

CONFIDENTIAL

29

LIMITED DISTRIBUTIONREAD AND DESTROYITEM NO. 8174/56JU
Aug 25
II/4255HUNGARYFOREIGN RELATIONS (1500)
Visitors (1501)A SWEDE LOOKS AT HUNGARY.

SOURCE STOCKHOLM: A Swedish engineer who visited Hungary in July 1956 together with his Hungarian born wife.

DATE OF OBSERVATION: July 1956.

EVALUATION COMMENT: This is a very interesting description of a visit to BUDAPEST. The writer who summarized his personal observations and impressions gives a clear and faithful picture on the life in BUDAPEST and in the province.

x x x

I was in Hungary for the first time, so I could not compare the present conditions with earlier times. However, the Communists in Hungary have not succeeded in destroying the old social classes. This can be seen already in the streets and still better at restaurants. The clothing standard in general is extremely low, I have seen as badly dressed people only in Spain among all countries of Europe. But in this general misery there are still differences. One can see in public places shabbily clothed men who wear e.g. summer trousers of linen plus a coat made from a heavy, black material, their shirts are frequently

(over)

patched, the shoes ancient and ugly. These are the workers, or the smaller white-collar workers. Then one can often see younger "comrades" in cheap clothes of bad taste which are, however, quite new and, from the viewpoint of the Hungarians, fashionable. A typical feature are the multi-colored ties. These are the Communists who have got better-paid jobs through the Party. Our acquaintances told us that anybody fashionably dressed is a Party member, police agent, or generally belonging to a dangerous and suspicious category. The third kind of people I could observe had shabby clothes too, old and unfashionable, but these were clean and well-pressed, and one could see that the man had seen better times. This is the former bourgeois and intellectual class. One can see at once that not only are their clothes clean and comparatively nicer than those of the other two groups, but that they have better manners too. When I needed some information in Hungary, I approached only such gentlemen in old-fashioned clothes, and was never disappointed: they could always speak either German or English. It would be erroneous to think that all such gentlemen belong to the older generation - I have seen young people of 25-30 who had as old-fashioned clothes and were as serious and retiring as the older ones. An acquaintance told me that the younger people in the old bourgeois class inherited the clothes of their fathers, or else they buy such clothes from the State commission shops.

I could see that these bourgeois (or, more correctly, former bourgeois) groups were still respected although their economic standard was probably below that of the new ruling class. At the spa restaurant of BALATONFURED I got acquainted with two younger Communists, an engineer and a civil servant. The engineer works at the largest textile factory in BUDAPEST. Both spoke of the former "ruling classes" with hatred but not without an unconscious admiration and respect.

The Jewish Problem.

The Jews constitute a separate problem. In BUDAPEST I talked to a Jewess. She is about 40-45, very pretty and well-educated. Formerly they had been quite rich. Up to 1954 she worked at an office, now she works no longer, she and her

(over)

daughter live on what they receive as gifts from relatives in America and on what they sell from their old possessions. The daughter graduated from the secondary school last year and wanted to continue at the university but was not admitted, being "alien to the class." She is now apprentice of photography.

This lady and a friend of hers - another Jewish widow - spoke of the Communists with the deepest and most heartfelt contempt, and spoke again and again of things that the Communists had robbed from them. The daughter, not at all a serious girl otherwise, hated the Communists too, but for quite different reasons - she said that the Communists were not modern people.

At SIOFOK where we spent three days, I met Jews of quite another kind - probably former retail tradesmen or commercial agents, who spoke like the Communists and had obviously adapted themselves to the new conditions.

Here I must confirm that anti-Semitism is very widespread in Hungary of today. I was with my wife at the restaurant "Hungaria" at SZEGED and got acquainted with a table there. They were officials at the town hall of SZEGED. When they had drunk a lot, they asked me whether I was a Jew. I said no, and one of them said: One can see you are a decent guy. Then they told me that the mayor of SZEGED was a Jew, it was a scandal. The aunt of my wife told us that her daughter would begin her studies at the SZEGED University in the autumn. She was very happy because, as she told us, it is extremely difficult for a Jew or Jewess to get admitted to the university. They admit only 5-6 per cent of Jewish students, which means, as she said, that "Numerus Clausus" is still being applied. The cousin of my wife had been admitted because she had graduated with honors, because her mother is a worker and Party member, and because she herself belonged to the Communist youth organization. She told me that the above three pre-requisites were all necessary in order to be admitted. The girl told me also that at SZEGED a boy had been refused admission although he had excellent marks. The reason was that his

father and grandfather, and even an uncle, were doctors and thus they had enough doctors in the family, this profession was not to become a family privilege for them.

All our Jewish acquaintances complained unanimously about anti-Semitism and they told me they were afraid that all Jews in Hungary would be murdered in case of a change.

The Jews in BUDAPEST are very unhappy that RAKOSI was succeeded by another Jew on the post of secretary general. They would have preferred to see Imre NAGY as No. 1, as he is a Christian.

A Cynical Young Lady.

I must also describe the cousin of my wife. She is 19, and has just graduated from the secondary school with honors. She is pretty and naturally intelligent. Her mother works the whole day, she has thus not much time to bring up her daughter, this is done by the school and the youth organization. She gets daily 10 Forint from her mother for her lunch. She eats at the canteen of the university students and only sups together with her mother. I believe she is a typical representative of the girls brought up by the Party. She is no convinced Communist, rather a cynic and believes only half of what she hears. But she knows practically nothing of the outside world. For instance, they had been taught about Sweden that the country is highly industrialized but that the factories are owned by American monopoly capitalists who exploit the Swedish workers. She was surprised that I, e.g., worked at a Swedish and not at an American firm. Her first question about Sweden was how great was unemployment here. She would not believe that there was none, my wife had to confirm it. The girl had got the highest mark in world history but she knows nothing about ancient ROME, only that there had been a large-scale workers' revolution directed against the emperor and the owners of large landed estates, and that the leader of the workers had been SPARTACUS. She can quote what LENIN said about imperialism but she does not know who won the First World War and who lost it. She has

(over)

not heard of STRINDBERG, IBSEN, Selma LAGERLOF, Knut HAMSON -- she has read only Hungarian, Russian and Czechoslovak writers. The greatest writers in her opinion are CHEKHOV and GORKI. She wrote her graduation paper in history about the life of Mathias RAKOSI and was rewarded with a book about RAKOSI. She has studied English for three years but can hardly put together a simple sentence if she knows the words. Her mother speaks German, she has learnt some -- one might say, a few words -- from her. She was, as she herself said, never any good in Russian, and for the rest nobody at her school could speak any Russian, not even the teacher. I wrote down quite a simple problem of trigonometry, which can be solved by every Swedish middle-school student in his second year: she could not solve it. On the other hand, she knew that in 1917 LENIN had returned to Russia via STOCKHOLM, a fact hitherto unknown to me. She knew all details about the October Revolution, and she knew the number of tractors in Hungary, the percentages of the Five Year Plan, etc. I was surprised that she had got the highest marks in all subjects but she explained to me that at her school the main emphasis was put on practical subjects. When I wondered whether LENIN's and RAKOSI's lives were practical subjects too, she replied quite seriously that they are very important.

The only aspect of the West-European and American way of life she knew about, was jazz music -- she mentioned even some American jazz stars by name, such as Louis ARMSTRONG and COLE. The girl told me that it is the greatest fashion among the students to collect foreign jazz records. They buy these from Hungarian athletes who have competed abroad and procured the records there, or from foreign tourists and diplomats. An ordinary record -- not a long-playing one -- costs 50-80 Forint.

BUDAPEST Medical Standards Down.

Although Hungary has been cut off from the West, I was told that of late the Hungarians have certain opportunities to read magazines and even see foreign films. The American and British Legations, and since a couple of months ago even the

(over)

French one, show films in the legation buildings. In the reading-rooms at the legations there are various magazines and journals available. The girl told me that very many students at the BUDAPEST University see these films and read the magazines. She regretted that there were no such opportunities at SZEGED.

Later I met a doctor. He is a cancer specialist, about 46-50, from a highly cultured former aristocratic family. He told me he earned very well indeed, as a specialist, about 4,000 Forint per month. But it was almost impossible for him to get hold of foreign, more particularly American, professional journals when he needed something, the institution at which he worked had to apply for foreign currency at the National Bank and it took months before the matter was settled. Therefore he used to go to the American reading-room where a girl would promptly order all the journals required.

The doctor said publicly that the general standard of the once famous BUDAPEST doctors had sunk deplorably low. They get but few foreign preparations, there are many which are quite unknown in Hungary, the professional books and journals from the West are hard to procure or quite unobtainable, the medical training at the universities is given on the Russian pattern, and moreover the young generation comes already badly educated from the secondary schools. Many weak or mediocre doctors have attained high posts on account of their political services, and behave like dictators there. He mentioned as an example Dr. RUSZNYAK whom I know personally from STOCKHOLM. Of late the situation has improved somewhat, but it is still forbidden at the hospitals to prescribe foreign preparations. It happens frequently that the doctor recommends to the patient to ask friends and relatives in the West to send them certain medicines. For instance, Saridon, Pyramidon and other quite ordinary preparations are unobtainable in Hungary.

Now some words about tourist traffic. The Hungarians are born hosts, this can be seen everywhere. But, of course, they behave so only toward the foreigners. The customs officers were quick and polite, but I have heard that tourists born in

(over)

Hungary have had difficulties with the customs control. We met the composer Louis LAJTAI in BUDAPEST, he told me that the customs officers had devoted more than an hour and a half to him. I must add that the control is very precise with regard to cameras, typewriters, etc.: they wrote everything down in the passports, the manufacturers' names, the fabrication number, etc.

Hungarian Roads Excellent.

I could not find my camera the last day when we were about to leave. Our relatives were in despair although I said that the camera was insured in Sweden, and would be replaced to its full value by the Swedish insurance firm if lost. They said that last month the authorities had hanged a "spy," charged with photographing military installations. The real story was that an Austrian tourist had given his camera to a Hungarian friend of his. When the Austrian was leaving the country, he told at the customs office that he had lost his camera. The officers accepted his explanation but reported it duly to the police. The police ascertained with whom the Austrian had been in contact during his visit to Hungary. The man in question was a former officer. My relatives said it was quite sure that the Hungarian was no spy and that the Austrian had only wanted to help him with the camera. Despite this the officer was hanged by the police. This is why my relatives were in so great a panic, they were afraid they would have trouble with the police if I could not find my camera. Fortunately I succeeded in finding it in the end.

I bought a film-roll (Leica-film) in BUDAPEST, it cost 80 Forint and was of East-German manufacture. My photos were almost all bad however, the film was probably old, of bad quality and the cassette not light-proof. I had bought the film at the Lenin Ring, in a large photographic shop there.

The roads in Hungary along which I drove (i.e., HEGYESHALOM-BUDAPEST, BUDAPEST-SZEGED, BUDAPEST-BALATON) are in excellent condition, the traffic is negligible, one meets only trucks.

Something what the Hungarians could not manage properly was the reception of foreign tourists by the authorities. On ar-

rival in BUDAPEST one must report personally at the Aliens Police within 24 hours. Here I had to wait for half an hour before it was my turn. A police officer, I believe he was a lieutenant, carried out a formal, but political interrogation. He interrogated me and my wife in detail and wrote down all our replies. It took more than an hour. The question referred mostly to general personal data - there were no political questions apart from the fact that I had to say what was the profession of my father, which countries had I visited in the course of past ten years, etc. Still more detailed were the questions who were our friends and relatives in Hungary, what places would we visit in the country, etc. My wife had to reply to a number of questions when, how and why she had left Hungary.

I protested mildly against this interrogation as I had already replied to all these questions, in writing, at the Hungarian Legation in STOCKHOLM. The police officer said he must obey orders and, moreover, he was quite sure he would have to undergo a similar interrogation by the Swedish police if he would come to STOCKHOLM. I explained that it is not customary in the Western countries to trouble the foreigners. It is enough to fill in an appropriate blank. The officer was very much surprised and did not believe me to begin with, then he decided to add this statement to the interrogation record, beginning it as follows: "X.Y. maintains that the foreign tourists in Sweden are not interrogated by the police, and it is enough to fill in a blank." The young man then remembered what he had probably been taught at the Party school, he said finally with considerable triumph: "Yes, it is possible that this is so in Sweden, Sweden is a neutral country after all. But in America they do not only interrogate the tourists, they fingerprint them too. We do not do this here." After the interrogation he told us that we were now in the files and if we did not violate any rulings while in Hungary, we would get entry visas to Hungary without any difficulties or delays in future. The Aliens Police lies in the Eotvos Street.

Maps Unobtainable in BUDAPEST.

On the second day of our visit I wanted to procure

(over)

some petrol coupons with which a foreign tourist in Hungary can buy petrol cheaply. The legation in STOCKHOLM had given me the address in BUDAPEST where these coupons were to be had. I drove there but was told that the appropriate agency (Auto-tourist Office) had moved. Where to? They did not know. I tried to get the necessary information by phone but failed, not even the Ministry of the Interior knew. At IBUSZ (the State Travel Agency) they did not know, either. Here we met two Austrian tourists on the same quest and we three together looked for the Autotourist Office. It took the whole morning before we found it; it lies now in the Nagymezo Street side by side with the night-club "Budapest."

At the office they gave us the coupons quickly and politely, but they had no map of BUDAPEST (there is no such thing available in the whole of BUDAPEST,) and a motoring-map of Hungary cost 100 Forint. True, the map is very fine, a booklet with stiff covers, but too fine for a simple tourist interested only in a route or two. But there are no simpler maps in existence. Instead, we got a number of propaganda booklets full of the Five Year Plan, portraits of RAKOSI and politics.

The restaurants are quite unsatisfactory from the viewpoint of foreign tourists. The only one of more or less Western standard is the "Gellert." It is practically always full, and after 1 p.m. half of the menu is sold out already. The waiters are mostly elderly people who can speak German, English and in some cases even French. The tip is officially 10 per cent but actually one is supposed to give more and the waiters indicate it in rather impertinent a manner.

We were even at other so-called first-class restaurants, e.g., the "Voros Csillag" at SZABADSAGHEGY, the "Budagyongye," "Hungaria" at SZEGED, the spa restaurant at BALATONFOLDVAR. These restaurants are exceedingly dirty, the tableware belongs to three-four different sets, the service is simply criminal.

I was rather surprised that the restaurant personnel are men. Elsewhere one can see women as building-workers. I heard also that women work in the mines, but the restaurants

(over)

are full of male writers.

The new tourist traffic has resulted in a fall of prices of nylon goods in private trade. A pair of nylon stockings which cost 100 Forint before, costs now only 50-60 Forint, a nylon slip can be had for 80 Forint and upwards, men's socks from crepe nylon cost "only" 40 Forint, etc. It is said that the Hungarians can now get visitors' visas to Czechoslovakia and smuggle textiles from there. Still, we paid everywhere with textiles we had taken with us. In BUDAPEST we lived in a private flat a whole week and paid for it with a men's nylon shirt, used. At BALATONFURED we rented a small house and paid 50 Forint weekly, i.e., a pair of nylon stockings.

Fear of the Communists.

A typical illustration to the present situation: the aunt of my wife gave her a ladies' costume. She had got it in a parcel from America, but it was far too elegant, nobody dared buy it, and so she gave it to my wife. The daughter of this aunt showed us an evening gown; this had come from America too. She had never worn it, she said it might be dangerous to be seen in so elegant a gown. She said the old reactionaries might wear what they wanted to, the police knows already all about them. But a student or worker would be interrogated by the police at once if he, or she, would wear strikingly elegant clothes.

This fear was discernible even elsewhere. I visited a family to whom I brought a letter from their relatives in STOCKHOLM. They have rather a nice three-room flat, with good old furniture inherited from their parents. The man and his wife are both white-collar workers. I wondered that there were no carpets and ornaments in the flat. They explained that they kept the carpets, silver and crystal vases stowed away in cupboards, they even showed them to me. They said it would be dangerous if anybody saw they had such things. At SZEGED I got acquainted with a furrier. He saw a rubber mattress, the kind to be inflated, in my car. He offered me three fur coats

(over)

made from silver fox for it. I remarked it would be bad business for him but he denied it: silver fox has no value at all in Hungary, nobody dares wear it. However, I did not agree to the exchange, I feared trouble at the frontier. But everybody knows that Austrian tourists do good business with fur coats, silver tableware, jewels, etc.

I took six meters of woollen material with me to BUDAPEST and let it be made into suits there. A tailor had been recommended to me. Once he was one of the best tailors in BUDAPEST, and he is still independent, or, as the Hungarians say, "Maszek." He demanded 600 Forint per suit and we agreed to this price. I paid with nylon goods. He told me that his customers are all Party tops. They have good foreign material - wherefrom? Naturally smuggled. But the material is always dark and very discreet - even the Party functionaries dare not wear striking clothes.

Meat Is A Treat.

Another characteristic feature of the situation: when we were at a restaurant with the cousin of my wife for the first time, she was very much surprised when I ordered meat. "But it's not Sunday today," she said. She was excited when we ordered veal, she had never eaten it before as it is not available at shops and can be had only at first-class restaurants. It is also characteristic that the restaurants offer Wienerschnitzel on their menus but it is always made from pork, the waiter at BALATONFURED did not even believe me when I pointed out that Wienerschnitzel had to be made from veal.

I tried to learn something about the new Hungarian power stations as I am a power station construction engineer by profession. It was impossible to get any data, as soon as I began to speak of this problem, everybody grew silent at once. When I was at SZEGED I wanted to visit the TISZADADA power station (not far from SZEGED) but our acquaintances said one needs a permit for it, and it would be more prudent to refrain from it, as one might easily be suspected of espionage.

I was however able to draw certain conclusions concerning the technical standard by observing the NEP stadium

in BUDAPEST. The construction is really magnificent and excellently planned, but the concrete used for the construction is of very bad quality, everywhere in the walls there are wide cracks so that one can put one's fingers into them and the outer layer of concrete is falling off.

The taxicabs in BUDAPEST are simply funny, they are either museum pieces at least 30 years old or else new small Skodas which rattle so that they can be heard at 200 meters' distance. The taxidriviers are young women, sometimes really pretty ones. I was told that they were former prostitutes, or former aristocrats, always ready for adventures. One must only let the taxi drive to some outer district, and the cars are comfortably upholstered too. I spoke with a woman taxi-driver, she said she earned about 1,000 Forint monthly, including the tips, but she had a 12-hour day to earn it.

It was wonderful to see how quickly RAKOSI's portraits vanished after his fall. One day there were still two portraits, LENIN's and RAKOSI's, at all restaurants, offices, waiting-rooms, etc. - the next day LENIN throned there in sole majesty.

My general impression was that the Communists have succeeded in turning a Central-European country into a Central-Asian one. I had in Hungary a feeling as if I had been in Albania or Turkestan of my boyhood's imaginations.

End.

LIMITED DISTRIBUTION

READ AND DESTROY