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HUNGARY

RE-EMIGRATION /2700/

STANDARD OF LIVING /3200/
Housing /3202/

LETTER FROM AUDREY SOMOGYI TO THE MEMBERS OF THE
BRITISH HUNGARIAN FRIENDSHIP SOCIETY.

SOURCE LONDON: RFE Office Research.

DATE OF OBSERVATION: Current period.

EVALUATION COMMENT: The previous two letters of Audrey SOMOGYI were published in LONDON Item Nos. 8521/55 and 10332/55.

This is again a rather clumsy piece of propaganda trying to disguise the poor housing conditions.

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The latest propaganda "letter," published and distributed by the British Hungarian Friendship Society, is as follows:

BUDAPEST VI

Bajcsy Zsilinszky ut 27.

November 24 1955

Hungary

To the members of the British Hungarian Friendship Society.

Dear Friends,

In this, my third letter to you, I should like to thank those of you who have written us such friendly and encouraging letters, and to deal with one or two questions that have been put to us and which I think will be of general interest.

For instance, Geoff Adams, of Burton-on-Trent, has asked us whether bedrooms are heated here. In order to be able to give an answer to this I must first tell you something about Hungarian housing in general, and as I wanted to tell you about our home anyway - this seems to be a good opportunity to do that too.

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The English type of small family house, with the living rooms downstairs and the bedrooms upstairs, is quite unknown here. In the cities everyone lives in flats, and in the country they live in small, bungalow-type houses. Generally speaking, it is considered a waste of a room to have it furnished as a bedroom and "standing idle" all day long, so all rooms are furnished with what the Hungarians call "combined" suites - in other words, they are living rooms during the day and bedrooms at night. As the living-rooms have to be heated, they are, of course, still warm at night - although I think most people do as we do and open the windows for a while before going to bed.

Heating is done either by huge tiled stoves, or - in the more modern buildings - centrally by radiators. /Open fireplaces, too, are unknown here./ All windows are double, that is, there is an inner window and an outer window with a space of 4-6 inches between the two, and although the temperature in winter often drops to minus 15 or 20° Centigrade, I have never heard of frozen or burst pipes occurring, which seems to indicate that the plumbing systems are more cleverly placed than in English houses.

We have been living in our present flat for over 10 years now. When the Soviet Army liberated Budapest from the Germans in February 1945 we were living with friends, our own flat having been completely destroyed by a bomb in 1944.

When we realized that, as far as we were concerned, the war was over, we came up out of the cellar where we had spent the terrible weeks of the siege, and looked around, with heavy hearts, at the devastation, and wondered whether there would ever be anything like a normal life again in our poor shattered city.

We ourselves were homeless, hungry, ragged and dirty, we had lost all our possessions and had lived through horror, yet all this was of no consequence whatsoever because we were alive.

Early in March 1945, Mihaly - who had been scouting around - came back with the news that there was a flat in Bajcsy Zsilinszky ut, that we could get, its previous occupants having been nazis who had fled to Germany with the Germans, and on March 15 /which, incidentally, is Hungary's Independence Day from the War of Independence of 1848/ we picked up our little bundles and our children and "moved in." It's true that one room had no roof over it, and we could step from that room to the next through the shell-hole in the wall; in common with all the houses in the city, there was no water, no gas, no electricity and no window panes, but still - it was our new home.

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It is perhaps because we started our life here under these circumstances that I am so fond of this flat now, and am so proud and thankful whenever a visitor remarks "What a nice home you have." We have four rooms, kitchen, bathroom, pantry - all spacious, because it is an old house, all sunny and airy. The rent is low, as rents are in Hungary, and the position is good for Mihaly as in a few minutes he can reach the Law Courts or his office.

Another question I should like to answer while on this theme concerns domestic help. Anyone is allowed to engage a domestic servant, either to live in or to come daily or as required. A young woman comes to help me every day except Saturday and Sunday; she is here from 0008 until 1300 hours and is paid by the hour.

In my next letter I shall deal with an interesting question from Miss Katz of Hackney concerning the origin of the Hungarian language. This is a subject I must study first!

We are now getting into winter, and have had one or two frosts already. Bob and Judy both have season tickets to the big open-air artificial ice-rink in the Municipal Park, and dash off to go skating whenever they have an hour to spare. They meet lots of their school-friends there and have plenty of fun together and come home with glowing cheeks and bright eyes.

The shops are all preparing for the Christmas season, for here too it is customary to give presents. The children here are doubly lucky as on December 6 a Santa Claus, or as he is called in Hungarian, "Uncle Nicholas," brings them sweets and chocolates and then on December 24 "Father Winter" brings them a Christmas tree and toys. Just now all the sweet-shop windows are very attractive with their little chocolate Uncle Nicholas figures, red boots, and golden birches with sweets tied on them, for the story goes that children used to put their little boots between the windows and Uncle Nicholas used to fill the boots of the good children with sweets but used to leave a birch-rod for the naughty ones.

Our children, of course, have long ceased to believe in such stories but would still be very disappointed if they didn't find any chocolate between the windows on December 6.

Our chief amusement now that winter is here is the opera, and the cinema. The operas, of course, are the same ones as are shown in Covent Garden, - Verdi, Mozart, Puccini, Wagner, Mussorgsky and so on; the films shown in the cinema are Hungarian, Soviet, Italian, French, Yugoslavian, Czech, Polish, Austrian and sometimes English. They are nearly always synchronized, /dubbed, ed./ that is, the talk is in

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Hungarian, which to my mind is far better than listening to a language one doesn't understand and reading sub-titles. Have any of you seen any Hungarian films? We should very much like to hear what you thought of them.

Our friendliest greetings to you all, and please keep on writing. We love to get your letters.

Your sincerely

Audrey Somogyi

P.S. Mihaly insists on my sending you a copy of the "Review of Hungarian Legislation" which has just been issued by the Hungarian Lawyers' Association, as, he says, possibly there are some lawyers among you who will find this very interesting. I am sending it under separate cover. A.S.

/This too, has arrived, and is now available on application to British Hungarian Friendship Society./

End.