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Vienna, July 29, 1934.

St. Leo

No. 66.

SUBJECT: FURTHER REPORT ON THE ABORTIVE ATTEMPT TO
OVERTHROW THE GOVERNMENT OF AUSTRIA.

The Honorable

The Secretary of State,

Washington, D. C.

Sir:

I have the honor to refer to my despatch No. 65, of July 26, 1934, reporting on the abortive attempt to overthrow the Government of Austria, and on the circumstances surrounding the death of Chancellor Dollfuss, in which I gave a recital of the events as from noon of July 25 to midnight of that day. I shall in this despatch endeavor to give as faithful as possible a recital of the further developments.

Early on the morning of July 26 I found that from official and other reliable sources it was clearly established that the

city

city had been quiet during the night. As has already been stated in my despatch No. 65 and in the telegrams referred to therein, the incidents in Vienna on the 25th were confined to the radio station and to the Ballhausplatz which is the name by which the building is known in which the Chancellor had his office and in which the Foreign Office is situated. Throughout the entire afternoon and evening of July 25 and that night the appearance of the city was normal except at the two places mentioned and with the exception of a larger number of troops, police, and Heimwehr on the streets. The public buildings, too, were heavily guarded.

On the morning of July 26 it was also possible to get more definite news from the rest of the country which had been remarkably quiet the day before in view of the attempted overthrow of the Government in Vienna. A police commandant was shot by a Nazi youth in Innsbruck, and in Styria in several small towns groups of Nazis had endeavored to take possession of the public buildings and where they had succeeded in doing so had been driven out again by the local Heimwehr.

Late in the morning of the 26th and more particularly early in the afternoon of that day information began to reach Vienna that there was fighting in various towns in Carinthia as well as in Styria between the Nazis and the local Heimwehr. It was impossible to determine the exact extent of these conflicts and they did not reach their most serious proportions until July 27. The reports which were sent out of Austria and which apparently have been published in the foreign press in most countries considerably exaggerated both the scope and severity of these encounters between the National Socialists and the Government forces. This, however, is readily understandable as there was considerable tension and news arriving at the capital was not always accurate.

The Government

The Government, however, decided to take no chances and martial law was declared in Vienna and for the province of Styria on the morning of July 26. Vice Chancellor Starhemberg returned to Vienna that morning and immediately took over the duties of Acting Chancellor. President Miklas also returned to Vienna from his holiday in Southern Austria that morning. A Cabinet meeting was held and the Government decided that a decree would be prepared according to which the persons taken prisoners at the Foreign Office, numbering 144, would be subject to trial by a military court.

During the morning also it was made known that Dr. Rintelen, the Austrian Minister at Rome, had endeavored to commit suicide during the night. While at the Foreign Office that morning Dr. Tauschitz, the Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, informed me that Dr. Rintelen's name had been in the mouths of the Nazis who took possession of the Foreign Office all during the fateful preceding afternoon, and that the Government had felt it necessary to ask him to come to the Defense Ministry where he was to spend the night until he could be examined to determine what connection he might have had with the affair. Dr. Tauschitz stated that Dr. Rintelen had not been put under arrest. At about midnight two police officers arrived at the Defense Ministry in order to take him to the Police Presidium as it had been decided to hold him more closely and there were no means for doing so at the Defense Ministry. According to Dr. Tauschitz when Dr. Rintelen was informed that he was to get ready to leave the building he had already retired for the night and asked that he be given time to dress. This was granted and some time thereafter a shot was heard in the room and the officials entered to find that he had shot himself just under the heart. Dr. Tauschitz said he left a short note which he had obviously just written to the effect that he

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could not live and bear to have his name mentioned in connection with the death of Dr. Dollfus. Dr. Mintelen was immediately taken to a hospital where a blood transfusion operation was effected, but his condition was declared to be serious.

At 10:30 on the morning of July 26 I called on the President to offer the condolences of our Government in accordance with standing instructions of the Department. Immediately thereafter I called on the Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Taubitz, for the same purpose, and took the occasion to express my personal condolences also to several members of the Foreign Office staff. The First Secretary, Mr. Kliefoth, who accompanied me, and I were asked if we did not wish to see the remains of the Chancellor which had already been prepared and were in his former office as Chancellor. I felt it my duty to follow this suggestion in the same spirit in which it was made, and the Chief of Protocol took us to the room where the Chancellor had been shot and where the blood had not yet been removed from the spot where he had obviously lain and where he had dropped near the door. We were taken then into the Chancellor's work room where it was obvious from a glance at his body that he had died from bleeding. I mention these details because they were during the same morning set forth to me by high ranking officials of the Government who said that it was clearly established that although the Chancellor had received two wounds, the physician had established that morning that neither of them ~~were~~ necessarily fatal if he had received medical attention. No physician had been called. The Chancellor was shot at almost exactly 1 o'clock on July 26, and although the time of his death is not definitely established, it seems that he died as a result of loss of blood from the wound in his neck between 3:30 and 4 o'clock. As has already

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been brought out in my despatch No. 65, Major Fey saw him at between 2:30 and 3 o'clock.

It is also now well established that the Chancellor requested that a priest be called and this was refused. It was not until the besieged found that there was no hope of their coup succeeding and that they would eventually be obliged to give themselves up that they sent for a priest and he arrived after the Chancellor had expired.

During my conversation at the Foreign Office on the morning of July 26 it was officially confirmed to me that Dr. Rieth, the German Minister in Vienna, had been recalled and that the German Government had indicated that if the 144 prisoners were taken to the German frontier the German authorities would refuse to receive them.

These 144 prisoners created a very serious situation for the Austrian authorities. The Government forces outside of the Foreign Office could not attack the building or proceed against the Nazis occupying it on account of threats of the Nazis to immediately kill not only the twelve principal hostages held in a room already referred to, but also some 140 other persons who were in the building at the time they occupied it, including many women stenographers and employees. When the Government made its agreement with the besieged Nazis it knew that the Chancellor had been wounded, but was under the impression that he was not gravely wounded and that no lives had been lost. It was felt that it would be unsafe to permit the situation to continue over night as any action would be more difficult after sunset. Furthermore, it was obviously dangerous for the general situation to permit the public to remain under the impression that a good part of the Cabinet was in a perilous situation for so long.

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It is quite understandable, therefore, that the Cabinet Council decided to meet the demand of the besieged Nazis to be given safe conduct to the German frontier.

As there is likely to be a good deal of discussion in the future with regard to this matter, I quote below the order which was given to Minister Heustädter-Stürmer by the Cabinet as reported in an official communiqué:

"By order of the Federal President the rebels are urged to evacuate the building on the Ballhausplatz within a quarter of an hour. If no lives of members of the Government who have been illegally deprived of their freedom have been lost, the Government declares that it promises to the rebels safe retreat and conduct to the frontier. If these terms are not accepted during the term fixed the forces of the Government will be used."

When the terms had been accepted and the German Minister had witnessed the agreement and the members of the Government in the building were set free it was found that the Chancellor was dead. Irrespective, however, that this was equivalent to a breach of the agreement and freed the Austrian Government from its obligation to provide safe conduct to the frontier, Dr. Schuschnigg stated to the foreign diplomatic representatives on the late evening of July 25 that the Government intended to detain only those whom it was established were the leaders and those who had been directly responsible for the murder of the Chancellor and to send the remainder the following morning to the German frontier. As is now known, the German Government on the morning of July 26 made it known that it would not permit these people to cross the frontier.

The 144 Nazis arrested at the Foreign Office are still in the police prison in Vienna. The action which will be taken with respect to them is not clear at this moment, but that the leaders and those directly involved in the murder of the Chancellor will be executed after trial by a military court seems to be without

question.

question. This will be covered in a later report.

On the morning of July 26 I was also able to learn from official sources that the Chief of the Criminal Police of Vienna and quite a number of important persons in the city had been arrested because of information becoming available to the effect that they had been engaged with Dr. Hintelen in the plot to overthrow the Government. By noon on July 26 it was already possible for the Government to establish that the action had much wider ramifications than it was at first thought. The Government was convinced of the complicity of Dr. Hintelen in the action, but was unable to question him on account of his precarious condition following his wound.

On the afternoon of July 26 and that night more serious difficulties occurred in various isolated towns in Styria and in Carinthia. The Acting Chancellor, Prince Starhemberg, as the head of the Heimwehr called all its members into active service and the streets in all towns were patrolled and guarded by the local Heimwehr. It was necessary to send troops to several towns in Styria and Carinthia to assist the Heimwehr.

Although Vienna continued quiet on the 27th, further conflicts were reported in Styria and Carinthia. At Kollenschlag on the German frontier a group of 40 Austrian legionnaires were reported in an official communiqué as having endeavored to cross the frontier. The communiqué stated that they had been driven back with several casualties. I made every endeavor through official and other reliable sources to learn the actual situation throughout the country. In all official sources I was assured, as were the members of the Legation staff, that the difficulties had been confined to Styria and Carinthia and that the situation was well under control, and on July 27 I was definitely informed by the authorities that by the following day the few spots where the Nazis had not been deprived of their

of their arms would be cleared up.

On July 28 a communiqué was issued by the Under Secretary for Defense which stated that the Government forces had lost since July 25 and up to that date 78 killed and 166 wounded throughout Austria. This includes casualties in the army, police, and Heimwehr. The principal casualties were at Leoben where the Alpine Montan Gesellschaft is situated. This company is controlled by German and Austrian capital and there is very large German influence in it. It is at Leoben that the conflict between the Nazis and the Government forces assumed the proportions of a small battle. As far as I am able to tell, the conflict throughout the country has been much exaggerated in the reports which have been sent outside of Austria as would be indicated by the official statement of the dead and wounded, which I have reason to believe is correct up to July 28.

On July 28 the funeral of the Chancellor was held at 2:30 o'clock in the afternoon. It was a moving and unusually well conducted ceremony and I am informed that not even when Emperor Franz Josef was buried in 1916 in Vienna was there such a show of public sorrow in the city. At the funeral ceremony at the City Hall President Miklas and Prince Starhemberg delivered funeral orations which were used as a dedication of the Government to the Dollfuss policies. They both declared in unequivocal terms the desire of the Austrians for friendly relations with all their neighbors, but that there could be no compromise on any question involving the independence of Austria or intervention in her internal affairs.

According to reports which it has been possible to get concerning the situation in the country on July 28 and July 29, it would appear that the country has been entirely quiet and that in those spots where resistance had still been shown on July 27, it has now ceased.

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I have endeavored to give the Department this brief recital of the events through the early evening of July 29. I have not gone into detail as the time has not been available to do this. I hope to cover important phases of the movement and to give appropriate interpretive comments in despatches to follow. I have been in constant touch with official sources of information and with my colleagues and believe that the events as set forth in my despatch No. 68 of July 26, and in this despatch report the circumstances as clearly as it is possible to relate them at this time.

Before closing this despatch, however, it should be stated that it has already been established that the Nazis who took possession of the radio station and of the Foreign Office on July 25 started from a point on the edge of the city where they gathered in a building and put on uniforms of the army and of the Vienna police which were unloaded from six trucks which stopped in front of the building shortly before noon. The men hastily threw off their civilian clothing and dressed for the most part in army uniforms. From the trucks also were unloaded arms, particularly revolvers, many of which were new and which it is said were of German origin. After they had changed into uniform the men got into the trucks and were rapidly driven to the center of the city. Six trucks left the rendezvous on the edge of the city, five of which reached the court yard of the Foreign Office. When they entered the court yard the occupants immediately entered the building and took possession of it in such a way that it was clear that they thoroughly knew its geography and the location of the various corridors and offices. They arrested the occupants always with the same cry "in the name of the Bundespresident and of the new Government". I am informed by various members of the Foreign Office staff who were arrested in the building by the Nazi invaders that the invariable statement was

the above

the above which was amplified in some cases to "in the name of the Bundespräsident and of Chancellor Bismarck", or "in the name of the Bundespräsident and the Chief of Police Steinbäuerl." A number of these same members of the Foreign Office staff have informed me, among them being the Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Tauschitz, that they were first of the impression that it was an attempt by the army to take over the Government as the pseudo officers and men whom they first saw had the appearance of regular officers and soldiers. It was not until later in the afternoon as the guards were changed that they saw that most of the men were obviously not soldiers from their deportment and from the way in which they wore their uniforms, and that parts of the regular equipment were missing.

Respectfully yours,

George S. Messersmith.