

Accused colonel's challenge to Eanes

From Jill Jolliffe
in Lisbon

A PORTUGUESE colonel charged with attempting a Left-wing coup in November 1975 has returned from exile in Mozambique in a challenge to the authority of President Eanes. Under a law twice approved by Parliament, Colonel Varela Gomes should be absolved of charges against him for his part in the 1975 coup plot. But the amnesty law which is strongly opposed by senior army men has not been promulgated by President Eanes despite his constitutional obligation to do so.

Colonel Gomes arrived in Lisbon on Saturday night in defiance of an order for his arrest and was allowed to pass freely through the airport. Journalists were barred from speaking to him, but before leaving Mozambique he told the Portuguese news agency ANOP that the president's failure to promulgate the law "demonstrates that the military have more power in Portugal than Parliament."

The new law gives an amnesty from legal charges to officers and civilians involved in coup attempts since the 1974 revolution.

It was approved by Parliament for the first time in April, but vetoed by President Eanes under pressure from the Army. Under the Constitution, the law returned to Parliament for review, where it was approved a second time, in July.

Army Chief of Staff General Pedro Cardoso then said that Armed Forces commanders would not accept the law, which "usurps the national responsibilities of the military community."

