

Christmas Accompanies Hungarians Into Austria: Under the impact of ...

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Christmas Came Early for These Hungarians in Austria

Christmas Accompanies Hungarians Into Austria

Under the impact of momentous events Europe has found it belongs together.

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Vienna

THIS IS THE TIME of the year when here in Central Europe the rivers slow down, jostling huge chunks of ice.

This is the time when the lakes of the Salzkammergut freeze over, when the forests are blanketed with snow, and when the spray from the angry North Sea hits the shore with a barrage of icicles.

This is the time when people like to stay home near the warm stoves, when parliaments adjourn for a prolonged Christmas and New Year's holiday, and when governments make an effort to keep things quiet.

But not so this year.

Instead of the seasonal freeze there has been an unseasonal thaw. While usually summer is the time for starting wars and spring the time for revolutions, this late fall and early winter have seen a large-scale war avoided by the narrowest of margins, one revolution succeed in Poland and another one fail in Hungary, and roads swarming with people driven from their homes.

All the way up from Greece to Britain people feel that they are standing on the threshold of momentous events. They have witnessed the monolithic Soviet bloc crack at its edges. They have seen changes occur in their own countries or among their neighbor nations which only a few weeks ago they would not have believed possible. And now they are asking themselves how far it will go.

Expectancy in Greece

There is expectancy throughout Greece, from the northern province of Thrace to the tiny Aegean island of Mykonos. It looks as if such issues as Cyprus which have troubled and agitated the Greek nation for years may be solved in an acceptable manner.

There is apprehension in Belgrade, and many Yugoslavs think back to 1948 and wonder whether the happenings in the satellite countries will pull them away from the West or whether they will see a renewal of the quarrel between Belgrade and Moscow.

In Austria, where the shock waves of the Hungarian revolution have been felt most strongly, people are torn between the dictates of prudence and the pressure of their brotherly feelings for the Hungarians.

In West Germany, politicians from all parties are sniffing the air and trying to discover whether the moment for reunification has drawn closer as a result of the new course in Poland and possibly of an increased readiness in Washington and Moscow to stabilize Europe by an over-all security pact.

A thousand questions are being asked and a



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Jingle Bells in Berlin, Too

Huge Christmas bells and other decoration pieces proclaim that the Yuletide will soon be

here. Two West Berlin youngsters appear fascinated by the traditional Christmas trimmings.

thousand answers are being given. Nobody knows which of the answers, if any, is the correct one and whether the incoming year will blight or bring to bloom the promises of the outgoing year.

Traveling through Southeastern and Central Europe during the past two months, I never looked at the calendar. I lived by the day, completely unaware of the season. But one evening when I walked across Berlin's Nollendorf Square my eyes all of a sudden were opened to the approach of Christmas.

Perhaps a hundred times I had passed displays of Christmas trees and wreaths. But only then, a couple of weeks ago, did I really see them. And only then did I begin to notice the festive decorations of the shop windows and the transfixed looks of children staring at the toy railways, dolls, and little automobiles.

From then on, I kept commuting between the world of adults occupied with problems that seemed so big and serious and the world of the children for whom Christmas, come what may, is the time when their most precious wishes are being fulfilled. It was an easy and gratifying commutation.

The other day I strolled along Vienna's Währingerstrasse with Putzi, 2½ years, her 4½-year-old sister Ciucci, and their mother. At one store I had to admire the rocking horse which Putzi expected for Christmas and at another Ciucci showed me the big doll which could walk and say "Mummy" and

Scene of the Week

which she hoped to get. And in between, the girls' mother asked me whether I thought that it was safe to stay in Vienna.

It would be wrong to say that it was difficult to feel the Christmas spirit. It was not; not here in Vienna, at any rate.

As it was, the Christmas spirit here blossomed ahead of its time, when the first refugees from Hungary arrived. It was true that among the first reactions of the Viennese was apprehension about what was going to happen to them; whether the Soviet troops would

respect Austria's neutrality, or whether they would experience a repetition of those trying three months from April to July, 1945, when the Red Army was in sole occupation of Vienna.

On the tense fifth of November, the Viennese by the tens of thousands rushed to the food stores and bought up whatever supplies of nonperishable food they could afford to.

Generosity Supplants Hoarding

But this buying spree did not last long. Within a day they pushed aside any concern about themselves and turned their hearts and hands to the Hungarians who started pouring across the border.

If Christmas spirit is a heightened feeling for one's neighbor and an exultant joy in giving, then the Vienna of the last weeks saw one of the greatest manifestations of this attitude.

Thousands of homes were opened to the refugees: homes not only of families with space and money to share but of people living on a meager income and in cramped surroundings. Wherever I went among my friends and acquaintances, I found Hungarian refugees living with them.

One of my friends had gone to a refugee camp with the intention of inviting two Hungarians to his home. He came back with four and on the evening I spent there with him and his guests we got the news that a fifth member of the family had reached the Austrian haven and immediately my friend said, "By all means let him come, too."

At another place, an elderly lady living in a 2½ room apartment had taken in eight refugees—a family consisting of a grandmother, an aunt, parents, a sister-in-law, and three children. While she was about to figure out how to bed all these people down for the night, the superintendent of the apartment house came up and asked whether he couldn't take two of the guests down to his own place. And so it went in all of Vienna's 23 districts.

Though the provinces and West Germany were not quite so close to the scene, there, too, nobody could mistake the uplift in the general feeling. Under the impact of events, the Europeans have rediscovered that they belong together and they united in a silent prayer: "Let us have peace on earth."