

think are superfluous: about their religion, or whether they use a car to travel to work. Some Germans suspect that intimate family matters might get known to their neighbours, despite all the promises that they won't.

The opinion polls suggest that a hard core of around 5% of the population will either refuse to take part on census day or deliberately give wrong answers. If that rises to 10% the statisticians reckon the results will be pretty useless. For information-hungry German officialdom, May 25th looks like being a cliff-hanger.

Finland

Not the Finnish revolution

FROM OUR NORDIC CORRESPONDENT

Turned upside down, Finnish politics look much the same. For the first time since 1945, Finland will have a Conservative prime minister, Mr Harri Holkeri. For the first time since 1959, the Conservatives will join a coalition with the Social Democrats, Finland's biggest party. The new government plans tax reform, more spending on research and education, and improved job security. It will try to keep inflation in check and the economy growing at its present rate of 2½% a year. Its predecessors would find little to quarrel with.

Mr Holkeri is 50, a natty dresser, and aims to cover 1,000 kilometres on skis each winter. In summer he jogs. Between work-outs, he is a governor of the Bank of Finland. He has been chairman of his party and fought the 1982 presidential election on its behalf. Next January, he means to run for president again.

Finland's politics were saved from any real upset by the current president, Mr Mauno Koivisto, a Social Democrat before his elevation to the above-party presidency. By making Mr Holkeri prime minister, he rewarded the Conservatives for their nine-seat gain in the March election. But by insisting that the Social Democrats continue in government, he averted a renewed polarisation of the country's left and right. Finland's need to stay on friendly terms with Russia also helped to keep the Social Democrats in government. The outgoing Social Democratic prime minister, Mr Kalevi Sorsa, who is probably the Finnish party leader best known to Soviet leaders, now becomes foreign minister.

The loser is the Centre party, which has been in almost every post-1945 government, since 1966 always as a partner of the Social Democrats. Its leader, Mr Paavo Vayrynen, the outgoing foreign minister, had offended the consensus-seeking President Koivisto by pressing for a non-socialist

On terror's trail

Are Europe's policemen at last getting on top of its terrorists? Not in Northern Ireland, alas, where on April 25th a car bomb planted by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) killed a Northern Irish judge and his wife near the border with the south—the IRA's most eminent victims for years. Elsewhere in Europe, however, terrorists are faring less well. A score of suspects have been arrested lately in France, Spain and Italy. Their capture suggests that patient detective work, and greatly improved co-ordination between governments, are tilting the fight against terrorism the right way.

In France, eight people—two Moroccans, four Lebanese, a Senegalese and an Algerian—have been arrested and charged over the past two weeks in connection with last September's bombing campaign in Paris. Responsibility was claimed by a group called the Lebanese Armed Revolutionary Faction, whose main demand was for the release from prison of Mr Georges Ibrahim Abdallah, a Lebanese accused of helping to murder an Israeli and an American diplomat in Paris in 1982.

The September blitz failed to achieve its aim: in February, a French court sentenced Mr Abdallah to life imprisonment. The men who planted the bombs are thought to have got safely back to Lebanon. But the French believe the eight people they have just arrested were responsible for storing explosives and giving the bombers vital logistical support. If so, their arrest marks France's third big coup against terrorists within three months. Eight other suspected terrorists, including six Tunisians, were arrested in March. And in February the police arrested four suspected leaders of the Action Directe

group in a farmhouse 60 miles south of Paris.

Europe's other home-grown terrorists have suffered reverses as well. During April, 11 suspected members of Italy's Red Brigades were arrested, six in Italy and five in Spain. Italian magistrates say the six being held in Italy, including an American woman, may have played a part in the murder of an Italian air force officer, General Licio Giorgieri, in March.

Some evidence from the pattern of arrests suggests that the terrorist groups are suffering from their earlier decision to forge stronger links among themselves. This enables the police to follow a trail from one group of suspects to the next. At the same time, European police forces have started to swap information much more freely under a new system of secure communications established at the urging of the European Community's Trevi group of interior ministers, who have set up a committee of civil servants and policemen to co-ordinate action against terrorism.

Thus the Tunisians arrested in March probably led French police to the bunch rounded up in April. The Tunisians, in turn, were nabbed after West German police linked a Tunisian restaurant in Paris with Mr Mohammed Hamadei, who is being held on suspicion of playing a part in hijacking a TWA airliner to Beirut in 1985. Mr Hamadei was arrested after British police charged Mr Nezar Hindawi, his brother, with trying to blow up an El Al airliner in London on the orders of the Syrian government. There is still plenty of terrorism in Western Europe: Britain's University of Aberdeen counted over 1,000 incidents in 1986. But more of the terrorists do seem to be ending up in jail.

coalition.

The president's distaste for discord also proved tough on the Conservative party's present chairman, Mr Ilkka Suominen. Although it was Mr Suominen who led the party to its election victory, he will have to make do with the trade-and-industry portfolio. Mr Koivisto apparently thought Mr Holkeri was less sullied by the rough and tumble of daily party battles—and so more likely to reconcile the Blacks and the Reds, as the Conservatives and Social Democrats are known.

President Koivisto, meanwhile, has proved his own mettle. By outsmarting the Centre party and avoiding the non-socialist coalition which the election results had seemed to promise (and thus keeping his own former party in government), the president got everything he wanted. Until the March election, he had been less active than his outspoken predecessor, Urho Kekkonen. Some Finns had been wondering just how strong his grip on the parliamentarians was. No longer.

Iceland

Women in demand

Iceland, so some of its 240,000 people like to say, is a small laboratory for political ideas. A lot of experimenting will be going on after the general election on April 25th. The result means that a coalition of at least three parties is now required to command a majority in the 63-seat Althing. An intriguing novelty is the strength of the Women's Alliance, which doubled its number of seats in parliament, from three to six. At the previous election, in 1983, it became the world's first women-only movement to win parliamentary representation; it now has a chance to play a pivotal role in the formation of a government. The Women are being wooed from all sides.

The pre-election centre-right government, led by Mr Steingrímur Hermannsson, resigned on April 28th. The prime minister's own centrist Progressive party,



Ladies with good reason to laugh

whose support comes mainly from rural voters, maintained its 19% of the total vote. But a split in its coalition partner, the conservative Independence party, cost the government its parliamentary majority.

In March the minister for industry, Mr Albert Gudmundsson, had to resign because of a tax scandal. The Citizens' party that he promptly founded won seven seats,

20% now, GDP growth of 6.3% last year). Instead, they accuse the prime minister of squandering the opportunities offered by cheaper oil and record fish catches, and of leaving the state's finances in a mess. The Social Democrats' leader, Mr Jon Baldvin Hanibalsson, would like a government that cuts spending but keeps its heart in the right place (he compares his party to Mr David Lange's Labour party in New Zealand). He too is wooing the Women.

But the Women are playing hard to get. They say they will consider approaches by other parties, but will not compromise on their principles. Formed just before the 1983 election, the Women's Alliance—which is more of a movement than a party—has no formal hierarchy, and it

plans to rotate its members of parliament (though not at a speed which would make them always a bunch of tyros). Its main message is that women, because of their experience of child-bearing, have different values from men, but have far too little influence in a still male-dominated society. It seeks a re-evaluation of women's work, both inside and outside the home.

The trouble is that, while the movement's aims are clear, its policies are not. That, together with the Women's lack of formal leaders, complicates discussions with potential coalition partners. It will take weeks for a new government formula to emerge from Iceland's political laboratory.

Portugal

Wanted: staying power

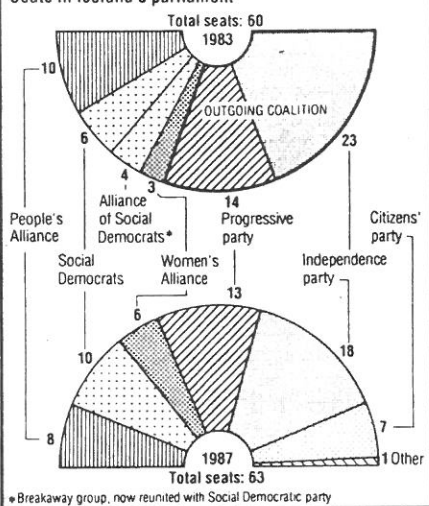
FROM OUR LISBON CORRESPONDENT

Portugal's 16th government since 1974 was brought down by a left-wing censure motion; yet President Soares, a former Socialist prime minister, has ignored calls from the left-wing parties to invite them to form a coalition. Instead, he announced on April 28th that an election would be held in July: before the August holidays, when nobody would dare ask a Portuguese to think about politics. It will be the third snap election in four years.

Portugal's constitution requires a three-

Althing to all women

Seats in Iceland's parliament



and this helped to reduce the Independence party from 23 seats to 18. Although still the largest party in the Althing, the Independents now need two partners instead of one to muster a majority. The rift with Mr Gudmundsson seems too deep to mend. Might the Women oblige?

Iceland's Social Democrats, who are congratulating themselves on outscoring the mainly communist People's Alliance for the first time in 50 years, are also interested in teaming up with the Independence party. But they are reluctant to contemplate a coalition with the Progressives. They give Mr Hermannsson no credit for Iceland's recent economic achievements (inflation reduced from over 80% in 1983 to about

Pravda and us, uncontinued

This is a bleak footnote to what had previously been a rather cheering story. Some readers will remember that late last year, to see how far *glasnost* had gone, we wrote a letter to *Pravda* disagreeing with an article it had published, and asking *Pravda* to print our reply. To our pleasure this eventually happened, even if the Soviet party daily accompanied our letter with a retort five times as long. From here on, however, things became less pleasant.

We reported all this in our issue of November 22nd. We also wrote a letter of thanks to the editor of *Pravda*, and took the opportunity to suggest an exchange of articles between our two papers, on an agreed subject, like the exchanges we have had with papers in other communist countries. No direct reply to this has ever reached us, but on December 19th *Pravda* ran a short article (a) rejecting the idea of an exchange of articles with *The Economist* and (b) claiming that we had not made it clear to our readers that our original letter had got into print in Moscow.

Pravda's rejection of a debate is a pity, particularly since on March 31st Russia's

foreign minister, Mr Edward Shevardnadze, promised his British counterpart, Sir Geoffrey Howe, that the Soviet government would "encourage direct arrangements between newspapers and magazines with the aim of exchanging...articles". Maybe this will persuade *Pravda* to change its mind. Meanwhile, its claim that we failed to report its printing of our original letter is flatly false. We have asked *Pravda* to make this clear. It has not done so, or given us any answer; and its London correspondent, who has been a model of helpfulness, has failed to get any explanation from Moscow.

This is a small example of the reservations people have expressed about Mr Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* ("opening things up"). To encourage Soviet newspapers to attack the inefficiencies and corruption in Soviet life that Mr Gorbachev deplores is certainly an improvement on the way Russia used to be. But openness will remain strictly limited until Soviet newspapers also open themselves to argument and correction from outside. *Pravda* misreported us. We are waiting for it to put this right.