

# Portugal's new Prime Minister sworn in

From Reuter in Lisbon

President Eanes yesterday swore in Portugal's third constitutional government, a non-party administration headed by the Prime Minister, Mr Alfredo Nobre da Costa, a 55-year-old business leader.

It replaces the six-month-old Socialist-led Government of Dr Mario Soares, dismissed by General Eanes a month ago after Conservatives withdrew their Ministers in a row over land reform and health policy.

Mr Nobre da Costa, a former Industry Minister, was sworn

in with 14 other Ministers and two Secretaries of State at the ceremony in the former Royal Palace of Ajuda. Government sources said he would appoint the rest of his team—up to a total of 30 junior Ministers—only after his programme had passed the vital Parliamentary hurdle next month.

Portugal's political parties, whose failure to agree on a new Parliamentary majority heightened the political crisis, have reserved their position on the new Government.

Its priority is seen as preparing the ground for new elec-

tions should these prove inevitable. Parliament, recalled from its summer recess earlier this month, was due to take a final vote late yesterday on a census Bill taking into account between 600,000 and a million new voters since the last elections in 1976. These are mainly young people over 18 years of age, and Portuguese settlers who have returned from the former African colonies.

Mr Nobre da Costa, in his first speech as Prime Minister, pledged that his Government would not merely be a caretaker administration, but would act pragmatically and with de-

termination in dealing with the nation's pressing economic and other problems.

"The desire of this Government is to cooperate actively with the political parties and maintain a lively and constant dialogue with them . . . this same dialogue will be maintained with the social partners (the unions and industry)," he said.

President Eanes, hailed Mr Nobre da Costa's patriotism in taking on his task, and again deplored the absence of any advance Parliamentary support for the new Government. He

said its task would be to pursue a policy of "global austerity" to meet the economic crisis.

General Eanes noted that Portugal's trade deficit in the first six months of this year was about 35 per cent higher than in the same period of 1977. Its foreign debt almost doubled last year and the Bank of Portugal's gold reserves fell. Another cause for concern was the rising cost of living—about 21 per cent above last year, and among the highest in Europe.

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## Leader who disclaims qualifications or desire for his job

From Stanley Meisler in Lisbon

UNLIKE most leaders, Alfredo Nobre da Costa, the new Prime Minister of Portugal, likes to stress that he is neither qualified nor inclined to stay in the job very long.

"I consider myself completely inadequate," he said a few days ago in an interview. "Every morning I first have to make an effort not to laugh at myself. Then I have to make an effort not to cry. Then I have to do the job."

Much of this may be pose. Mr Nobre da Costa wants to persuade the political parties of Portugal that he is not a threat to them. An engineer

and company manager rather than a politician, he was selected by President Eanes because of what the President perceived as a deadlock in Parliamentary party politics.

The Socialist Party of the ousted Prime Minister, Dr Soares, did not see the problem in the same way. The Socialists have bitterly criticised the appointment of an independent like Mr Nobre da Costa as a constitutional affront to the democratic system. In their view, the President was obliged by the Constitution to turn once more to the Socialists, who, although they are not a majority party, have the most seats in the Assembly of the Republic.

The Socialists could try to bring Mr Nobre da Costa down in 10 days when, as required

by the Constitution, he will present his programme to the Assembly. So it is not surprising that Mr Nobre da Costa is trying to reassure everyone that his political ambitions are limited.

"We are not in any way trying to stay for a very long period of time," he said. "As a matter of fact, a lot of the Ministers have come into my Government on the understanding they are prepared to do it for six to eight months, but no more than that."

It will take that long, according to the Prime Minister, to write a new election law and to register voters. Even if elections are delayed until 1980, he expects the parties to work out a coalition of some kind and replace him next year.

Those who know him well

believe that he will turn out to be efficient and pragmatic. A soft-spoken man who has never campaigned for office, he will contrast noticeably with his predecessor, the emotional, eloquent, and popular Dr Soares.

Mr Nobre da Costa's ideological position sometimes confuses the Portuguese. He has described himself as a Socialist sympathiser and, although officially an independent, served as Minister of Industry and Technology in one Socialist Government. With the Socialist Party attacking his appointment, however, his sympathy, as he puts it, "at this moment is slightly strained."

On the other hand, Mr Nobre da Costa worked before the revolution for the Champaímaud family, one of the monopolies that controlled the

Portuguese economy during the Fascist reign of the late dictator Salazar. This association had made his Leftist credentials suspect.

Mr Nobre da Costa is known as a technocrat leading a Government of technocrats while the politicians sort out their conflicts on the sidelines.

If his government succeeds too well, the Portuguese people might turn their backs on political parties and seek the eternal salvation in managers and technicians like Mr Nobre da Costa. "I hope that won't happen," he said. "Anyway, I don't think we will rule as well as all that, because we will be limited by a lot of factors. And the parties will try to resume power as soon as possible." — Los Angeles Times.

● Mr Nobre da Costa is sworn in as Prime Minister of Portugal yesterday

