

ITEM No. 9436/56

A.A. DISTRIBUTION

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HUNGARY

STANDARD OF LIVING

Food

/3200/

/3201/

ARMED FORCES

Soviet Armed Forces

/0300/

/0309/

EXILE

Anti-Communist Propaganda

/1200/

/1207/

LIVING CONDITIONS.

SOURCE ROME: Three Hungarians recently arrived from Hungary.

DATE OF OBSERVATION: July 1956.

EVALUATION COMMENT: The food situation and general living conditions in Hungary are correctly described.

Subsources' statements about Soviet people living in Hungary are in accord with available information on the Soviet colony's life the country. Suicides of Soviet personnel before returning to the USSR are frequently rumored, and other sources also reported about such cases, but it is difficult to ascertain to what extent they correspond to the truth.

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The living conditions, both for the workers and the small artisans -- subsources' do not speak of the ex-middle class and the Hungarian aristocracy - are insupportable and inhuman owing to the systems and conditions created by Communism. The salaries are extremely low, and the prices of foodstuffs and basic necessities are too high, so that they do not allow the population to be sufficiently nourished, or to satisfy the most primitive personal needs. The wages of the workers range between 600 and 1,500 forint, while the women workers in many factories receive only 350 to 400 up to 900 forint.

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Prices:

Meat

Only beef or frozen pork giblets are available once a week, while veal has not been seen for years, and even if, as an exception, it should be available, it is so expensive that only the Communist hierarchy are able to buy it. Beef costs between 20 and 28 forint a kg. and pork between 25 and 32 forint.

Fat

Costs 30 forint a kg., but it is a mixture of margarine, tallow, sunflower oil and a little animal fat /beef or pork/. As a result of certain impure and tasteless mixtures of fat, there has been a considerable increase in the number of people who suffer from liver and gastric disturbances, and also in the cases of food poisoning.

Fish

Another foodstuff which is very scarce. Before the war it was found in abundance and was a better buy than meat. Now it is extremely expensive, and only very rarely frozen fish from Poland is available in the general markets of BUDAPEST /Vásár-csarnok/: the fish is frozen in great tables of ice. /The blocks of ice are broken with a hammer. Inside there is a mixture of many varieties of little fish of inferior quality and completely tasteless./

Milk

Skimmed - costs 3.50 forint a liter.

Butter

Costs 70 forint a kg., but it is rancid and impure.

Eggs

If available, cost 1.70 to 2 forint each. For the greater part it is easier to buy them from private suppliers, that is the so-called "Maszek" /magánszektor/, than from the State markets.

Bread

Is generally of inferior quality, except in a few cases - and sometimes it is even lacking completely, e.g. in the villages, so that the peasants, not having any flour with which to make,

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bread, come into the towns to buy bread and other foodstuffs.

Flour

Costs 4.60 forint a kg., but it is not good. A better quality flour, which is rarely available costs seven forint a kg.

Rice

Notwithstanding that, according to the Regime propaganda, Hungary is named as the greatest producer of rice in Central Europe, this item has not been available for years. The established price would be 18 forint a kg.

Wine

Is a mystery to the population, because everyone knows that there is abundant production, but nevertheless, loose wine which is sold in the restaurants and buffets, is anything else but wine. It is an artificial mixture with a certain percentage of alcohol. A liter of this "wine" costs 12.40 forint while the genuine wine is found bottled only, and a bottle of this containing three quarters of a liter costs between 28 and 35 forint.

Liquors, brandy, rum, etc. are for the major part made from methanol mixed with spices. Because of the bad and expensive wine, an ever increasing number of workers, in desperation, take to drinking rum and brandy /pálinka/ which is extremely damaging to the health, so that, as a result of this consumption of alcohol the number of mad and unbalanced persons is continually increasing. In ten years, the number of lunatic asylums has doubled in BUDAPEST, besides the fact that the ones already in existence have been enlarged and the number of beds increased.

Hungarian Salamí costs 60 forint a kg., but it is not always possible to find it, or other cold cuts.

Coffee - roasted - costs 400 forint a kg.

Lemons are very precious things, one succeeds only very rarely in buying one and only at BUDAPEST, and thus, the best gift for a family is to give a lemon. It is not advisable to send them from abroad, because exorbitant duty has to be paid and the delay in the delivery of the parcels can be as long as a month, so that provisions, fruit etc., go bad. The youths have never seen a banana, pine-apple, etc. and they know this fruit, if they have ever heard of it, only from tales and books.

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Fresh fruit is not regularly available and even if it is, it is of inferior quality.

Women's summer shoes of poor quality cost from 190 to 240 forint.

Men's light shoes, not good quality, cost between 360 and 400 forint at the State shops.

On the other hand, if someone has the financial possibility of having a pair of all-leather shoes made to measure by the shoemaker, he will pay between 1,000 and 1,200 forint for them. However, this is a great exception, because the shoemakers, like the other artisans, do not receive raw materials with which to work, and they are therefore, only able to do repairs, or to make a pair of women's shoes out of two old men's shoes. The dressmakers make out of two used dresses, a dress with a newer line, made up, however, of two colors, designs and materials.

#### Russian "Instructors."

The number of Russian "middle class" has greatly increased during recent months at BUDAPEST. It is said that they are experts, functionaries, technicians and pilots for training their Hungarian counterparts in the use of the new Russian aircraft.

It is also said that all the fighter-pilots are Russians, because the Regime would have no trust in Hungarian pilots. These Russian "instructor" pilots receive an extremely high salary from Hungary; their pay would be in the region of 10,000 forint a month.

These Russians, who are almost all accompanied by their families, continually make evacuate homes in the best quarters of BUDAPEST, such as Pasarét, Rózsadomb, Andrássy-ut, etc...

They have special shops - with Hungarian merchandise - where only they, their families and also the high functionaries of the Communist Party, may make purchases. They have a vast selection of all the best products at prices which are one third of those which the goods would cost - if it were possible to find them - at a State shop for the Hungarian public. So, for example, there is a draper's shop for the Russians on Váci-utca, - the shop windows have curtains, and there is no name or indication above the door. Another "Russian" shop is found on Benczur-utca, and beside these there are a further five or six similar shops. Those who wish to make purchases

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there, must first show the shop assistant their identity card and a special ticket which authorizes them to do their shopping there.

The Russian families in Hungary live like true nabobs, and so it becomes clear why if any of them are recalled, they try with every means in their power to prolong their stay in Hungary. In BUDAPEST a very significant is rumored incident. A Russian functionary, having been recalled to Russia, was standing outside the door of his house on Bajza-utca, with his family and all their cases and trunks, waiting for transport to the station. The woman was crying continuously and complaining with gesticulations to the husband, who seemed desperate and beaten, when, all of a sudden, he pulled out a pistol and first fired at the breast of the woman, then killed the child and lastly himself.

All this happened in full day light in the street; many passers-by witnessed this tragedy until the police barricaded off the road. Subsources did not witness the scene, but all three of them have heard of it from different sources. It happened early this summer. /According to another version, the Russian began the slaughter on the arrival of the truck after having learned that besides having to leave, he could not take anything with him and that all their goods would be confiscated by the Russian authorities./

#### New Houses.

Another interesting piece of information is that the new houses for the people and those for the workers are built according to Russian plans, that is the apartments have neither bathroom nor toilet, and that on each floor there is one single bathroom-toilet combined for five or six apartments.

#### Western Broadcasts.

And finally, as far as Western radio stations are concerned subsource affirmed that all those who have radio sets, or trusted friends who have them, listen in secretly to the broadcasts of Radio Free Europe, LONDON, ROME, Voice of America etc. The Hungarians do not like BBC, LONDON, because it is too objective and treats the subjects with indifference. Radio ROME, especially its comments on current affairs, is poor and defeats its own purpose. The Vatican Radio is too cautious and broadcasts old news items. The Voice of America has a fresh and varied service, while the most popular broadcasts are those of Radio

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Free Europe, because it comments on all home and foreign events, gives an extensive information service. Certain sections of the broadcasts are very successful indeed, while there are also broadcasts in which neither the tone nor the content finds support among the listeners. /This refers to certain comments or talks which tend to lean toward a transformation of the Communist Regime, similar to that of TITO, instead of a complete liberation from Bolshevism itself./

The population desperately hopes for a change of Regime and the possibility of electing its own leaders in absolute freedom. It does not wish to hear talks of a prolongation -- even if changed and less insupportable, -- of the Communist system.

In Hungary, the majority of people know that a National Council exists, composed of ex-ministers and diplomats, the names of whom they know, but the Hungarian people would like to hear of the activities of the Hungarian emigrants more often, and to hear the voice of the heads and leaders of the emigrants through RFE broadcasts.

Subsources unanimously declared that although at times Radio Free Europe makes errors, it is the most popular, because it always gives hope for the liberation of the country; hope without which the population could neither resist nor live...

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