth in the 1976 presidential polls, have recently adopted a carefully neutral attitude. But both they and the Socialists have had kind words to say about Miss Pintasilgo.

One theory widely voiced in political quarters here is that the rightist campaign against Miss Pintasilgo has been pitched so virulently for electoral purposes.

The new premier must take some early and unpopular decisions in the economic field — including higher prices for fuel, transport and other public services — which are bound to mean more belt-tightening for the Portuguese.

The former nonparty government of law professor Carlos Mota Pinto failed to take such measures despite the urging of the Socialists. The theory is that the rightists will gain extra votes in the coming polls because the left, with which they have associated the premier, will take the blame.

Gen. Eanes reluctantly resorted to elections despite his fears — shared by the Socialists — that the results may not be very different from 1976.

He has urged the political parties to shoulder their responsibilities and find a stable governing majority in the new assembly.

There are already broad hints that if the rightist alliance fails to win a majority in the elections — and the conservative weekly tempo estimated it would need to gain at least 43 per cent of the votes on a joint ticket to do so — the Socialists and their Social Democratic rivals will be forced to do a deal.