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NO COUNTRY FOR THE POOR

Directed by László Nemes

Editor István Nagy, Director of Photography László Halász, Gergely Áron Papp, Additional Camera Dorothea Balczó, Akos Baranyai, Miki Kócsik, Máté Mészáros, Dramaturgy Sándor Szóka, Producer Hektor Csörgős, Production Assistant Carmelita Andrius, András Ujvári, Original Music Yoni Toussy, Color Grading István Nagy, Sound Mix Szabolcs Miklósi, Commissioning Editor SWR Bernd Seidl, Commissioning Editor EO Margie de Koning, PBS Distribution Anna Alford, Executive Producers Artje Boehmert, Polina Georgescu
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NO COUNTRY FOR THE POOR

Synopsis

What if democracy fails citizens by not serving them all equally? What if inequality becomes the norm and the most vulnerable citizens are left behind with no money, no home, no rights, and no country of their own? In Hungary, the government has slashed social benefits and criminalized homelessness, but a group of activists, homeless and middle class, is confronting authorities to defend social justice and their right to be citizens. After the tragic death of two of its founding members, the group feels that Hungary is growing more hostile and their struggle is more important than ever. Despite all odds, their own community keeps them going—a mini-society with democracy and solidarity at its heart, an island of hope, belonging and dignity in a society gradually shifting the other way.

Story

In Hungary, every third citizen lives under the poverty line, often in substandard, energy-poor housing. 30,000 people don't have a home at all and homeless shelters cover only a tiny fraction of the demand, yet sleeping on the street is against the law. Losing your home also means losing your children to state care. As a result of extensive changes to the constitution and the social welfare system in the past seven years, homelessness has been criminalized and social benefits have been slashed to a bare minimum. Poverty has become a vice in the public eye.

But AVM, a group of activists, homeless and middle class, confronts the authorities to defend social justice and human dignity. AVM – A Város Mindenkie – translates into their name and motto – The City Is For All. They organize protests, flash mobs, and non-violent actions, like live chains, in the spirit of the Civil Rights Movement. But most of their daily work goes into helping with individual cases, battling for social flats, preventing unjust evictions, reuniting parents and children, lobbying local authorities and doing grassroots advocacy.

The group was founded in 2009 by Tessa Udvarhelyi – a community builder and activist, and Balint Misetics – a sociologist and public intellectual. Over the course of its existence, Tessa and Balint personally, as well as the movement they created have gotten recognition for exceptional non-profit and advocacy work. On par with empowering the homeless to know and fight for their own rights, a key

AVM ambition is to build a community that is based on democracy and solidarity – something that most of its members can not experience in the everyday Hungarian society.

A Város Mindenkie

A Város Mindenkie (THE CITY IS FOR ALL) is arguably the most durable social movement in Hungary today, a group of about 50 homeless and middle class activists who fight for justice and civil rights on behalf of homeless and those living in precarious conditions. Through their non-violent direct actions and advocacy, they help the poor families avoid evictions, lobby for social flats for the homeless and reunite families in which children had been taken away into state care as a result of families sliding into homelessness.

This is the story of their fight, which takes an unexpected turn when they discover something more powerful and transformative than political victories – AVM as an alternative society, a community that nurtures inclusiveness, participation, personal growth and dignity, human connection and solidarity. As the group struggles against injustice in Hungary, its members discover that life can be much more fulfilling as part of the community and that making a step towards other human beings and standing up for a more just society is making a step towards yourself and a more fulfilling life. It is this community and its bonds that give them the strength and perseverance in their fight against the system.

Protagonists



TESSZA and BALINT are the co-founders of AVM. Tessza is a 35 year-old anthropologist and determinate activist. In the film, she represents the structure and rules of the group, being often part of conflicts that erupt in group meetings. Tessza is the ultimate guard of this order, the main knowledge-holder, and the guardian of the group. Without her time and energy the group would not exist. She knows everything about everyone, understands all internal processes and knows exactly what is needed to ensure the well-being of AVM as an organism. She keeps account of all decisions taken in the group, all its plans, all promises. Balint, 29, is AVM's diplomat, always on the lookout for cooperation opportunities and ways of connecting AVM's work to other civil society efforts. Despite his young age, he is a respected public voice in Hungary.

Tessza and Balint are both regarded as key figures who can play an important role in the future of the political left in Hungary. From a number of perspectives, Tessza and Balint are like a couple of parents caring for a family. They debate things but always agree on the main principles. Their vision and work play a key role for the group. They both see the group as a laboratory of the future that can influence the political landscape of Hungary in the long run. Both of their personalities are not quite so easy approachable. They like operating in the shadows, although it doesn't mean they don't want to lead the group. Their goal is to empower homeless people instead of leading them but they are still learning how to refrain from being traditional "leaders".



JUTKA is a 59 year-old homeless woman, who has been living in a shack for 16 years. She was abandoned at the age of 2 and grew up in orphanages, then lived in poverty and abusive relationships. Her five children died unborn but she gives her love to children of others. She makes her living from collecting and selling garbage. At AVM she cares most for the cause of homeless mothers who are separated from their children by force. We witness Jutka's transformation as she is empowered to publically fight for the AVM cause, leading protests and appearing in front of a parliamentary committee to argue for decriminalization of homelessness. She finds her place in the world in the AVM family.



ZSOLT is a 44 years old father of four children. Half Roma, he comes from Hungary's industrial stronghold Miskolc where he worked as a crane operator at one of country's largest factories. After the factory was closed in 2008, he lost his job and his wife divorced him. Zsolt moved to Budapest in hope for a new job – but with no social housing opportunities, he spent years living in a shack in the capital. Zsolt has ambitions and with the help of the group he finally gets social housing and a new job as a house caretaker. Despite his very strenuous job cleaning staircases and taking garbage at dusk, 7 days a week, he rediscovers dignity in his new life of a working man.



JANI and ERIKA are a homeless couple who live in a forest shack on the edge of the city. A few years ago they have taken a few of their fellow homeless citizens to the forest and established a small community of which Jani became the “captain”. They get involved in the advocacy of AVM and together lobby local authorities for social flats, not for themselves but rather, for example, for their neighbour Krisztina whose children are in state care and the only way to get them back is to move into a social flat. Together they succeed at getting two flats, one for Krisztina and her children and the other for Jani and Erika. But the process is long and frustrating, social flats are unliveable and have to be renovated, their strength wanes. While in a temporary shelter Erika suddenly passes away. Unable to imagine his world without Erika, Jani falls into a prolonged fight with tuberculosis and passes away a year later without a chance to try out a new life in a flat. Their story saddens but empowers the group to carry on their fight.

Director Laszlo Bihari

Laszlo is a Budapest based journalist and filmmaker. His latest works focus on poverty and marginalization of Roma communities. Laszlo's journalistic pieces also covered the experimental art scene and grassroots activism on the fringes of society. Laszlo has 23 years of experience in the media, he worked at Hungary's most prominent news papers, specialized in issues of environmental and civil rights advocacy groups and organizations in Hungary and Europe. NO COUNTRY FOR THE POOR is his debut documentary film.



Director's Note

The very existence of AVM is the most exciting civil initiative in Hungary today because its activity manages to cut across the political and other dividing lines creating alliances across the board. This is virtually unprecedented and presents a fascination and a strong motivation for the film-makers to explore and show it to the world.

The film is originally inspired by the Director's interest in the work of AVM and an intimate knowledge of its daily life. Laszlo has spent the last four years in close contact with the group, studying their "phenomenon" in something that can be compared to anthropological participatory observation method. The filmmakers are convinced that humanity has to reshape its thinking about human life in order to find

a way out of the crises we generated. However, our civilization tends to think of the social, environmental and economic crises as problems that can be "solved", obstacles that can be overcome, so that the same lifestyle that led to these crises can be continued. We feel AVM is a unique experiment at creating a better society, a place we could all imagine ourselves belonging to. Is it possible for the mankind to live in ways that are more just and caring? This exploration can help us understand why so many people live unhappy lives and what a better world could look like.

We believe the story of AVM has an important message in reflection on this issue. It shows that we cannot pursue individualism without autonomy and that collectivity is meaningless

without solidarity. As the group struggles against injustice in Hungary, its members discover that life can be much more fulfilling as part of the community, which gradually becomes the most important part of their life that offers them possibilities they had never had before. When you take a step towards other

human beings, when you stand up for a more just society, you also take a step towards yourself and discover a life that can be happy and fulfilling. When you stand up for a more just society, you also take a step towards yourself and discover a life that can be happy and fulfilling.



Credits

This film is dedicated to the everyday tireless work of all the members of the City is for All activist group, homeless and not, as well as to the activism of all such groups around the world, that find strength and motivation to fight for social justice.

with

A VÁROS MINDENKIE

A film by.....Lazslo Bihari
Editor.....István Nagy
Camera.....Laszló Halász, Gergely Áron Pápai
Dramaturgy.....Sandor Szöke
Producer on Location.....Hunor Csörgits
Production Assistant.....Carmel Fuhg, Andrea Hronyecz
Original Music.....Yann Toualy
Color Grading.....István Nagy
Sound Mix.....Stanislaw Milkowski
Executive Producer.....Antje Boehmert, Polina Georgescu
Commissioning Editor SWR/ARTE.....Bernd Seidl
Commissioning Editor EO.....Margje de Koning

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Documentary

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