

cern that should spark a new and broader coalition of thought and action. The U.N. special session indeed offers an opportunity for such a coalition to be formed. Setting aside the cheap prophecy and partisan deceits reflected in the Mobilization for Survival's pastoral letter, the religious communities could play an important part in forming such a coalition.

A more effective coalition will be marked by several virtues, none of which should be alien to the religious communities. First, it will acknowledge as legitimate the concern for the security of the United States and of those who depend on us, together with concern for the prosperity and well-being of all the American people. The arguments for security and domestic well-being can and should be turned in favor of disarmament. Second, such a coalition will be scrupulously honest about the ambiguities and risks involved in disarmament. Against those who cite disastrous precedents *and* against those who offer guarantees of success it must be clearly understood that we have not been down this road before. Honesty also means a fair apportionment of blame for our present dilemma, especially in relation to the U.S. and the USSR. More important than apportioning blame, the focus must be on the commonality of the threatening terror.

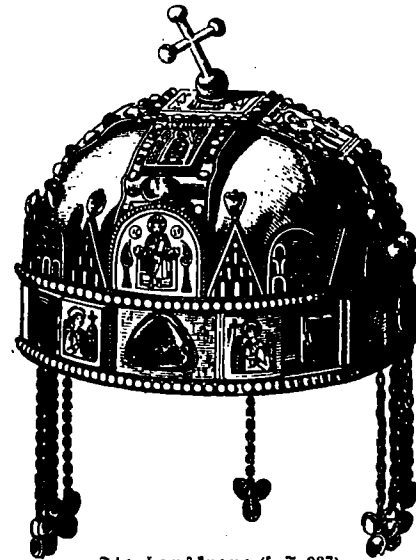
Third, a new and more effective coalition will acknowledge that the problem is not new, nor have all efforts to resolve it been totally ineffective. It will respect the many people, including political leaders, who have been wrestling with the problem for many years. They need support, not anathemas. Finally, it will be a coalition whose urgency of intention will be sustained by modesty of expectation. It will not collapse in disillusionment if nuclear weapons are not banished in "the year of disarmament." A coalition that needs to be sustained by the achievement of utopia is unsustainable. To diminish the terror now in the hope of a world beyond terror—that is a vision immodest enough to inspire and modest enough to sustain a renewed devotion to disarmament.

EXCURSUS IV

Wilson Carey McWilliams on The Crown of St. Stephen, the Panama Canal, and Other Sacred Objects

The Carter administration has its troubles with sacred objects. Recently the president announced that on January 6 he intends to return to Hungary the Crown of St. Stephen, in American custody since 1945. He and his advisors must have expected public protest, especially by Hungarian-Americans. The Hungarian regime was built on the suppression

of 1956, and something like 200,000 Soviet troops are still in Hungary. The "recent improvements in human rights" discerned by the administration seem real enough, especially in the relations between Church and State, but they can neither erase grim memories nor write real guarantees for the future. But there is no great disagreement between the administration and its critics about the character of the Hungarian regime. The real issue is the importance of St. Stephen's Crown.



Stephanskrone (f. S. 937).

To the administration's critics the value of the Crown is incalculable. It confers legitimacy and majesty; it represents the sanction of the past on the present, the judgment of the enduring and the eternal on the transient and temporal. The Carter administration doubtless included the "symbolic value" of the Crown in its calculations, but its reckonings were secular, cerebral, and mercantile, unsuited—its critics argue—to assessing something sacred, affective, and priceless. As one Hungarian-American, Stephen M. Vijdaj, put it, the Crown is not "an amusement piece which should be displayed in a museum."

Such domestic attacks were anticipated and discounted, but the Hungarian Government *also* has had occasion to complain that the administration is too flippant in its treatment of the Crown, which seems to have taken Washington rather by surprise. Reacting to rumors that Rosalynn Carter would return the Crown, a Hungarian official noted that the president probably regarded sending his wife as a "nice gesture," but he protested that the Crown of St. Stephen is not "just a bunch of flowers."

I sympathize with the (probably foredoomed) struggle of the administration's critics to keep the Crown in America, but it is hard to argue with the case for sending it back to Hungary. More than one tyrannous head has worn it. The Habsburgs had the Crown when Windischgrätz conquered Budapest and Paskievitch laid vanquished Hungary "at the feet of the czar." The last Hungarian government to

control the Crown—Admiral Horthy's—was no defender of human rights. The Crown does not symbolize political virtue; it represents the continuity and political existence of the Hungarian people. The values "for which it stands" are nationality and sovereignty, not personal liberty or popular government. That the administration managed to offend all parties to the quarrel over the Crown, however, hints at more fundamental shortcomings.

St. Stephen's Crown belongs to a foreign culture, and perhaps the administration can be excused for failing to understand it. But the administration has also failed to appreciate the sanctity—in certain quarters—of the Panama Canal.

It must have seemed to the president and his advisors that the treaty with Panama was a shrewd bargain. Making concessions to Panamanian nationalism, it protects America's strategic interests as far as any agreement can. Minor imperfections aside, the treaty relieves the United States of what, in an anti-imperial age, can only be a problem and an embarrassment at little or no material cost. The number and vehemence of the treaty's opponents came as something of a shock. But it is not because of its mundane utility that the Panama Canal inspires empurpled defense.

To the American zealots the Canal is a symbol of American nationality, almost an American equivalent of St. Stephen's Crown. We built it, they say, and we paid for it. When we were young we were read stories about Goethal's struggles against tropical disease; in the movies Humphrey Bogart defended the Canal against Sydney Greenstreet and some villainous Japanese; the maps showed the Canal Zone as American territory, just like Alaska or the Virgin Islands.

To the partisans of American control the Canal—an achievement that eluded Europeans and that brown-skinned peoples could not even attempt—is a symbol of American ingenuity, technology, and superiority. The Canal Zone preserves our memory of a time when natural resources were plentiful, individualism seemed sensible, and the natives were quiet. In a world in which such things are slipping away the Canal is a buttress for the old belief that our national will, informed by science, is capable of realizing that mastery of nature promised by modern culture and liberal teaching.

It is a shabby promise and a shoddy teaching. The Canal appeals to that side of American culture that is dedicated to externals, using monuments and dominion to conceal an inner disappointment, loneliness, and desperation. People cling to that secular creed, however, because its crumbling defenses are better than total vulnerability. The Canal treaty's opponents cannot be won over by pragmatic persuasions because their fury proceeds from an inarticulate recognition that pragmatism is not enough.

Curiously, the Hungarian Government shows a better appreciation of what is to be valued in political life. It plans a spectacular ceremony to celebrate the Crown's return, possibly featuring a joint appear-

ance by the Cardinal and Party leader Kadar. Ironically, a nominally revolutionary regime is eager to lay claim to political continuity; an atheistic government longs for the support of the Holy Crown. The Hungarian Government, in effect, is acknowledging that its creed is not enough, and since that creed claims to provide a sufficient answer to the dilemmas of human life and governance, to concede that it is inadequate is to admit that it is false. Their enthusiasm for the Holy Crown shows that the commissars, like the proverbial emperor, have no clothes.

It is not clear, however, that our republic is better dressed. To the contrary, the Canal treaty's antagonists are only one indication of the moral crisis in American political culture. The president and his advisors, as their dealings with sacred objects suggest, too often seem unaware of the nature and depth of that crisis. Fascinated with engineering, the president sometimes appears to believe that a little tinkering will set the old creed working again. But the president also knows that other, often inward or private, side of American culture that sees the fraud in individualism and the quest for mastery. His opponents' passion may yet lead the president to appeal to and speak for that other America, so long on the defensive. Certainly that is a result to be desired. Above all lesser goals we need to rebuild the channels of community and the crown of the spirit.

EXCURSUS V

Homer A. Jack on **A Special Opportunity for Disarmament**

"We are for genuine disarmament and against sham disarmament." This may be how many Americans feel about the prolonged disarmament negotiations in Geneva and elsewhere. However, these words were uttered by Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua during the general debate at the U.N. late in September. Huang Hua added that "as a first step, all nuclear countries, and particularly the two nuclear superpowers, must first of all undertake the unequivocal obligation that they will not be the first to use nuclear weapons at any time and in any circumstances."

If most Americans are cynical about the snail's pace of disarmament negotiations, they may be doubly cynical when learning that in May the U.N. is convening a special session of its General Assembly devoted to disarmament. For many years disarmament has been a nonstarter, but tied to the U.N. General Assembly will the special session turn into a disaster?

Most observers in the U.N. community tend to be more hopeful about the special session, especially