

THE MASARYK MYSTERY

By ROBERT ENGLAND

EVER since the body of Foreign Secretary Jan Masaryk of Czecho-Slovakia dropped the sixty feet from a third story window of the Government Buildings in Prague in 1948, speculation has been rife as to whether the fall was suicide or murder. The official account claimed that the victim had been much depressed by letters from abroad reproaching him for collaboration with the Communists, and that, in his misery he had climbed out the bathroom window and thrown himself on the stone-flagged courtyard below.

It was known that he had, before his death, made a trip to the grave of his father, Thomas G. Masaryk, founder and First President of the Republic of Czecho-Slovakia. An unusually shrewd and alert man, he had no immediate family ties inside the country that might have embarrassed him in an attempt to escape. He kept an apartment in London, and was in constant touch with friends such as Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart, who indicates in his memoir of the statesman that he planned to escape, but seemed to have abandoned the plan for some reason. Bruce Lockhart inclines to the view that he committed suicide.

Recently C. L. Sulzberger of the *New York Times* has offered another explanation of the death. He claims that a Dr. Teply, a well-known criminologist and police surgeon of Prague, left a document in which the doctor related that at 5 a.m. on March 10, 1948, as a result of a telephone call he went to the courtyard below Jan Masaryk's apartment, and recognised the beaten pyjama-clad body as that of the Foreign Minister. His quick examination of the body disclosed many bruises, broken heel bones, and a bullet-wound in the nape of the neck, clearly a case of assassination in which the victim had been beaten after a struggle for life. On returning to the apartment, he found the secret police, Interior Minister Nosek and Deputy Foreign Minister Clementis re-arranging the furniture, and they, after some hesitation declared the death to be due to suicide. Dr. Teply disagreed, but was rebuked and all were warned to say nothing about the affair. Three or four months later, an official story claimed that Dr. Teply had died as the result of an accident, having taken a wrong injection. But he had left his written story in the hands of friends who have now been able to release it.

The suggestion that the death was due to murder has been widely rumoured, and has been given considerable credence in Washington for some time. Two years ago the late Col. Harold Robbins, who had lived in Prague in 1949 told me that it was whispered in that city that Masaryk had been seized at the airport, when about to board a plane for freedom, and he was shot. The Communists didn't know what to do with his body for a time, and finally decided to bring it back to the Government Buildings, and work up the story of suicide, and give him a state funeral.

There are many odd angles to this tragic event. Jan Masaryk was a man of unusual abilities, musical, artistic, social, witty. He knew the world of diplomacy intimately, and had a host of friends of all shades of opinion, who would have risked much to save him. I met him, at the suggestion of Col. Crosfield a former President of the British Legion, in the Spring of 1940. I found his wit, though a trifle Rabelaisian, not unkind, his personality attractive, his knowledge of public affairs encyclopaedic, and as he held a Ph.D. of an American University, his grasp of the American point-of-view was particularly notable in a European statesman. He also showed the evidence in his conversation of his early academic discipline, and to all this he added linguistic gifts of a high order, and the ability to get his personality over to any audience, private or public. He was particularly gifted as a broadcaster, and during the war his voice became known in Czechoslovakia as the voice of the resistance. As I had visited Prague frequently in the twenties, and had studied with some care the problems of Central Europe, I endeavoured to lead him into full and frank discussion, and though he never lost entirely his diplomatic finesse, his frankness astonished me. At one point in the conversation, Col. Crosfield asked him about the introduction of M. Benes to the forthcoming Legion Convention. At that time M. Benes had no official position in the exiled Government of Czechoslovakia, and Col. Crosfield didn't like to introduce him as the past President of Czechoslovakia. Quick as a flash, Jan Masaryk replied "Introduce him as the second President of Czechoslovakia."

I waited until the subject of Munich came up naturally and I found him quite prepared to discuss it. He did so without bitterness, and conceded that the British were totally unprepared to fight at that time, and was far more understanding of the Chamberlain point-of-view than I had expected. As one critical of appeasement I was at the time surprised at his tolerant

attitude. But on reflection, I recognize that he may have been more aware than I of the strength of isolationist and neutral sentiment in the United States, the reluctance of Soviet Russia to enter a war as an ally of Great Britain and France, and the support being given by leftist leaders and writers to pacifist propaganda. But in all my experience, I never met a man less likely to become the victim of a psychotic compulsion to suicide. Urbane, fond of the good things of life, with a shrewd eye for men and affairs, I would have expected him to display great diplomatic skill in co-operating with the Kremlin, and to prove a happy host or guest as occasion demanded at any high level party the Russians cared to have. Underneath the banter and the wit, I sensed a keen loyalty to Benes, to his father's memory, and a devotion to his country.

In 1946, I spent a part of a day with the late Isaiah Bowman, then President of Johns Hopkins University. As a geographer, he had been at Versailles in 1919 in the President Wilson delegation, and had much to do with mapping the boundaries of the succession States. He knew Dr. Benes intimately, and when, during World War II, Benes visited the United States, he spent some time with Dr. Bowman. Recalling the evening, Dr. Bowman said that he was struck by the clearness with which Dr. Benes saw the course of his forthcoming conversations in Moscow. As a Slav, he expected lengthy explorations in the course of the day of the first conference, but he did not expect to get anywhere, until after a late dinner; and then after many toasts, there would come agreement in the early hours of the morning. Dr. Bowman hinted some scepticism as to reaching an agreement quickly, but Dr. Benes said that in post-war Europe, Russia would be a giant, and that his country as small power must reach an understanding with the Power that would be dominant in the East. At this time it was not an accepted thing in the West that the War could be won, and, if won, there was doubt as to the outcome in a Russia, that by then had suffered enormous losses. But it was abundantly clear that Dr. Benes would go to the utmost, short of losing autonomy, to work with Russia. It is now known how bitterly he was disappointed, and how his physical condition made any fight against the Communist "coup d'état" out of the question.

The Foreign Minister, Jan Masaryk, a close friend of his President, sought to keep step with Soviet Russia. There came the test of the Marshall Plan participation in July 1947, when Masaryk had to reverse his Government's decision at th

orders of Moscow, and thus had to accept the position of a satellite of the USSR. From that point, it was clear that his days as Foreign Minister of Czechoslovakia were numbered. The son of the great Masaryk, the friend of Benes and of many powerful figures in his own country and abroad, he was not trusted to live quietly in retirement, nor was it to the interest of the Communist leaders to allow him to escape with his story of the events that had brought his country into direct opposition to the United States, the old friend of his country that had been brought up on the veneration of the Wilson policy of the self-determination of small nations. No doubt, to a regime already suspicious the risks of an escape abroad would bring up the fact that his father and Benes had practically created Czechoslovakia from outside the country in World War I. The voice of a Masaryk could be dangerous to an authoritarian government. Furthermore no 'curriculum vitae' or secret police file of Jan Masaryk would omit his strong links with the west. His mother had been the daughter of the president of an American insurance company. He held a degree from an American university, he had accepted at some time in the twenties a British Decoration—C.B.E.,—from the Government of the United Kingdom. His father had been a professor in the University of London, and he and Seton Watson and Wickham Steed and the group around the School of Slavonic Studies in London had worked closely together to bring about the birth of Czechoslovakia. As Minister for his country in Great Britain he had a special place in the hearts and minds of the British people.

All these points were in his favour as seen from our angle, but to a Communist mind they were capable of being twisted into a picture of a man who, in the idiom of the Communists, was a tool of Wall Street, an agent of the Imperial powers of Britain and the United States. His friend, Bruce Lockhart, had called his book about the Russia of the Revolution, *The Memoirs of a British Agent*, and it would be all too easy to fit this term in its more recent pejorative sense to the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister. The willingness to accept Marshall Aid clinched the suspicion, and recent events in his unhappy country indicate that there was no place for Jan Masaryk in the present tyranny.

If then, Jan Masaryk committed suicide, he certainly helped the Kremlin out of a dilemma.

But look for a moment at the method of his alleged suicide. Why should he choose death by a fall from a window?

In the famous defenestration of Prague of 1618, the two most ardent Catholics of the Council were hurled from the window of the same palace into the moat, but were only slightly injured by the fall. In the previous defenestration, two hundred years earlier (1419), a Hussite crowd headed by John Zizka threw the burgomaster and several councillors from the window of their council-chamber, but they might have survived had they not been killed by the mob.

King Alexander I. Obrenovitch of Serbia had married the widow of a Czech engineer, Mme. Draga, and in 1903 they were brutally assassinated in their palace at Belgrade, and their bodies were thrown from the window.

We in the west, are familiar with the phrase "throwing a project or a suggestion out of the window", but the word "defenestration" as known in Czech history referred to throwing a minister or a tyrant out of the window. The word occurs in French and is duly listed in Littré, with a reference to the Prague events. Defenestration was the prelude in 1419 to the Hussite war, and in 1618 to the Thirty Years War.

In both cases the defenestration symbolized the end of a regime or the beginning of a struggle for that is a significant part of Czech history. When we turn to the history of the great first President of Czechoslovakia, we find that he was in the direct tradition of the Hussites. In July 1915, when he made his revolutionary manifesto demanding Bohemian independence, he did so as a Hus anniversary speech. Thomas Masaryk was no ordinary Czech patriot. He was a free thinker, and scrutinised carefully the myths and legends of his people. In 1883 he showed that certain Czech texts which sought to prove that there had been a high standard of Bohemian culture in the Middle Ages, were forgeries. This required courage, for these MSS were greatly valued by all Czech patriots. He was as firm here, as he was in his rejection of the "Protocols of Zion"—the forgeries that were the base of most Central European anti-Semitism. His first notable work published in 1881 was a study entitled *Suicide as a Phenomenon of Modern Civilization*. In this he showed his interest in abnormal psychology, and his grasp of sociological principles.

Jan Masaryk was schooled in Czech history, and knew his father's work, for he was an intense admirer of his father's life and works, and shared his father's free-thinking attitudes to society. He must therefore have known much of his father's first sociological study of the causes of suicide, and the attitude

of the Catholic Church on the subject. In his later years, the father had worked to promote greater understanding between the Catholic and Protestant faiths, and was careful to avoid any policy that would give offence to the millions of Catholics, particularly in Slovakia.

Jan Masaryk would know the story of the defenestrations, and he would also be aware of the attitude of the Catholic Church on the question of suicide. It is unlikely that he would not know about the various ways of committing suicide, and in any case the end of the Nazis and of Goering had been well publicized. At once there arises to the mind of the student of European history the question—Why, should a shrewd man such as Jan Masaryk choose to commit suicide from the palace of his father's triumph, in a manner that would recall the stories of previous defenestrations, and be so likely to lay the base for another myth in the hands of his enemies that would injure the great name he held? Moreover the method was uncertain; there was the risk of failure and of incurring serious injury short of death that would prove embarrassing. Would he be likely to take the chance that the name of Masaryk would be linked by the guides and tourist literature to the story of the Imperial officers, Martinitz and Slawata, the victims of the defenestration of 1618? But if Jan Masaryk had too keen a sense of history to adopt this method of ending his life, why should the Communists adopt this story of his suicide?

It may be that it was ready to hand and the story developed by accident. But it is significant that of all the many explanations that might have been made, this is the one that could be most useful to the Communists when they rewrite, as they will, the history of Czechoslovakia and the share of the Masaryks in the attaining of national freedom. A fatal accident elsewhere is easily arranged by the executioners of Moscow, when state policy demands, but this has all the ear-marks of a too-carefully prepared plot. For the moment, the devout Catholic will not find it too easy to make a martyr of the free-thinker who is alleged to commit suicide. But in time there will be built up the idea that the fall from the window was the end of a hated regime and take its place with the other defenestrations of Czech history. Meantime, Dr. Těplý is dead, and another witness, the former Deputy for Foreign Minister Clementis is now being pursued.

The motive and the method fit together in a psychological chain, not certainly of evidence, but of such extraordinary his-

torical and ideological coincidence as to indicate that Jan Masaryk was the victim and not the accomplice of Soviet Russian Policy.

There can have been few men so able and so willing to co-operate with the Russians as Jan Masaryk and Edouard Benes. Both were the heirs of friendly Slav traditions. Thomas Masaryk had written in the two volumes—*The Spirit of Russia*, what is even today accounted one of the best studies of the Russian mind. They understood the demands for social justice and were sympathetic to all forms of state enterprise. But they were products of Western education. They had no particular attachment to any particular creed or doctrinal group, religious or economic. They were exemplars of our Western way of thinking, slightly sceptical, open to discussion, and willing to compromise. Perhaps, indeed, they had something of that Czech spirit of accommodation that has had to adapt itself to so many Imperial overlords in the long history of their country. But they were the kind of realists with a sense of humor and a sociological approach, who could be, and often were, brilliant members of round table, or panel discussions, or university seminars. Unfortunately, the Communist game is not played according to the rules of polite discussion or of parliamentary debate. The exchange of ideas in conversation with the aim of seeking fresh viewpoints or the modification of one's attitudes or opinions is in the communist methodology dangerously deviationist and heretical. Moreover, our straight line view of foreign cultures are taken in the main, from encyclopaedia and histories that pay at least lip service to the ideal of objectivity. It is taken for granted that there can be no compromise between the Catholic and Communist ideologies, but the Masaryk story indicates that in the end there is no possibility of mutual understanding between the thoroughgoing rationalist or freethinker and the Kremlin type of Communist.

No book, no encyclopaedia, no school, no teacher, no philosophy, in Soviet Russia has any concern for objectivity historical or scientific presentation. The whole concern is to arrange the factual material to serve the ends of Soviet Russia. There is undoubtedly intensive work in the schools, the academies, and the laboratories; the output of printed matter is enormous; and there is unrelenting study of cultures, customs, social and political conditions abroad as translated into the idiom of the Soviet Russian Imperialism. Institutions labor to develop the methods by which Communists hope to take over the national cultures they study. Thus, indigenous

tural beliefs are revived and utilized in China; old prejudices and grievances are exploited as in the anti-British propaganda in the Middle East, the anti-American feeling in Europe, and the Negro disabilities in the United States. The documentation and the detailed analysis of the possible points out of which may be grown movements to threaten established order are thorough, and the follow-up relentless. Even in Canada how quickly the Communist party sized up the weak spots in a trade-union, the grievances and cultural wants of a racial minority, the complaints of the consumer faced with rising prices, the sentimentality of the Humanitarian, the unsuspecting character of our Civil Service before the Spy Trials, and how cynically the party can drop its name and exploit the faith of the liberal thinker who so dearly wants to believe the best of his fellow-men and to welcome any experiment labelled progressive. In the desperate and tragic struggle that lies ahead for the next few decades, we in the West are not exactly well-equipped for an ideological war. It is difficult for us to agree on a gospel of freedom that can preach sincerely and vigorously, and we dislike using the weapons that our enemies use. We tend to put our faith in free discussion and to assume that, given a sincere and vital worship of the truth on our part, somehow truth will win. Our practice is far from our ideal, an ideal which we preach and affirm so often at Convocation and in our public assemblies. In the short run, we seem to have no alternative but to adhere to the policy that "when a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace," but we ought to read the injunction that follows in Holy Writ, and the parable. "He that is not with me is against me" leaves little room for the neutral attitude which some connote with the nineteenth century idea of the scholar and the scientist. The parable of the house, "swept and garnished and empty" to which the devil returns with seven of his fellows should give us pause in our idea that we can empty our minds of all the myths, the religious beliefs, the ethical ideas by the cleansing of science, and keep the house unoccupied.

The recent outpouring of affection towards the throne in the British Commonwealth, the solemnity with which we turned to Christian ceremony to express our grief at the loss of a dedicated life, the tradition by which we give our allegiance to a young woman, as Queen, and the continuity of our constitutional practice are all items which some sociologists in the

name of science would dismiss as vestigial forms of superstition and crowd hysteria that should disappear in a sane and completely rationalist world. In a Marxian society, dedication, sacred duty, reverence, religion, and ethical conduct all disappear before the compelling mechanism of the party, until Pilate's question—"What is truth?" becomes a natural cynicism and perjury a virtue if it be directed against an enemy.

To hold to the ideal of "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" in this ideological struggle and the Czech motto "The Truth will prevail" will be extremely difficult, and it will not be enough. The words of Pascal are worth thinking about. "We make an idol of truth; for truth without charity is not God, but his image and idol, which we must neither love nor worship."