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Vienna, October 2, 1954.

No. 158

SUBJECT: SOME COMMENT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF
THE DOLLFUSS TRADITION IN AUSTRIA.

The Honorable
The Secretary of State,
Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to inform the Department that, together with my colleagues here, I attended on Sunday morning, September 30, the dedication of the Seipel-Dollfuss Gedächtnisbau, which is a memorial church erected to honor the memory of Dr. Seipel and of Dr. Dollfuss.

Already some time ago the idea was conceived and carried into effect of building a Catholic church in one of the working sections of Vienna, dedicated to the memory of Dr. Seipel as one

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of Austria's great Chancellors and as a faithful servant of the Church. It was intended that the remains of Dr. Seipel should be permanently interred in the crypt of this church. After the assassination of Dr. Dollfuss it seemed fitting that this church, which was then nearing completion, should be dedicated to the memory of Dr. Dollfuss as well, as the policies of the two men were so closely in accord and as Dr. Seipel had regarded Dr. Dollfuss as his natural successor. It was therefore decided to name this church the Seipel-Dollfuss Gedächtnisbau, and to place in the crypt the remains of the two great Chancellors of post-war Austria.

The remains of Dr. Dollfuss had been temporarily interred in a Vienna cemetery and pilgrimages to his grave have been a daily occurrence from all over Austria. In an address made by Chancellor Schuschnigg a few days ago he referred to the million and a half Austrians who had already in the brief time which has elapsed since the death of the Chancellor visited his grave. On Saturday, September 29, the remains of Dr. Seipel and of Dr. Dollfuss were taken with great ceremony from their temporary resting places to the Seipel-Dollfuss Gedächtnisbau where they have been permanently placed in the crypt especially prepared for and dedicated to this purpose.

The ceremony on Sunday, September 30, dedicating this church was an impressive one. A mass was celebrated by Cardinal Innitzer and at its close addresses were made by the Cardinal, President Miklas, and the Chancellor, Dr. Schuschnigg.

In view of what has already happened since the death of Chancellor Dollfuss, it is not too early, I believe, to say that

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this church will become a Mecca for patriotic Austrians. When one considers the economic distress prevailing among the masses in Austria and that her population is only about 6½ million, Chancellor Schuschnigg's statement with respect to the number who have already made a pilgrimage to the temporary resting place of Dollfuss is significant. In practically every city and town squares and streets and some buildings have been named after Dollfuss. In the churches the picture of Dollfuss is invariably to be found. A public subscription is in progress for the erection of an imposing memorial to his memory and I am informed that the results are unusually good in view of the difficult times. This memorial promises to be the most significant that Austria has as yet erected in honor of any of her statesmen.

There is every indication that a real Dollfuss tradition is developing in Austria and that this will remain, as it already is, the expression of Austria's will to retain her independence. One of the primary principles of the political philosophy of Dr. Dollfuss was that Austria's independence must be maintained not only for the sake of Austria, but as an indispensable factor in the maintenance of peace in Europe. On this subject he found no compromise possible and it was his unalterable attitude which undoubtedly led to his martyrdom. It may be that his martyrdom and the developing Dollfuss tradition will prove to be the bulwark supporting Austria's independence.

It is not my intention in this despatch to discuss the qualities of Chancellor Dollfuss and his place in history. I do not feel competent to do this, but I may say that anyone who had contact with him fell under the spell of his charm and personality and was impressed by the obvious ability of the man.

I arrived in Vienna on May 20, 1934, and during the weeks which intervened between my arrival and his assassination on July 25, I had almost daily opportunity to have contact with him and had the privilege of a number of long conversations with him. I gathered the distinct impression whenever I was with him that I was talking with a man of unusual ability and as the weeks went on I formed the definite conviction that he had many of the qualities of a really great man.

I should like to say, however, that the outstanding qualities of Dollfuss were his charm, simplicity, and greatness and kindness of heart. Like all truly great men he was always the same to all persons at all times. This poise and ease are all the more significant in view of the Chancellor's humble origin and in the light of his comparatively limited opportunities. Perhaps the greatest tribute that those who will in the future write of Austria's great Chancellor, will be able to pay him is that in a country where aristocratic traditions and class distinctions still hold strongly and have deep roots in the present day life of the people, this man who came from the most humble beginnings and who did not have the certainty as to who his father was had the respect and confidence of all classes including the most distinguished and worth while representatives of Austria's nobility and aristocracy.

The quality perhaps which most impressed foreign observers who had contact with Chancellor Dollfuss was his wide grasp and real understanding of European as well as Austrian problems in spite of the fact that he had had limited opportunities for travel and contact. He had a real breadth of vision and a deep understanding of human nature, as well as a deep sense of the necessity for rectitude and generosity in dealing with his fellows.

A member of the present Cabinet who was an intimate personal friend of the Chancellor and a close co-worker politically, has in an article which appeared in the *NEUNE WISNER TAGEBLATT* of August 5, 1934, given an appreciation of Dr. Dollfuss, the closing paragraph of which is, I believe, of sufficient importance to be made a matter of record and I quote below a translation thereof:

"Dollfuss never thought of himself. That was perhaps the greatest charm of his personality. Everyone who came in contact with him had the absolute conviction that this man wanted nothing for himself. This, too, was the most weighty aspect of his kindness that drew so many people from different circles to him. In this kindness there was nothing artificial. There was never a mask or a pose. It was always the real expression of himself. Then, too, as he went on his upward path he remained absolutely true to himself. He never changed from the days that I first knew him as a student of theology, and he was the same with all people with whom he spoke. I have seen him in conversation with farmers and with workers, with the Hungarian Minister-President, with the Papal Legate, with diplomats, in short with persons of the most varied origin, education, and attitude towards life. With them he was always the same. He was always his real self. It was also the real Dollfuss who said in the face of death that he had wished nothing else than the peace and happiness of his country which he loved above everything."

Respectfully yours,

George S. Messersmith.