

Life in Eastern Europe Brightens

By RAYMOND H. ANDERSON

BUDAPEST — After long years of austere living — crowding in stores for inadequate and inferior goods cramped housing and a pervading sense of grayness — Eastern European consumers are gradually moving toward a better way of life.

Throughout the region, the Communist regimes are paying more heed to the needs and comforts of their citizens.

Bloody street violence in Poland a few years ago, when workers exploded over a wage freeze, shortages and price increases, provided urgent incentive for leaders to re-examine their priorities.

The consumers no longer are satisfied just to find that there are shoes, bicycles, sausages and tomatoes in the stores. They are demanding higher quality, more variety, better service and more reasonable prices. They are also demanding more passenger cars, larger apartments, more stylish clothing and fewer restrictions on travel abroad.

With the exception of Rumania, where the ambitious regime of Nicolae Ceausescu is straining consumers' patience with frantic investment in industry, impressive improvements are being made in the Eastern bloc's standard of living. In Rumania there is progress, but it is too slow to curb complaints and unrest.

In Bulgaria, the consumer situation is still somewhat spartan. But the leadership has undertaken a broad program to improve housing, increase the supply and quality of consumer goods, raise wages and reduce the work week.

Among Eastern European countries, the most-favored consumers are in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland, roughly in that order. In these countries, private cars have become so numerous that parking is an emerging urban problem.

The recent motorization of Eastern Europe is contributing to a changing way of life and a broadening of the car owners' horizons.

Last summer, a Western vacationer driving through Rumania and Bulgaria found the highways crowded with cars from throughout Eastern Europe, heading toward the modern resorts and broad beaches of the Black Sea.

Little East German Trabants and Wartburgs, Polish-assembled Fiats and Soviet-built Moskviches, Zhigulis and Volgas stretched endless along the roads and waited in long lines at the gasoline stations.

Modern hotels, roadside restaurants, attractive camping sites and clusters of brightly painted overnight cabins have sprung up throughout the region to serve the motorists.

So many Eastern motorists passed through Bucharest, the Rumanian capital, last summer that the city's hotels had to turn away hundreds each night. The University of Bucharest opened its dormi-



Modern styles in Budapest catch the eye of window-shopper.

OVERFLOW OF vacationers.

At vacation time, travelers now encounter Eastern European motorists in Greece, along Yugoslavia's Adriatic Coast and increasingly in Italy, Austria and France, as well as in the East. A few journey as far from home as Spain. Many of the Eastern Europeans stay at camp sites to stretch their small allowances of foreign currency.

As part of the shedding of an austere way of life, resort officials at Varna, Bulgaria, organized an international

contestants from all the Eastern European countries and a few from Western Europe bounced along a stage in mini swimming suits before judges and thousands of spectators. Even half a dozen Russian girls took part, despite Moscow's frowns on such bourgeois exploitation.

Besides the cars, vacations abroad and beauty contests, more Western standards of life show up in many ways in Eastern Europe.

An expansion of self-service stores, in particular, is reduc-

Despite the gains of recent years, the Eastern Europeans still lag behind Western Europeans in abundance and quality of the material things of life, but the gap has narrowed.

Although changing fast, cities like Budapest, Prague and Bucharest retain some of the old-fashioned European quality of life before World War II. Then restaurants were more sedate, waiters more professional and polite and the streets less jammed with cars.