

Habsburg Otto - egy különös sors története [Otto Habsburg: the Story of an Extraordinary Life]. By Emil Csonka. (Munich: Új Európa Kiadó, 1972. Pp. 580.)

What happened to the Habsburg dynasty after the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire? What has been the life of the first Habsburg heir who could not occupy the throne of his ancestors? Emil Csonka, a Munich historian, undertook to answer these questions and thus to relate the life-history of Otto, King Charles' eldest son, from the time he was the heir-apparent, to his recognition as a European statesman.

This well-organized, scholarly work, written in excellent Hungarian, will be welcomed by those interested in modern political literature. Its topic is not only Otto Habsburg's life, but rather the era in which the eldest son of the last Hungarian King was born and brought up.

Otto was forced to leave Vienna with his parents at the age of six losing, at ten, his father the Emperor-King while in exile in Madeira. He was twenty when, at the request of his mother, Queen Zita, he launched a political campaign to regain the thrones of Austria and Hungary. According to Csonka, Queen Zita never gave up hope that political developments both in Vienna and Budapest would be such as to require return of Otto as Emperor-King. The extremely energetic widowed Queen worked hard on the restoration of the Monarchy. She obtained the cooperation of several outstanding politicians of the twenties and thirties and was successful in building up contacts with the royalist groups of the Austrian Republic and the Hungarian Kingdom. (After 1918, constitutionally, Hungary remained a Kingdom and the prerogatives of the King were exercised by a Regent).

The course mapped out for Otto by his mother was not an easy one. Neither socialist Vienna nor the majority of patriotic Hungarians wanted another Habsburg in the Viennese 'Hofburg' or the royal castle in Buda. Csonka gives a detailed account of Otto's political career in the Europe of the thirties. A royalist restoration is not an easy cause at best and is rarely successful. The exceptions were the Stuarts in England and the Bourbon King who returned to his throne after Napoleon's defeat. Once, very briefly, Otto also came close to success: immediately before the annexation of Austria his return was a distinct possibility, but Schuschnigg hesitated at the last moment and instead of Otto, Hitler marched to Vienna.

The anti-nazi attitude of the Habsburgs is well-known. Otto himself is a humanist, a democrat, and an enemy of dictationships. Accordingly, he and his family tried to promote the Austrian cause in France, England and the United States during the year of 1939 to 1945, but to little avail. The book describes the amazing political ignorance

of several statesman of the day in European affairs. President Roosevelt's naiveté and obscure views on Stalin and the Bolshevik system are astounding. Otto Habsburg had to fight not only misguided Western politicians, but also the intrigues of various emigre groups, and particularly those of the Czechs. Benes gave the impression that he considered Otto as a greater foe than Hitler, the 'Moravian corporal'. An account is given on the tragic fate of the Austrian Legion which was dissolved because of disagreements among emigre circles.

Certain historical facts about Hungary are also reviewed by the author. During the war the Kallay government with the consent of the Regent, contacted the United States concerning the possibility of a separate peace treaty on several occasions. The Hungarian diplomats and other public figures living in Washington persuaded Crownprince Otto, among others, to support this Hungarian line with Roosevelt. Otto undertook the task despite the maltreatment to which he had been exposed on the part of Budapest during the previous decade. The subsequent exchange of secret messages and letters begun in the summer of 1943 did not produce tangible results, although a number of somewhat naive promises were made. The book is incorrect in implying that Kallay and Regent Horthy promised Otto that in the event of a separate peace treaty Hungary would offer him her throne. The writer, while working on a Horthy biography, recently discussed this question with the late Tibor Eckhardt who stated categorically that such a promise was never made to the Crownprince during the negotiations of 1943 and 1944.

Being convinced that Churchill's plan for the setting up of a political union between Bavaria, Austria and Hungary fell through as a consequence of Stalin's violent opposition, Otto returned to Austria in June 1945. But the man who represented Austrian interests so ably during the war was not allowed to remain in his country. The Renner government requested him to leave the French sector of Austria, where he lived. Although the occupying French authorities suggested that he stay despite Vienna's order, the 33 year old Otto rejected this offer with the words: "During my whole life I have been fighting against foreign interference and infringement of Austria's sovereignty. Therefore, I will not accept the help of the French occupying powers to remain here". Thus, Otto once more left Austria, this time as an adult.

Emil Csonka gives a detailed account of Otto's life after 1945, dealing with his political struggles, journeys, lectures, his marriage and financial situation. The emerging picture is one of a highly-cultured European, a humanist and a democrat. There is no doubt that Csonka is biased both towards Otto as a person and towards his political aspirations. However, he still manages to chronicle the events

of an era and the life of Otto Habsburg with accuracy and relative objectivity.

The last chapter of the book, entitled "The Battle for Return" deals with the changes in Austrian domestic politics which led to Otto's ultimate return to his country. Numerous pictures and photographs of historical importance as well as an extensive list of sources present the author as an excellent scholar with a wide horizon. A detailed index is also attached.

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