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Planned Accident?

By Anthony Balasy

Horthy's Death

IT IS a curious coincidence that Stephen Horthy, vice regent of Hungary, should have died on August 20, the feast day of St. Stephen, first King and patron saint of Hungary. Or was it a coincidence? Young Horthy had but recently become the incumbent of an important political office and his views had repeatedly been reported as none too friendly to the Nazis and Hitler's Hungarian henchmen. Also the news as given to the world by the official agencies in Germany and Hungary does not tally with clandestine broadcasts of Hungarian, Rumanian and Russian origin, so that the impression can't easily be dismissed that we may be confronted again with one of the political crimes at which the Nazis are past masters and in which field their lack of morality is evenly matched by a thorough ruthlessness of model execution.

According to the official version Horthy's plane crashed a minute or two after the take-off somewhere on the Eastern Front at 5 a. m. on Thursday, August 20. A later official statement calls the accident death in action. Yet another account speaks of a return flight in company of some reconnaissance units of the German Luftwaffe. Apparently the reader is free to make his choice. Or could it be that the Nazi press is really less shackled than we in the democracies have been led to believe? Or maybe Mr. Goebbels was late getting up on that particular morning?

Election Was Blow to Nazis

Horthy was elected vice regent of Hungary in March last. Reports that reached this country at the time emphasized his lack of sympathy with Hungary's pro-German trend and his election was held to be a blow to pan-Nazi aspirations. The reasoning went something like this: the regent is old and might die any time. There being no provision as to who should succeed him, a scramble would ensue and play into the hands of the noisiest group, i. e., the Hungarian Nazis, who by means fair or foul would try to help their own man into the saddle. With young Horthy's election the door seemed shut to such interregal nightmares; on his father's death he would immediately take over the reins of government, thus assuring the smooth continuation of constitutional life.

With his death the question of the regent's succession again becomes an issue. It will be remembered that the present head of the Hungarian state was elected by the national assembly in 1920 and, due to inhibitions of a traditionalist nature, was called regent, a kind of vicarious agent for a theoretical absentee king. The length of his term of office, however, was not fixed by the law; by all intents and purposes his job was to be a lifelong one. This circumstance and the gathering clouds of Europe's political horizon in the 1930's and their final burst in 1939 left Hungary increasingly apprehensive of what dissensions and partisan struggles may be in store for her in case of the regent's unexpected death. Hence the election of his son in March of this year to the position of heir-apparent in all but name.

Stephen Horthy was a good-looking and likable fellow. He was but 16 years old when his father assumed the highest office in the land, and be it said to his

credit this never spoiled his character. His manners were good and retiring and the handsome young man was never forward or obtrusive. So favored by the gods, it was but fair that Nature acted with much more restraint where the expending of mental gifts was concerned. He was liked by all and not least by the ladies. La Belle France and Merry England were bountiful purveyors of attractive admirers. In 1940 he married a beautiful Hungarian girl; she and a son survive.

Courted German Displeasure

When after Pearl Harbor the Hungarian government severed diplomatic relations with the United States and the American Legation in Budapest had to pack its trunks, young Horthy, snapping his fingers at the Gestapo agents and courting the displeasure of the German Legation, went on frequenting his American friends, too proud to yield to po-

litical pressure. This is not mentioned as an instance of quality or strength, for who would not despise an opportunist coward, but the fact remains that due to his father's position his calls in American houses were not without touch of advised demonstration.

The low tide of international morality that introduces murder as an admitted weapon of political warfare makes it inevitable that one should look upon the sudden disappearance of people whose views are known to disagree with the Nazi tenets as the result of some diabolical master plan rather than the outcome of undesigned accidents. The contradictions surrounding the Hungarian vice-regent's fatal mishap may be cleared up one day, in the meantime the specters of other Nazi victims haunt the memory and it is difficult to escape the gruesome thought of past massacres.

