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Will the Hapsburg Return?

Russell Kirk

AT THE EDGE of the Bavarian village of Poecking, the Archduke Otto von Hapsburg, heir to the Holy Roman Emperors, lives in a biggish suburban house. He has not seen Vienna since he was a baby; now he is 48 years old, still exiled by Austrian laws and politicians. But in 1962, conceivably, he may go back—though not to the “imperial slum,” the vast old Hofburg palace in Vienna—at least to the city that for six centuries was the seat of the masters of Central Europe. It will not be as Emperor that he returns; yet he may influence profoundly the affairs of Austria and even of the whole Continent.

Late last June, the Austrian Cabinet—which at present consists of an evenly balanced coalition of the People's party and the Socialists—debated the question of whether the Archduke should be permitted to reside in Austria. Headed by the Chancellor, the People's party members favored his request; but the Socialists, led by the Vice Chancellor and by Otto Probst, the Socialist Secretary General, vehemently protested. Since all decisions of the coalition Cabinet must be unanimous, no action was taken.

The Archduke, an energetic and persevering man, now is appealing to the Austrian courts, and says he will turn, if necessary, to the World Court. Born in Austria, holding an Austrian passport, and—according to the monarchists—being Austria himself, he can claim that he is denied the right to live in his own country, a violation of the Declaration of Human Rights. Even the Austrian Socialists do not deny that Otto von Hapsburg is an Austrian national.

Slight of build, courteous and easy in manner, often humorous in conversation, the Archduke seems an unlikely gentleman to be banned as a dangerous subversive. A principal theme of his books and lectures is the protection of minorities; he is no enemy to democracy; and he seems so liberal to some Austrian monarchists that they are not quite certain his restoration would be an unmixed blessing. During the war he worked hard against the Nazis. He has discouraged the formation of a regular monarchist party, and never would have anything to do with schemes for the violent overthrow of the Austrian Republic. Why does he remain a man without a country?

In part, he is the victim of the climate of opinion which prevailed at the end of World War I. Even

Herbert Hoover, in those years, dreaded the possible restoration of “the tyranny of the Hapsburgs” in Central Europe. Since 1918, many people's eyes have been opened concerning what *real* tyranny in Europe amounts to—particularly the domination of an Austrian of quite different antecedents, Hitler. In obedience to the will of the Allies, at any rate, the founders of the Austrian Republic passed in 1919 an anti-Hapsburg law—reaffirmed in the Austrian peace treaty of 1955, at Russian insistence—providing that any member of the Hapsburg family who desires to live in Austria must renounce his claims to the throne, his family's pretensions, and sign an oath of allegiance to the Republic. If Hapsburgs do not comply, they are subject to arrest and deportation, and their property in Austria is sequestered.

Last June, Otto von Hapsburg at last accepted these conditions, submitting his renunciation of imperial claims and family rights, and swearing loyalty to the Austrian Republic. Vice Chancellor Pittlerman, Otto Probst and other Socialist leaders, nevertheless, denounced this oath as insufficient, and demanded that the Archduke swear further that he will take no part in Austrian politics. (Though the anti-Hapsburg laws disqualify any Hapsburg from becoming President, they do not bar Hapsburgs who have sworn allegiance from other political activities.) To this Socialist demand, beyond what Austrian law specifies, Otto von Hapsburg refuses to submit.

Why this Socialist dread of an amiable, learned and tolerant man who is anything but an energumen of iron reaction? There are two principal causes, and the first of them is to be found in the dogmatic ideology of the Austrian Socialists. More rigidly Marxist than the Socialists of any other Western European country, the Austrian Social Democrats have recoiled from the brutalities of Soviet soldiers and commissars, but still retain a wistful hankering after the doctrine that there are no enemies to the Left. This attitude, it should be said, by no means dominates all the younger members of the party—indeed, as the Archduke Otto himself has observed, among the rising generation of Socialists are young people more truly conservative than many of the professed conservatives of Vienna. But the Socialist Cabinet ministers are of the older generation, full of hard memories of the siege of Karl Marx House by the troops of Dollfuss, and strong haters of the name of Hapsburg, with its connotations of aristocratic existence, the imperial armies and the role of the Emperor as protector of the Church. For the

Dr. Kirk, former editor of *Modern Age*, has contributed to these pages several times in the past, most recently with “The Passing of the Patron” (9/21/57).

veteran Socialist politicians, the return of the head of the House of Hapsburg would symbolize the refutation of Marxist prophecies.

Were the Archduke an older or less intelligent man, the Socialist leaders might grudgingly permit him to enter Austria, considering him impotent. Being at the height of his powers, however, and full of plans for political action, Otto makes the older Socialists nervous as to their political future. One American professor of chemistry, after hearing a Detroit speech by the Archduke, murmured: "Well! I always thought archdukes and such were ignorant playboys. But this fellow is brilliant." (Otto earned a doctorate in political science from Louvain University, and is an accomplished public speaker.) Those Socialists who have heard the Archduke speak in Germany or elsewhere tend to be of the same opinion.

Thus the Socialist ministers' attitude toward Otto very strongly resembles the surly dread of the King entertained by the English politicians in Bernard Shaw's comedy *The Applecart*. Like Shaw's King, Otto is alert, clever, personally winning, practical and fond of the paradoxical role of popular tribune. Like his ancestor Franz Joseph, he thinks that only three things in life matter: duty, work, honor. Though quicker of mind and wittier than Franz Joseph—whose name still is loved in Austria—he has an equal capacity for painstaking endeavor, a quality not often encountered among Austrians. If such a man, with all the prestige of his great name to back him, should embark upon popular politics in Vienna—why, there is no telling what he might not achieve, except for the Presidency that is forbidden him by law.

This dread that Otto might upset the party applecart is not confined to Socialists. Former Nazis—who may be found nowadays in both the Socialist party and the third Austrian faction, the Freedom party, and even within the Christian-Democrat People's party—hate the Archduke because of his aid to the Allies during the war and his hostility toward virulent nationalism. They mutter that he was a traitor—to the Third Reich.

And as for the more or less conservative People's party, which represents chiefly the rural and Catholic interests, officially its leaders seem to favor the Archduke's return. Their leader, Chancellor Gorbach, states that Otto's request must be judged not by political expediency, but upon the basis of the Archduke's legal rights under Austrian law. Some People's party ministers and provincial governors, and important civil servants, are known to be monarchists at heart.

Yet some of the People's party politicians are nearly as uneasy about Otto's potential influence as are the older Socialists. Some of these have said, in private,

that they would not be sorry to delay his return as long as possible. Certain Austrian public-opinion polls have disclosed that the rising generation seems to be looking for a new man and a new program; and a great many young people, not a few of them from the Viennese working classes, frequently visit Otto in Bavaria. No professional politician relishes the thought of relinquishing office, or leadership, to a charismatic newcomer.

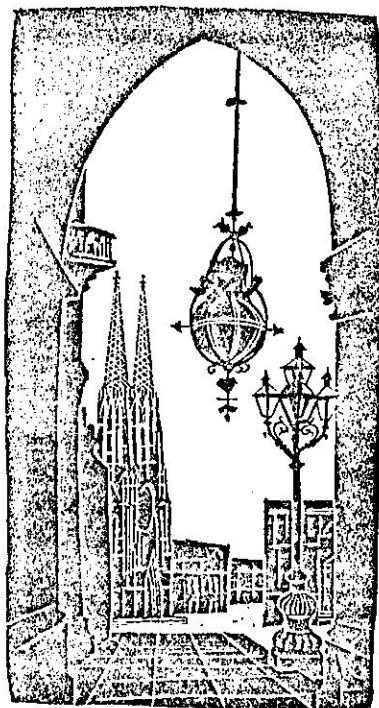
Two years ago, when there was considerable talk of Otto's possible return, the politicians' disquiet was less marked. Apparently they then thought that Otto would appeal only to the old folk who recalled the glitter of the Empire before 1914—and not to all of them. But nowadays they are conscious of an unrest within the Austrian electorate, particularly among people in their twenties: the old slogans no longer satisfy, and in none of the three parties is there a rising figure of much popular strength, except perhaps Governor Krainer of Styria—whose views are in substantial harmony with those of Otto.

The Socialists, in particular, have grown aware that their Marxist doctrines no longer catch the popular imagination. Herr Probst declared in a recent address that should Otto von Hapsburg return, he might rapidly gain the support of the majority of the people—and that therefore it is the duty of the Socialist party to protect the Austrian people from their own quite conceivable

folly. Vice Chancellor Pittnerman sometimes applies to the Archduke epithets which Hitler hurled against the Hapsburgs. Another Socialist official has drawn an analogy between Otto von Hapsburg and a "robber frequently in conflict with the law."

Such vehemence is in strong contrast with the indifference to Otto's return which many Socialist politicians expressed in 1959. Even today, some certified Socialist officials do not echo Pittnerman's and Probst's detestation; but they remain silent. It is doubtful whether rank-and-file Socialists approve altogether the Cabinet ministers' antipathy. The working-class Socialist who also remains a sentimental monarchist is not rare in Austria; nor is there any necessary opposition between a constitutional monarchy and Socialist policies.

In certain quarters, the Hapsburg name and the antinationalist system of the Hapsburg Empire now attract support where it was not found before 1914. Formerly "Hapsburg" was virtually synonymous with the Catholic Church and with the great landed interests; but this is no longer. One example of the sort of serious supporter of Otto among the younger generation is Dr. Thomas Chaimowicz, of Salzburg, a Jew, most of whose relatives died at the hands of the Nazis. To Dr. Chaimowicz and his friends, the Archduke Otto symbolizes toleration, order and the traditions of civility.



What would Otto of Austria-Hungary actually do if the Cabinet or the courts should permit his entry into Austria? No one, not even the most active monarchist, is quite sure. At the end of World War II—during which his hopes had been encouraged somewhat by Franklin Roosevelt—Otto flew to Innsbruck; but at the insistence of the Russians, he was expelled again.

But the Archduke being one of the best-informed men in Europe—he presides annually over the convention of the European Center for Information and Documentation—and of a practical turn, it seems certain that he would not attempt a restoration of the Empire. In his writings, he has predicted the gradual dissolution of the old class distinctions in Europe, and the rise of a new sort of democratic society. Like de Tocqueville, whom he has read attentively, he does not propose to fly in the face of Providence. And he would prefer real personal and family influence to a grand but empty title.

"I would never consent to be a mere ceremonial sovereign on the English pattern," he said to me nearly two years ago. For form and pageantry he has little taste. As a political theorist, his principal interest is in the *lit de justice*, the role of impartial chief magistrate, above party—the protector of minorities. Recently he suggested that Austria ought to establish a new office, that of Chancellor of Justice, with life tenure; and this Justiciar ought to be independent of party and faction. He added that he is willing to take such a post.

Also it is conceivable that he might aspire to be Chancellor—that is, Prime Minister. The Austrian President, like the German and the French, is chiefly a ceremonial figure; it is the Chancellor who determines state policy and proposes legislation. The Chancellor is appointed by the President. Should a non-Socialist President be elected by a fusion of Austrian factions rallying round Otto, the heir of the Emperors might enter upon the curious condition of being Chancellor of a realm created dynastically by his own ancestors.

The support of old-fashioned monarchists probably would not suffice for such a triumph, even allowing for the Archduke's skill as public speaker and organizer. But a liking for the Hapsburg now extends to people who are not monarchists at all. A good many liberal republicans seem inclined to take Otto for a pillar of order and liberty; and the Austrian middle classes feel the need of some such figure. With the old liberal interests, Otto himself stands well: he attends the annual meetings of the Mt. Pelerin Society of economic liberals, and this year, at Turin, presented a well-received paper before the association. Add to this the glamor of the Hapsburg name, and the fact that Otto has long been approved by Catholic hierarchy and priesthood, in a country highly Catholic—and the picture of the head of the House of Hapsburg as a popular statesman seems less fantastic.

The Emperor Karl, Otto's father, died in exile, broken by the war years and the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian system. The widowed Empress Zita reared her children carefully and successfully, teaching them to maintain their dignity even though deprived of country and money and opportunity for duty. History does

repeat itself, though always with variations; so it would not be altogether amazing for a thousand years of authority to make its mark felt after an interval of one generation. Like the Stuarts, the Hapsburgs have been at their best in adversity. Though Mayors of the Palace have become Emperors, never before has an Emperor become Mayor of the Palace. Yet Otto von Hapsburg, as Chancellor of Justice or as political catalyst, just possibly may find a new role for ancient royal houses.

PRAYER FOR INTELLECTUALS

To the Wise Men

Like me you were late in coming. The shepherds were here long before; even the cattle. They had joined the chorus of angels before you were on your way. For you the primordial discipline of the heavens was relaxed and a new defiant light blazed amid the disconcerted stars.

How laboriously you came, taking sights and calculating, where the shepherds had run barefoot! How odd you looked on the road, attended by what outlandish liveries, laden with such preposterous gifts!

You came at length to the final stage of your pilgrimage and the great star stood still above you. What did you do? You stopped to call on King Herod. Deadly exchange of compliments in which there began that unended war of mobs and magistrates against the innocent!

Yet you came, and were not turned away. You too found room before the manger. Your gifts were not needed, but they were accepted and put carefully by, for they were brought with love. In that new order of charity that had just come to life, there was room for you, too. You were not lower in the eyes of the holy family than the ox or the ass.

You are our special patrons and patrons of all late-comers, of all who have a tedious journey to make to the truth, of all who are confused with knowledge and speculation, of all who through politeness make themselves partners in guilt, of all who stand in danger by reason of their talents.

Pray for us. May we, too, before the end find kneeling-space in the straw. For His sake who did not reject your curious gifts, pray always for all the learned, the oblique, the delicate. Let them not be quite forgotten at the Throne of God when the simple come into their kingdom.

Prayer put in the mouth of St. Helena, when she prays in Bethlehem, remembering "the three royal sages who had come from so far to adore Him." From Helena by Evelyn Waugh, pp. 223-224, reprinted with permission of the publisher, Little, Brown.