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Monday, Jan. 13, 1941

INTERNATIONAL: Bulgaria Starts the Cure

At 1:45 p.m. on the first day of the year a hand in a Sofia broadcasting station set a pickup on a revolving record.

Out on the air waves went a voice: "Today we meet the New Year with renewed hope for a better future for Bulgaria and with a firm belief in justice. But let us at this solemn moment not forget the national proverb: 'God helps him who helps himself' . . ." The speech lasted until 2 p.m. At 2:05 the man whose transcribed voice had spoken those words stepped into a special car attached to the Orient Express, westbound. He was an ex-professor, an archeologist at heart, a lover of the ancient art of Greece, a sad and sick man. With him were his tall, intellectual wife and his secretary. A few hours later the Bulgarian Government released the news that Premier Bogdan Filoff had left for Vienna to consult the eminent Dr. Hans Eppinger about his stomach ulcers.

Someone discovered an interesting coincidence : another passenger on the Orient Express was Baron Herbert von Richthofen, cousin of the great World War I flying ace, German Minister to Bulgaria.

Someone else discovered that when Bogdan Filoff detrained in Vienna at 6:17 the next evening, he was greeted by the Bulgarian Minister to Germany.

From then on, newspapermen watched the movements of Bogdan Filoff as if he were the most important man in Europe.

Luncheon at the Imperial Hotel with some Bulgarian friends. . . . Yes, next morning a visit to the doctor . . . another consultation the next day—perhaps he was there for his health.

But in Sofia a peculiar announcement came from the Foreign Office: if Germany should happen to demand a right of way for troops across Bulgaria, it was easy to see there would be nothing to do but accede.

In Berlin it was noticed that Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop was nowhere to be found. The Foreign Office would say nothing of his whereabouts.

On the Balkan bourse of rumor, business suddenly became brisk. It was remembered that Bulgaria turned down an invitation to sign up with the Axis at the time when Hungary, Rumania, Slovakia more discreetly accepted. Whispers in Sofia became shouts in Berne, guesses in Istanbul became assurances in Belgrade, Bucharest made facts of Budapest fictions. Suddenly articulate were "competent neutral diplomats," "certain circles," "seasoned observers," "well-informed border sources." They were all agreed: Vienna might be healthy for Bogdan Filoff, but his visit there did not bode long life to Bulgaria. If Adolf Hitler should apply the bee to King Boris III and his men, they would surely have to give in.

The Plan. It looked as though the Germans were getting ready to do that big something which had brewed so long. They had an estimated 18 divisions posted along the south Austrian and Hungarian borders against Yugoslavia. Perhaps twelve more divisions were stationed in Rumania, some among the oil wells of Ploesti, others tight against the Danube opposite Bulgaria. Other troops were reported all along the Rumanian border opposite Russia. Even the Italians joyously received German troops down their native boot. It was reported that by Feb. 1, 18 German divisions would be south of the Brenner. What form the big something would take, no one knew. Most probable play would be a squeeze on Greece, which would also probably involve squeezes on both Yugoslavia and Bulgaria.

Psychologically the Nazi way was paved with golden terror. Editors yipped at each other across borders like a lot of frightened animals. Yugoslavs objected to Hungarian mobilization abetting the Nazis.

Hungarians complained that Rumanians were unduly exercised about Transylvania.

Rumanians warned Russians that Communists would not be tolerated.

The Russian position was more than ever an enigma. Russian troops were reported drawn up in a bristling line from Lwow to Odessa. An alleged Russian spy, Peter Vasilyvich Roshdesvadensky, said to be in the pay of Italy, was thrown out of Yugoslavia. At week's end Russia suddenly called home her envoys from Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Rumania.

Russia might be in on the play, might eventually get another slice of Rumania and some of Bulgaria.

Rumania became a vacuum. All international telephone connections with the country were cut. Public railroad trains ceased crossing the border and even inside the country the Rumanian Railways canceled all but three express and 13 local trains. German troop trains were reported moving in all directions; and the Nazis gave reports a touch of sweetness & light, saying some men were going home for the holidays. The ominous sealing of the country seemed to be a

threat against Bulgaria. On the Bulgarian side of the Danube, reporters said you could look across and see the Germans making a great swagger on the Rumanian side.

Further Consultations. All this made the doings of sick Bogdan Filoff seem that much more important. At last correspondents got what they were looking for. The first reports were fuzzy: Ribbentrop might go to Vienna to see his doctor, Filoff might go to Carlsbad to take the cure. Then the Bulgarian Premier actually left Vienna, headed, it was said, for Salzburg to see "a specialist." Rumors cropped out of Sofia to the effect that King Boris III was also on his way to Germany; but this was later denied. At last the destination of Filoff was discovered, and the cat was finally and definitely out of the bag. He had gone to Castle Fuschl, Joachim von Ribbentrop's retreat near Salzburg, not far from Berchtesgaden. A report leaked out that this week he might have to see the master physician in Berlin.

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