

## PORTUGAL

# 'Retornados bring salvation'

Of all the many potentially catastrophic problems facing Portugal's new government the one that shows positive signs of being solved — the absorption of 600 000 refugees into the community — is ironically the one which after the military coup of April 25 1974 looked like being the most hazardous.

Since the coup Portugal's population of nearly 9 million has increased by 7% as a result of the arrival of "retornados" (refugees) who fled Angola, Mozambique, Sao Tome, Cape Verde and Timor when Portugal divested itself of its former colonies in 1975. As many as 700 a week used to arrive in Lisbon.

Portugal could not wash its hands of the problem and so is tackling the problem in an almost military fashion with promising results. "We tell the retornados," Lt-Col Goncalves Ribeiro, the high commissioner for the problem, told me: "You have lost everything. If you want a future you must build it yourselves and we will give you the means to do so."

The policy is paying off as the colonel demonstrated by reeling off an impressive list of statistics. With a metal baton in his hand, which he waved with the finesse of a conductor at dozens of charts in his office, he said that the number of retornados which the Government was now supporting had gone down from 70 666 in 1976 to 15 604 last year

and he expected this year's figure to be around 10 000.

Only a small number of the refugees qualify for full government aid, but in a country where the economy is considerably depressed the \$315 million which it has cost the Government so far is a high price to pay.

Until September 30 last year, the Government paid all hotel bills for retornados. This temporarily solved the housing problem for those without relatives in Portugal and also kept hotel managers happy because rooms would otherwise have been empty with the slump in tourism after the coup.

The Government admitted it was on the wrong track by footing the bills and not offering incentives and has started to change its policy. In 1977 some \$120 million was provided to help start 4 868 approved projects which have created 32 933 jobs for the retornados, mainly in light industry and agriculture. Portugal has about 400 000 unemployed out of a labour force of 3.2 million.

Easy credit conditions are offered. When a project is officially approved retornados can borrow 60% of the money needed from the Government at 3% interest and the other 40% from banks at the normal 12% rate. This provides the vitally needed incentive and means that the ordinary Portuguese do not feel so resentful that the retornados are privileged.

Credit is also provided to build homes. In 1977 5 822 were built and this year another 6 000.

While some are moving out of the refugee camps and into homes they have built, there are still many in camps like the Quinta Da Graca, formerly a farm, near Estoril, the fashionable resort outside Lisbon. Two thousand are still there in yellow pre-fabricated houses and khaki-coloured military tents supplied by the Red Cross.

"We must encourage them to leave," said Erik Krumhansen, co-ordinator for the Red Cross, "otherwise this will become a slum." A lorry takes people every day to nearby sites to build houses.

The retornados have earned a high reputation for their hard work. Indeed some Portuguese will admit that "the salvation of Portugal is in the retornados". There is an element of truth in this jibe as the case of a Pakistani Mozambique grocer in Lisbon demonstrates. He opened a shop in an area full of shops and has made a go of it by opening when everyone else is closed. He recently took his first holiday in 18 months.

*Refugees: a reputation for hard work*



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