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April 14
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HUNGARY

STANDARD OF LIVING /3200/

VISITOR FROM WEST PAINTS BLACK PICTURE OF BUDAPEST.

SOURCE MUNICH: Visitor from a Western capital to BUDAPEST.

DATE OF OBSERVATION: Mid-March 1956.

EVALUATION COMMENT: This is a very interesting report about the pitiful conditions prevailing in Hungary.

Mrs. MARTON, the UP Correspondent, was released from prison on April 3 1956.

It is interesting to note that last summer's police actions expelling people from BUDAPEST by the withdrawal of their residence permit are commonly considered as "deportations 1955."

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Source stated that he had been quite appalled by the dreary aspect of the capital, its lack of color and the obvious, all-pervading apathy of the population. He stressed that his impressions were quite superficial, but had left him with a lasting feeling of depression.

"After passing through VIENNA, the last outpost of Western civilization, I was appalled at the contrast between these two capitals only a few hours' distance from one another. I was introduced by a Western resident there to others who had been there for some years. None of them, particularly the diplomats, are able to meet any other than official "Regime" Hungarians - primarily because of the dangers involved for any ordinary citizen who meets foreigners. There is no resident independent foreign correspondent, since the arrest of the MARTONS, so that even through the medium of correspondents of Western organs diplomats have no means of learning what the people say and do. There are no newspapers from which

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anything can be learned, except what the Regime decrees to be written. Westerners live in a ghetto, in the walls of which I could see no gateway - hardly even a loophole through which they might catch a glimpse of the outside world. The last wave of deportations in 1955 and the ensuing dread among the population of the most casual contacts with Westerners closed the last loophole.

"I have many friends who have been in Hungary for longer periods since the war. When I saw the aspect of the shops today, it was with difficulty that I could believe that they had told me that even eight years ago the shops really contained goods which anyone from the free world would look at twice, and even buy. The people slouch through the streets, shabby, apathetic, disinterested in everything around them, and convey an impression of resignation without hope of any kind. The Regime seems to have failed entirely in its efforts to arouse that spurious appearance of the "joie de vivre" which the Nazis created as a screen behind which they attempted to conceal the sordid brutalities of their regime. Here all attempts at fooling the people with circuses, in the absence of bread, seem to have been abandoned.

"Obviously there must have been a good deal of reconstruction of war damage, but it is not apparent to a casual visitor like myself. To me it seemed that the universal apathy must have overwhelmed also this field of what should have been activity. The contrast with what has been done in the way of reconstruction in what must have been much worse-damaged cities in Germany was amazing. Every person - sportsman, artist or intellectual - allowed to get a glimpse of rehabilitated war-damaged cities in the free world - must return to Hungary as a potential danger to the Regime /even should his sympathies be Communist/ if ever he tells friends what he saw.

"I saw that the churches were very well attended, and was struck by the number of young people attending religious services. There seems to be freedom of worship - which is quite a different thing from freedom of religion. The churches themselves do not offer any escape from the general shabbiness of the city. They are in a shocking state of disrepair, owing to the Regime having deprived them of their revenues and all kinds of financial support. Friends of mine quite devoid of religious sentiments said 'If we were to be subjected to this Regime, we would turn to the Church as the one ray of light in the prevailing darkness.'

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"The only thing which I found to smile at in this grey city was the sight of portraits of Stalin displayed for sale in the State auction rooms. I was happy to re-cross the frontier into the comparative sunshine of a blinding hail-storm in the West."

End.