

BACKGROUND INFORMATION SUPPLEMENT  
(USSR)

SOVIET HOUSING CONSTRUCTION

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Domestic Affairs

On January 16, 1959, Pravda published a report of the Central Statistical Administration of the USSR entitled "The Results of the Fulfillment of the State Plan for the Development of the Soviet Economy in 1958". It stated that in cities, urban-type settlements, machine-tractor stations, repair and tractor stations, sovkhozes, and timber industry enterprises, state and private funds and state credit had provided in 1958 about 68,000,000 square meters of living space for the population. In addition, 700,000 dwellings had been built by kolkhozniks and other rural dwellers. It was further pointed out that the 1958 volume of housing construction had exceeded that of 1957.<sup>1</sup> However, neither the report nor other Soviet sources attempted to give any indication as to how many apartments had been built in urban areas or as to how much living space was provided last year in rural areas. Without such data it is, of course, difficult to calculate the average apartment space, or to compare the amount of housing construction in the USSR with that in the West. Nonetheless, some form of comparison can be attempted.

The West German press, for example, has reported that in 1958 approximately 530,000 dwellings were built in West Germany, including West Berlin. The average area of each dwelling was approximately 70 square meters, giving a total area for the year of 37,100,000 square meters.<sup>2</sup> The population of the country in 1956 was 51,600,000.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the per capita average was 0.72 square meters of living space, or 103 apartments for every 10,000 inhabitants. The dwellings built in the USSR in rural areas comprise mainly extremely modest apartments or houses, with, as a rule, an area of not more than 40-45 square meters. Assuming an average area of 50 square meters, rural building accordingly accounted in 1958 for some 35,000,000 square meters. Thus, a total area of about 103,000,000 square meters was provided in the year. With a population of 200,200,000 in 1956,<sup>4</sup> this gives a per capita average of 0.51 square meters of living space, a much lower figure than the corresponding one for West Germany.

According to Soviet data, a total area of 350,000,000 square meters of dwelling space was made available in urban areas and approximately 4,500,000 dwellings were built in rural areas over the period 1949-58.<sup>5</sup> Assuming an average area of 50 square meters per dwelling and a total area of 225,000,000 square meters, approximately 575,000,000 square meters of housing were built in the period. With the 200,200,000 population of the

<sup>1</sup> See also Bulletin, Munich, No. 1 (1959), pp. 31-37.

<sup>2</sup> Suddeutsche Zeitung, Munich, January 10-11, 1959.

<sup>3</sup> Statistisches Jahrbuch für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1957, Wiesbaden, 1957, p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> Narodnoe khozyaistvo SSSR v 1956 godu: Statisticheskyy ezhegodnik (The National Economy of the USSR in 1956: A Statistical Yearbook), Moscow, 1957, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 176; Pravda, January 27, 1958 and January 16, 1959.

USSR in 1956, this gives 2.88 square meters per capita. During the last ten years 4,700,000 new dwellings were erected in West Germany, including West Berlin.<sup>6</sup> Even if their average area is assumed to be 60 square meters, and not 70 as indicated above, a figure of 5.47 square meters of living space per capita is obtained, almost double the Soviet figure over the same period.

In the December 1958 issue of the Monthly Bulletin of Statistics, published by the Statistical Office of the United Nations, data is given on housing construction in the United States. They pertain only to housing construction in cities and cover only the first ten months of 1958. Although incomplete, these data give a sufficiently clear picture of the situation in the United States, and show that about 1,200,000 new dwellings were constructed in American cities in 1958.<sup>7</sup> The average living space in the United States exceeds that in West Germany. In the 218,600 one-family houses offered for sale in 1956, the average floor space was 1,230 square feet, or approximately 113 square meters.<sup>8</sup> As the Statistical Abstract of the United States 1957, published by the Department of Commerce, shows, almost all American apartments have from three to six rooms, and the average is approximately 4.6 rooms.<sup>9</sup> In other words, average floor space, and not just living space, cannot be less than 100 square meters. This means that at least 100,000,000 square meters of new living space were built for the urban and suburban population alone in the United States in 1958. This is considerably more than was provided for the urban population of the USSR in the record year of 1958. In 37 states alone of the United States, 80,100,000 square meters of living space were provided in 1954; 93,100,000 in 1955; and 86,800,000 in 1956.<sup>10</sup> Thus even today, when many more new dwellings are being built in the USSR than in former years, the Soviet Union is nevertheless still lagging far behind such Western countries as the United States and West Germany. According to the West German housing census of September 25, 1956, a population of 50,070,000 in West Germany, including West Berlin, had at its disposal 51,140,000 rooms.<sup>11</sup> In America there is enough living accommodation available to provide more than 80% of the population with one room per person.<sup>12</sup> In the Soviet Union, even according to official data, one person has an average of no more than 7.7 square meters of living space,<sup>13</sup> and in reality often far less.

<sup>6</sup> Statistisches Jahrbuch für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1958, Wiesbaden, 1958, p. 225; Süddeutsche Zeitung, op. cit.

<sup>7</sup> Monthly Bulletin of Statistics, United Nations, New York, No. 12 (1958), pp. 72-73.

<sup>8</sup> Statistical Abstract of the United States 1957, Washington, 1958, p. 768.

<sup>9</sup> ibid., p. 775.

<sup>10</sup> ibid., p. 759.

<sup>11</sup> Statistisches Jahrbuch für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1958, op. cit., p. 231.

<sup>12</sup> Statistical Abstract of the United States 1957, op. cit., p. 775.

<sup>13</sup> Narodnoe khozyaistvo SSSR v 1956 godu: Statisticheskoye sbornik, op. cit., pp. 17 and 177.



According to the magazine Planovoe khozyaistvo, an average of 12 apartments were built for every 1,000 inhabitants of Moscow in 1957.<sup>14</sup> A total of 1,810,000 square meters of living space was made available.<sup>15</sup> On April 1, 1956, the population of the city was given as approximately 4,900,000,<sup>16</sup> but it was in reality considerably more. The average size of the apartments constructed in Moscow in 1957 was not more than 30.9 square meters. From this it can be seen that any attempt to compare the scale of housing construction in the USSR with that in the West on the basis of data on the average number of apartments built per 1,000 inhabitants,--one such attempt was made by Khrushchev at a meeting in the Moscow Kalinin Electoral District<sup>17</sup>--can be extremely misleading and give an extremely false picture of the amount of housing construction carried out in the USSR.

In conclusion, it must be pointed out that building costs in the USSR are considerably higher than in the West. In the United States, the above-mentioned 86,800,000 square meters of living space built in 1956 cost \$9.826 billion, or \$113 per square meter.<sup>18</sup> In West Germany in 1958, 530,000 dwellings with a total area of 37,100,000 square meters cost about 12 billion West German Marks, or 350 Marks per square meter.<sup>19</sup> In the Soviet Union, according to Planovoe khozyaistvo, the average cost of one square meter was 1,410 rubles in 1956, and 1,397 in 1957.<sup>20</sup> In many cases it was even higher.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Planovoe khozyaistvo, No. 5 (1958), p. 36.

<sup>15</sup>Pravda, March 11, 1958.

<sup>16</sup>Narodnoe khozyaistvo SSSR v 1956 godu: Statistichesky ezhegodnik, op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>17</sup>Pravda, 15 March 1958.

<sup>18</sup>Statistical Abstract of the United States 1957, op. cit., p. 759.

<sup>19</sup>Suddeutsche Zeitung, op. cit.

<sup>20</sup>Planovoe khozyaistvo, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>21</sup>Bulletin, op. cit., p. 33.