

# FOCUS

## THE PORTUGUESE ELECTIONS

At first sight, the Portuguese general election, held on December 2nd, might seem part of a general swing to the right in Western Europe. It gave the right-wing parties who formed the self-styled 'Democratic Alliance' (AD) 128 seats in the Portuguese parliament — a majority of six over the combined forces of the Socialist Party (74 seats), the Communist Party (44), its electoral ally the Portuguese Democratic Movement (3), and the lone representative of the ultra-left Popular Democratic Union.

On closer examination, however, the Right's victory is less than convincing. True, the AD's percentage of the vote was 45% as opposed to the 40.4% won by its component parties the PPD (Popular Democratic Party) the CDS (Social and Democratic Centre) and the miniscule PPM (Popular Monarchist Party) in the 1976 elections. But an even sharper increase was registered in the Communist vote. The PCP had secured 14.7% of the vote in 1976: in December APU (the 'People United Alliance' — an electoral coalition of the PCP and MDP in which the latter is very much the junior partner) won 19%.

The great loser was the Socialist Party which slumped from 34.9% to 27.4%, losing

votes heavily on both left and right.

Nevertheless, despite this sharp decline in the PS vote, more people voted for the Left than for the Right. APU plus the PS plus various ultra-left slates accumulated slightly more than 50% of the votes. It was the Hondt system of proportional representation that robbed the Left of victory. This system penalises small parties (so that, except in Lisbon, all the ultra-left votes went up in smoke), and ensures that where votes are concentrated on a bloc of parties such as the AD more seats will be won than if the same

votes were dispersed among the various elements of that bloc standing separately. The use of this system in Portugal does raise the question of a Communist-Socialist electoral alliance fairly sharply.

The Socialist Party's defeat was the predictable result of its miserable period in government from 1976 to 1978, of its subsequent failure to form an effective opposition to the reactionary administration of Carlos Mota Pinto in the first half of 1979, and finally of its refusal to put a clear policy before the electors.

In office, the Socialist Party, despite the radicalism of its programme, carried out the dictates of the International Monetary Fund, building up colossal deficits on the trade and payments balances, and dissipating Portugal's substantial gold reserves. Like many another spineless social-democratic governments before it, Mario Soares' administration imposed restrictions on wages while doing virtually nothing to control the rate of inflation. It ruled first as a minority government, in tacit agreement with the Right, then in open coalition with the CDS, a party full of former functionaries of the defunct fascist regime. In July 1978 the right decided that it had no more use for the Socialist Party, and Mario Soares was discarded like a piece of spent chewing gum. The CDS broke off the coalition, President Ramalho Eanes started appointing allegedly 'independent', 'non-party' (but in fact reactionary) governments, and the PS found itself out in the cold.

But although out of office, the PS could still bring down any right-wing government provided it acted in concert with the Communist Party in Parliament. Instead the PS chose to allow the grossly reactionary government of Mota Pinto to survive. Twice the PS parliamentary group abstained — on a motion of no confidence and on the budget — when it could have removed the government. Thus seven months of arbitrary violence was imposed on the Portuguese people, particularly in the rural south where repeatedly force was used to eject workers from the collective farms of the Alentejo and hand them back to the previous landowners, before the PS could bring itself to table its own motion of censure, and Mota Pinto resigned.

In government the Socialist Party had laid the basis for counter-revolution. It had passed laws which threatened to destroy the agrarian reform, to undermine the nationalised sector, and to provide vast compensation to expropriated latifundists and monopolists. Even in opposition the PS attempted to carry on this 'legislative counter-



Alvaro Cunhal

	APU		PS		AD	
	%	deputies elected	%	deputies	%	deputies
<b>The South</b>						
Beja	50.7	3	21.9	1	19	1
Evora	48.8	3	16.9	1	26.9	1
Setubal	46.9	9	21.3	4	22.3	4
Portalegre	29.3	1	19.7	1	32	2
Lisbon	26.1	16	25.8	15	39.9	24
Santarem	21.7	3	27.3	3	41	6
Faro	20.2	2	33.9	3	34.5	4
<b>The North</b>						
Aveiro	7.9	1	28.4	5	56.6	9
Braga	10.0	1	30.2	5	51.8	9
Braganca	5.8		22.1	1	60.5	3
Castelo Branco	12.4		27.6	2	49.8	4
Coimbra	11.2	1	35.1	5	44.7	6
Guarda	5.4		26.2	1	60.3	4
Leiria	10.8	1	23.1	3	56.1	7
Oporto	14.5	6	34.8	14	44.4	18
Viana do Castelo	9.8		24.7	2	54.7	4
Vila Real	6.1		24.8	2	57.6	4
Viseu	5.5		21.2	2	64.3	8
<b>The Islands</b>						
Azores	3.1		29.8	2	59.2	3
Madeira	3.0		17.2	1	68.7	4

revolution' by introducing a bill regulating the internal life of trade unions, designed to shatter the power of Portugal's trade union confederation, the CGTP-Intersindical.

When it came to the elections the PS refused to give any guarantees as to what its deputies would do once elected. The PS would 'rule alone', claimed Soares. Since it wasn't going to get 50% of the seats, this was clearly absurd. The Portuguese people weren't interested in marvellous promises: what they wanted to know, declared PCP General Secretary Alvaro Cunhal, was quite simple — who did the PS intend to ally with after the election? Would it vote with the AD in the Assembly, or with the Communists? Everybody knew what a vote for APU or a vote for the AD meant: but what was a vote for the PS? Was it a vote for the Left or for the Right?

This was an effective campaigning point, though somewhat disingenuous, since Mario Soares' personal antipathy towards the PCP was well-known, as was the fact that any Socialist-Communist alliance would immediately lead the German SPD to cut off its subsidies to Soares.

The election once again pointed to the deep regional differences in Portugal. North of a line from Lisbon through Santarem to Castelo Branco the Right holds a clear majority. South of that line the Left holds an equally clear majority. (The islands of Madeira and the Azores are also right-wing dominated). The following table of results grouping the electoral districts geographically illustrates this:

APU's strength lies in the most heavily industrialised parts of the country — Lisbon and Setubal districts — and in the Agrarian Reform zone (which covers Beja, Evora, Portalegre, Setubal and parts of Santarem). The plains of the Alentejo and Ribatejo with their great estates, now run as collective farms, provide a striking contrast to agriculture in the much hillier terrain of the north and centre of the country, where the minifundium is dominant, where individual farmers (either proprietors or tenants) scratch out a living on tiny plots of land. Northern villages will frequently be dominated by a 'cacique': the word has no exact English equivalent, but he (or sometimes she) will often be the major landowner or businessman in the district, may have a substantial economic hold over the farmers, and exercises, in tandem with the Catholic Church, effective political control over the area.

However, the Left has made headway in the north. APU's vote in the northern districts generally doubled that achieved by



From O Diario, Lisbon



the PCP in 1976. The election of a Communist deputy in Braga was particularly satisfying. This district was one of the worst hit by right-wing mob violence in 1975. In the centre of the city of Braga itself the Archbishop had incited a fanatical crowd to burn down the PCP offices, and similar scenes had occurred in smaller towns. Now the Left is securely established here, and clerical intimidation no longer has its desired result.

Local elections were held a fortnight later on December 16. On a rather lower poll the right wing pushed up its percentage of the vote to 47%. APU won 20.9% while the PS remained more or less static at 27%. The party with the largest share of the vote in a council wins the mayorship. APU now has 50 mayors (previously its total was 37); the PS has slumped from 115 to 57; while the right wing has risen from 152 to 196. (This is not quite as impressive as it seems since councils vary enormously in size).

The Right can glory in capturing Lisbon and Oporto councils from the Socialist Party — but other factors must be worrying it. For the Right's electoral alliance tended to break down locally. In more than half the municipalities the AD ceased to function and its separate parties ran their own slates. Animosity between rival caciques clearly wrecked the prospects for right-wing unity at a local level. This mutual suspicion may yet seep upwards and cause serious problems for any right-wing government.

As expected, APU consolidated its position in the Agrarian Reform zone and in the Lisbon and Setubal industrial belts. Indeed in Setubal district APU won all of the 13 councils: APU votes of 66% and 62% in the working class townships of Moita and Barreiro on the south bank of the Tagus, or of 62% and 65% in the rural councils of Alcacero do Sal and Grandola, are eloquent testimony to communist hegemony in this part of the country. Encouraging advances were also registered in the north, with many more APU councillors being elected.

Taken together, the two December elections are little short of catastrophic for the Socialist Party, and the PS intends to hold a major inquest. The writing is clearly on the wall: within a couple of years the PS could easily be overtaken by the PCP as the largest force on the Left, not only in terms of membership (the PCP is already in an unshakeable position here with its 180,000 members), but also electorally. The situation is particularly perilous in that many PS votes are purely tactical in purpose: in the north the PS votes tend to be anti-fascist, in the south they tend to be anti-communist. The northern PS vote was undoubtedly

influenced by Soares' claim that there was no chance of electing Communist deputies in these parts of the country. But the excellent showing by APU in the north has shattered this argument: apart from the islands, there is not a single district in Portugal where the election of at least one Communist deputy next time round could be considered as wildly improbable.

Thus the Portuguese Socialist Party must fear that it is sliding towards the same, very junior, position on the political scene as that occupied by the Italian socialists. But this fear has not provoked any change of direction at leadership level. Immediately after the general election, the PCP offered joint talks with the PS to discuss ways of combating the right: this was immediately rejected by the PS Secretariat.

The right wing now has eight months to enjoy its tenuous victory. Under the terms of the Constitution fresh elections must be held in 1980 in order to elect a legislature that will be competent to revise the Constitution if it so desires. The December elections were unforeseen and were only held because there was no other way of solving the governmental crisis that followed Mota Pinto's resignation. In this eight months there can be little doubt that the right wing will try to dismantle all the gains made by the working class as a result of the revolution. In particular, the Agrarian Reform will once again come under attack, and further state violence can be expected in the fields of the Alentejo. But the popular movement is far from cowed, and forms a formidable obstacle to the plans of the AD.