

Franco given Last Rites

from ROBIN SMYTH in Madrid

GENERAL FRANCO was given the Last Rites of the Roman Catholic Church yesterday as his life ebbed fast.

Before Franco asked for the Last Rites, he had been shaken by two heart attacks within three hours, and there were also complications of the stomach and lungs.

The cardiac relapse was too severe for there to be any hope of recovery. A medical bulletin issued just before 2 p.m. said that his condition remained serious, and Franco's military chaplain said Mass by his bedside at the Pardo Palace with his wife, Donna Carmen, beside him.

Talks about the constitutional means of transferring power to Franco's heir, 37-year-old Prince Juan Carlos, were suspended when the deterioration in the Caudillo's condition became plain. Franco slipped towards death when the supreme poker that he has exercised for 36 years still clutched between his hands.

On Tuesday, after his first major heart attack, Franco refused to take his condition seriously, and it is believed that a request from his Prime Minister, Senor Carlos Arias, that he should retire in favour of Prince Juan Carlos, was declined.

When his condition worsened the Spanish Government was faced with the possibility of constitutional deadlock in which the country would have no effective head

of State or commander-in-chief of the armed forces at a time when it was caught up in a conflict with Morocco over the Spanish Sahara.

The Spanish people are watching the 36-year-old dictatorship flicker out with no evident sign of emotion. People questioned in the streets of Madrid showed little curiosity about the bulletins on Franco's health. Strong feelings of anticipation or fear of the future are for the moment being kept well hidden.

While 37-year-old Prince Juan Carlos prepares the first moves of the new monarchy, Madrid politicians are assessing its chances of survival. The Prince has many of the qualities that go to the making of a popular ruler.

He is good-looking and dedicated. But his education at Franco's hands and the long years spent standing in the dictator's shadow have lost him the confidence of the opposition without winning him a following among Franco's supporters.

Even his father, Don Juan, Count of Barcelona, passed over by Franco because of his liberal opinions, has denounced his son's accession to the throne. From his home in the Portuguese resort of Estoril, Don Juan is maintaining his claim, supported by liberal and left-wing elements in Spain. But it is unlikely that he will make any move to embarrass his son during the difficult opening months of the reign.

The right wing regards Juan Carlos as a liberal who has never accepted the Fascist trading and aims to open Spain to the 'demons' of democracy that Franco has so long held in check.

Franco's death will be the signal for the emergence of opposition parties from the political underground in which they have been forced to perate. Although they are divided among themselves, the parties which demand a return to a democratic system claim to have more than 80 per cent of the country behind them.

Senor Felipe Gonzalez, the young leader of the Socialist Party of Spanish Workers (PSOE), said yesterday: 'I don't think there can be a real return to democracy led by Juan Carlos. We intend to oppose from the very start the kind of compromise with the past that he represents.'

Senor Leopoldo Torres, another leader of the PSOE, which is the internationally recognised Spanish party, said: 'We see no future in an evolution of the present regime. There must be a complete break with the Franco dictatorship and a new democratic start.'

The left-wing parties believe events will quickly become unmanageable for the Prince, caught as he is between the need for liberal reform and the vengeful and frightened extreme Right.

Juan Carlos will rely heavily on the survival of the climate of public opinion which has allowed Franco to spend his old age in power: a fear of change and strife, a determination not to risk a resurgence of the passions of the civil war.

'The point of departure for any change must be present legality,' says Senor Marcelino Oreja, one of the leaders of what is known as the 'civilised Right' who, because they are forbidden to form a party, have registered themselves as a business company called FEDISA—the Federation of Independent Studies Limited.

These conservative refugees from Franco government—the most prominent of them is Senor Manuel Fraga Iribarne, the Spanish Ambassador in London—are going to have a strong influence on Juan Carlos as he tries to fight his way free of the Franco heritage.

'The armed forces would never allow a dramatic break with the past,' says Oreja. 'And the Prince is above all a man of the Army. He is a liberal, but he knows that after 40 years the whole furniture of a room can't be thrown out of the window in

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48 hours. First you replace a table, then a chair.

'It is important that this approach to change, which is the only one that can hold the Spanish people together, should be backed by international opinion.' Both opponents and supporters of the Prince agree that he will be able to act with far greater boldness if Franco is not there to watch his every step as he starts his reign.

Much will depend on how the new ruler pitches his first declaration, which is ex-

pected to come within a week of his takeover.

Felipe Gonzalez says that if this opening statement is a dramatic breach with all that has gone before, the Falangist ultras will have nowhere to go and the threat of a right-wing backlash should collapse.

The 'civilised Right' feels that the Prince must move far more cautiously, but must leave no doubt about his intention of steering Spain towards a democratic system.

Oreja says: 'Some changes

must be emphasised so clearly that it is plain that the will of the Prince is to move in a definite direction. If it is clear that he has taken this road, I don't think the Left-wing opposition will push him too fast.'

The elements which FEDISA expect to see in the first royal policy declaration are:—

1. A general amnesty for all political offences short of terrorism; a final end to the lingering proscriptions of the civil war.
2. The incorporation into Spanish law of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. A recognition at last of the right of assembly and freedom of speech.
3. The establishment of a Parliament based on universal suffrage.
4. Recognition by Madrid of the 'personality' of the Spanish provinces, especially the rebellious Basques and restive Catalonians.

There is no sign that Juan Carlos would take the revolutionary step of allowing the Communist Party to operate openly in Spain, although under its exiled leader, Santiago Carrillo, the Spanish Communist Party is the mildest in Europe.

It is on the new regime's attitude to the Communists, who command only a 10 to 15 per cent following in the country, that the democratic experiment may break down.

The Spanish Left is already split over the Communist question. The Communist Party and the Popular Socialist Party have formed one alliance, while the PSOE and Christian Democrats have formed another.

There is no sign of whether the extreme left-wing terrorist groups are prepared to call a truce in their war with the police. If terrorism continues, Juan Carlos's margin for manoeuvre will become even more uncomfortably slender.

The Prince is expected to start out with the present Prime Minister, Senor Carlos Arias, at his side. Senor Arias had reform plans which Franco scotched. He would ordinarily have three more years in office, but Juan Carlos is expected to choose his own Prime Minister as soon as he feels safely installed.