



The Guardian

Wednesday August 30, 1978

do. But that is a different story. When re-attribution changes the supply of an artist's works, it has the same effect. The famous pre-war re-attribution of the Giorgione Allendale Nativity to Titian (by Bernard Berenson) hit its value simply because no more than half a dozen Giorgiones may have survived, while Titian was still hard at it when he died at over 90.

But that apart, does it all really make sense? The respectable answer, which applies in the case of the Constables, is that it is right and proper that works of art by a perceptive and original artist should command a higher price than paintings by a chap who simply followed in his father's footsteps. John Constable really did change the direction of English painting, by seeing our landscape for the first time in a way which was genuinely English and not a mere derivative of Italian painting. If I have embellished and reproduced his father's style, that is not the same thing. But the less respectable answer is that the price of paintings, like the prices of houses, is influenced by fashions and by the transient passions of individual collectors, and museum directors and trustees. The eighteenth century portraits which commanded dizzy prices in the 1920s would be a drug on the market today if most of them were not mercifully locked up in American public galleries. Perhaps one day, there may even be a fashion for collecting the works of Constable *films*.

He won't succeed without help

The birth pangs of Portuguese democracy have been appallingly prolonged and are not over yet. The most hopeful aspect of the new Government which was sworn in yesterday is that its leader, Mr Nobre Da Costa, appears to be a relaxed and confi-

dent man whose character contains none of the elements of the prima donna which occasionally marred the political conduct and judgment of his Socialist predecessor, Mr Soares. If Mr Da Costa can govern Portugal calmly until there has been electoral reform followed by fresh elections he will have done his country a memorable service. His Government will be the ninth since the Portuguese dictatorship was overthrown in 1974; nine governments in four years are more than is good for any democracy, especially for a new one.

What makes the immediate future look even harder for the Portuguese is that they have four major national problems and a hung Parliament. Mr Soares might, perhaps, have behaved more calmly in government and less nervously following his dismissal if his party had held more than 102 parliamentary seats out of 263. One hundred and two seats do not confer any imperative or imposing right to govern, which is what Mr Soares sometimes seemed to think he had. Nor, in the end, had he managed to solve the four problems—agrarian reform, the creation of a national health service, the absorption of the colonists returned from Africa and, above all, Portugal's continuing economic crisis.

Faced with a divided House and some highly unimaginative financial conditions imposed on Portugal by the IMF, Mr Soares himself cannot be blamed too severely for these failures. But what matters now is not just the reception the new government gets in Portugal—and particularly the attitude which Mr Soares himself chooses to take to it—but what sort of a chance the outside world is prepared to give it. If the Western Community is not prepared to put more muscle behind Portugal's attempt to establish a well-rooted and viable system of democratic government, then there is every danger that it will be left in the end with some form of government which is very much less desirable than either Mr Soares or Mr Da Costa is trying to provide.