

Hungary Is Still Seeking Return of the Crown of St. Stephen, in Safekeeping at Fort Knox

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BUDAPEST, Dec. 4—Any American visitor of some standing is told by his host here that Hungary wants the speedy return of the Crown of St. Stephen. The relic has been in United States safekeeping since the end of World War II.

Hungarian dignitaries impressed on Secretary of Commerce Elliot L. Richardson during an official visit to Budapest last week that it was totally unjustified to keep the 1,000-year-old crown, the supreme symbol of Magyar nationhood, any longer in Fort Knox. K. Members of Con-

gress and other prominent Americans who recently passed through here had heard the same complaint, coupled with expressions of hope that the Administration of President-elect Jimmy Carter would at last give the national treasure back to Hungary.

"We Hungarians are often credited with a gift for political hunch," a high-ranking official said today. "For what it's worth, I have a hunch that something is moving in the question of the crown."

The official, who did not want to be identified, said American possession of St. Stephen's Crown was an "unacceptable situation," one of two issues pre-

venting the improvement of relations between Hungary and the United States.

The other problem, the official said, is the Trade Act of 1974, which links the granting of tariff concessions, or so-called most-favored-nation status, to relaxation of emigration curbs in Communist countries.

The Hungarian Government contends that it does not practice anti-Semitism and that Jews are free to leave Hungary.

United States officials involved in American-Hungarian affairs concede that this country treats its 80,000 to 100,000 Jews much better than does the Soviet Union. These officials suggest that the

next United States Administration may declare that Hungary has complied with the human rights requirements of the 1974 act and is therefore eligible for trade facilities.

As for the crown, Washington has told Budapest repeatedly that the relic will one day be returned, depending on a better general relationship between the United States and Hungary. Hungarian officials say they have even been commended by Americans for their country's great patience on the issue. But, they say, their Government has never been told exactly why the crown is still in American hands.

The relic, according to legend, was sent to St. Stephen, Hungary's first King, by Pope Sylvester II after the nation's conversion to Christianity. The crown is in the Byzantine style, studded with gems, decorated with miniatures depicting religious scenes, and surmounted by an inclined cross.

Pro-Western Hungarians gave the crown to United States military officers in 1945. The so-called crown jewels—a gold scepter and orb and a gold-encrusted royal mantle—also were handed over to the Americans for safekeeping.