

BULGARIA CAPITAL HAS BETTER LIFE

West Diplomats in Sofia Cite Improvements but Visitor Finds Standards Low

SOFIA, Bulgaria, Nov. 17 (Reuters)—Life is becoming slowly better for the 600,000 inhabitants of the Bulgarian capital, though to the foreigner the standard of living still seems well below that of the West.

Western diplomats living here report that Bulgarians are slightly better dressed this year than last. Women are wearing more attractive and gaily colored frocks.

In general, the stores are well-stocked with consumer goods, some shoddy, and often expensive. Many of the manufactured goods come from East Germany, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union.

Although the traffic in Sofia's main boulevards is less than that in a small country town in the United States, more motorcycles and more patched-up pre-war automobiles are to be seen on the road than ever before.

Sign of Progress

These venerable vehicles, for all their fifteen or twenty years, are in fact a sign of progress, diplomats explained. The private owner, who all these years has kept his car hidden and perhaps dismantled in a back yard, now has a little more money and a little more confidence in the future and feels able to run his vehicle.

Confidence in the future brightened after the Geneva conference of the Big Four heads of government. Bulgarians no longer are told each day through the press and radio that the United States and other Western powers are bent on a third world war.

The standard of life in Sofia is higher than that in the provinces. Sofia has good buses and street cars, but in Plovdiv, Bulgaria's second city, converted trucks are used as buses. Similarly, converted cattle trucks are often used as passenger coaches on the railroads.

Prices Are Listed

The cost of living, by Western standards, is high, as the following prices show:

Nylon stockings cost 60 to 82 leva (the equivalent of \$8.40 to \$11.48); a pair of men's shoes, 170 leva (\$23.80), women's shoes, from 210 to 310 (\$29.40 to \$43.40); a tennis racquet, 275 leva (\$38.50).

A small radio costs 1,050 leva (\$147), a bicycle 1,250 leva (\$175), and a small East German automobile 28,880 leva (\$4,043). A package of twenty cigarettes costs about three leva (42 cents).

The cost of living seems still higher when the purchasing power of a worker's monthly wage is calculated. A clerk or semi-skilled worker will receive 400 (\$56) leva a month. Thus, one month's wages will buy one pair of men's shoes plus one pair of women's shoes, or five to six pairs of nylon stockings. Three months' wages must be used to buy a bicycle.

Bulgarians consider that prices are more favorable than they were since the Government periodically decrees price cuts. New articles, including brocades and silks from Communist China, also are appearing in the stores.

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