

Prague Rules Masaryk's Death Not Murder, Probably Accident

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PRAGUE, Dec. 11 — An investigation into the death in 1948 of Jan Masaryk, Czechoslovakia's last non-Communist Foreign Minister, suggested today that he had slipped and fallen while sitting on a window ledge during a bout with insomnia.

The findings by the office of the Czechoslovak Attorney General thus cast doubt on the 21-year old verdict of suicide and also "excluded the possibility of murder." The report said the evidence pointed to "an unfortunate accident."

It was announced that a more comprehensive statement on the inquiry would be published soon. However, because the possibility of murder had been excluded, the attorney general's office said it considered the case closed and would not

make final official ruling on the cause of death.

The Foreign Minister was the son of Thomas G. Masaryk, the founder of the Czechoslovak republic and its first President. He died in a fall from a second-floor window of his apartment in Cernin Palace on March 10, 1948.

The death came just two weeks after the Communist takeover in Czechoslovakia and created a sensation, as the cold war was in its early stage.

Doubts about the official version of suicide lingered and during the liberal Communist leadership of Alexander Dubcek, an official investigation was reopened.

After the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in August,

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1968, crushed the reform movement, there were reports that the inquiry into Jan Masaryk's death had been suspended.

Thus tonight's announcement made by Dr. Karel Pesta, department head in the attorney general's office, caused general surprise.

Says Hundreds were Heard

Dr. Pesta said, according to the Prague radio, that hundreds were heard in an extensive investigation, proving that "the possibility of murder can be excluded."

"There is much evidence for the possibility of an unfortunate accident," Dr. Pesta said and asserted that Mr. Masaryk could have died in the following way:

The minister had developed a habit of fighting insomnia by exposing himself to cool air. During World War II, in Britain, Mr. Masaryk was known to set on the window sill until he got thoroughly chilled and when he went to the warm bed he found it easier to fall asleep.

Mr. Masaryk "undoubtedly" suffered from insomnia on the night of his death and therefore it was possible that he sat on the window to get cool air.

Another habit of Mr. Masaryk, the report said, was to sit with his legs crossed in yoga fashion.

Cigarette on Window Sill

On the outside window sill, investigators at the time found the type of cigarette smoked by Mr. Masaryk and there were "many other indications which lead us to the conclusion that there was a possibility of an unfortunate accident."

According to Dr. Pesta, this would also explain the discovery of pillows near the window, which stirred speculation in the past that a fight had preceded Mr. Masaryk's death.

The pillows, the report said, may have been used by Mr. Masaryk to protect "those parts of the body which he did not want to get chilled, like his kidneys."

Near the window, pills were found. They were of the type to combat headaches. And glass of drinking water near the window indicated that Mr. Masaryk intended to take them. An autopsy established at the time that he had taken a "normal dose."

The report listed these points, casting doubt on the earlier official verdict of suicide:

¶ Mr. Masaryk had not left a farewell letter and had not put his things in order.

¶ Masaryk had been working that night on a speech he was to give to a visiting Polish delegation the next day.

The original suicide verdict, the report explained, was based on the belief that he was deeply disturbed by the Communist takeover and had received cables and letters from the West criticizing him for staying in the Communist government of Klement Gottwald.

But psychiatrists were quoted by the report as having said that the few days following the changeover in Prague were not long enough a period to drive Mr. Masaryk to suicide.

The report also said that he told a friend in America in 1947 that he would "jump out of the window if a new war would break out." That explained in part the original version of suicide, the report said.

At one point Dr. Pesta said that the findings "could not exclude the possibility" either of suicide or accidental death. But the rest of the statement made plain that the investigators tended to regard an accident as the most likely explanation.