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RENT AND LEBENSRAUM IN RUSSIA

Although Soviet propagandists, from the First secretary-Chairman of the Council of Ministers, N. S. Khrushchev, down to the thousands of agitators at the lowest level, frankly admit that housing conditions throughout the country have thus far scarcely shared in the spectacular improvements claimed for the industrial sector of the economy during the Five-Year plan period, a consistent refrain in the chorus of praise for Soviet achievements is the low cost for rent. Thus, a leading economist, accusing Western statisticians of demagogic practises in selecting items for comparative studies of living standards, boasts that the

"purchasing power of the ruble spent on one square meter of housing in Moscow is two or three times higher than the purchasing power of the dollar spent on a square meter of housing in New York or Washington"¹

This assertion, as is pointed out in the study on "Rent in the USSR",² can be challenged even on a purely quantitative basis with data from 1950; in qualitative terms nearly a decade later, no meaningful comparison between average facilities and conveniences can be made.

The admittedly low rents in the Soviet Union, however, apply only to state owned housing, nearly 70% of the total dwelling space;³ for the remaining 30%, an entirely different situation prevails. In his recent speech to the Writers Congress, Khrushchev, however, unwittingly revealed that for those Soviet citizens whose families occupy approximately 1/3 of the dwelling space not subsidized by the State, the financial burden for rent is considerably in excess of the national average. As an example of contemporary Soviet housing conditions, the tale of Khrushchev's intervention on behalf of the despairing ex-convict requires no commentary;⁴ in the case of this unfortunate individual between 33 1/3 and 40% of his monthly wages were needed for renting a "private apartment", a proportion much greater than the 20% average for pre-revolutionary Russia and even higher than the 20%-30% expended in capitalist countries.⁵

It is, of course, impossible to draw statistical conclusions from the single instance in Khrushchev's parable; nor can any selection of self-critical material from the Soviet press portray the extent of the overcrowding still prevalent despite past and future promises. A plaintive plea for more space for large families provides a brief glimpse of Soviet reality:

"As long as there was only one crib at our home, everything was fine. But when another bed was added, and then a third and a fourth, the walls closed in on us; the children have nowhere to move, and they have to take turns at the table doing their homework. We realize that the housing problem cannot be easily solved, but it is being vigorously attacked. It is a joy to know this, and to see new houses going up one after another

and families moving in. But why are no priorities given to families with many children? Is this fair?⁶

Even more bitterly can the same question be raised by the many couples whose marriages have collapsed but who must remain together since, as an American correspondent has reported,

"it's not uncommon for a divorced couple to go on sharing...even the same bed, because neither can find another place to live."⁷

The seven-year plan has promised a separate home for each family predominantly two room apartments.⁸ To an outsider this may seem scarcely adequate; to those who have endured years of communal living it must appear as a mirage. For the average citizen fulfillment of the promises for improved housing will certainly be a major criterion for judging Khrushchev's words and deeds.

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¹E. Varga, *Kommunist* #18, December 1958.

²T. Sosnovy, *The American Slavic and East European Review*, April 1959; see below pp. 5ff.

³ibid. p. 5.

⁴See below p. 1; speech at the Congress of Soviet Writers, Radio Moscow, 23 May 1959.

⁵*SSSR Kak On Est*, Moscow, 1959, p. 279.

⁶*Komsolskaya Pravda*, 13 March 1959.

⁷Irving Levine, *Main Street, USSR*, Doubleday, 1959, quoted by Albert Parry, *New Leader*, 27 April 1959.

⁸See below, p. 3-4.

KHRUSHCHEV'S HELPING HAND

Speech at the Congress
of Soviet Writers
Radio Moscow
23 May 1959

I shall read to you a letter received by me from a man who was convicted of robbery. Here is this letter:

(Text) "To the Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers Comrade Khrushchev.

"Since I was twelve I have been stealing. For that I was sentenced four times. The last time, 1954, I was sentenced for six years. I have served my sentence. After my release I returned to my family and obtained a job as carpenter. I used to earn from 500-600 rubles per month. Paying 200 rubles a month for an apartment I could not provide a living for my family. Having gone 400-600 rubles into debt for the rent money at my office, I deserted my family consisting of a four-year old daughter, my mother, my wife--my wife is in a maternity home with a new-born baby--on March 25 and departed with an idea of an easy life....

"That was in Sochi. I invited the author of the letter for a talk...

"He said: "Please understand my situation. I could work as a loader because I am a strong man. But I am not admitted to this work. They look upon me as a thief. The loaders earn more. I could draw good wages but they do not trust me. Until lately I worked in a brigade. The others in the brigade earned more than myself. I am considered a thief and therefore they give me lesser work. What can I do now? How could I be with my family? They do not allocate an apartment to me. I live in a private apartment. If I were living in a state-owned apartment, I would pay less. Please help me. I give you my word to be an honest man. I will prove this to you."

"What do you want of me? What can I do for you?" I asked him. Help me to feed the family he said, that is most important, I want to return to my wife, my children and my mother." "All right, I shall try to help you, I replied to him, "I shall ring the party Gorkom Secretary and ask him to look into your case, give you a job and help you to acquire a skill so that you can earn more. But try to work honestly. Afterwards I shall ask them to give you subsidy. Just think, a subsidy for a former thief. (Laughter, applause) that it possible only under our Soviet conditions. (applause).

"You will be given a subsidy to enable you to build a little house or, if that is not possible, I will ask them to give you a residential unit (Kvartira) and then you will have to pay less. It is common knowledge that our rents are the lowest in the world. I would say they amount to symbolic payments because the rents in question are obviously insufficient to employ a doorkeeper in the house."

USSR--THE COUNTRY WITH THE LOWEST RENTALS IN THE WORLD

SSSR Kak on Est,
Moscow 1959, pp. 279/280

In the Soviet Union rent absorbs not more than 10%, and in the majority of cases 5-6% of wages. Persons having a family of 4-6 members enjoy a discount and pay 5-15% less.

The workers pay approximately 1/10 to 1/4 of the actual cost of the housing, the state bears the remainder.

...The average cost of construction of a new brick house in 1956 was 1648 rubles for 1 sq. meter of living space. In certain large cities the cost of housing was even higher: in 1956 in Moscow it was 1991 rubles, in Leningrad 1744 rubles; in Kiev 1957 rubles; in Sverdlovsk, 1717 rubles; in Lugansk 1956 rubles; in Odessa 2016 rubles. If the cost of capital amortization is to extend over 40 years then the annual amortization per sq. meter is 40-50 rubles. (approximately 3.3 rubles-4 rubles per month) not counting heat and maintenance expenses. The worker pays only between .7 rubles and 1.32 rubles per sq. meter per month, the remainder is supplied by the state.

In pre revolutionary Russia the workers had to pay out more than 20% of their wages for rent. In the capitalist countries rent requires a great sum (20-30% of wages) and is continuously growing (between 1949-55 in France it increased 3 times, in the USA--30%).

THE COUNTRY IS BUILDING HOUSING

Talk by David G. Khodjaev
Moscow Home Service
3 April 1959

(Summary with Quotations) When new houses are built it is of the utmost importance to choose correctly how many floors they will have.

"Single-story houses with plots of land for individual families present a type of building that is very comfortable to live in, but this is the most expensive kind of building, and gives rise to unjustified growth of the urban area and colossal expenditure on engineering equipment and amenities. For this reason such buildings are only admissible when they are put up privately, and they cannot be accepted as a pattern for building operations by the state.

"At one time, in 1949-1954 enthusiasm for high buildings existed in our country, and especially in the large cities. For instance, houses of eight-fourteen floors were adopted in Moscow at that period as the fundamental type of building. It has been shown in practice that even though these houses allow for a more economical use of land and permit a shortening of streets and engineering networks, their building and operational expenses are much higher. The designs of the buildings become more complex, it becomes necessary to install elevators. Furthermore, they are less comfortable to live in, economists have calculated that four-five story houses without elevators represent the cheapest way to build. It is such houses that will become most widespread in the near future."

The Seven-Year Plan has raised the task of providing a separate home for each family. The new plans provide for small apartments, predominantly two-room apartments.

"The new types of apartments are more comfortable for the tenants. Furthermore, architects have reduced building costs for such apartments by 10% for each square meter of residential area."

In an apartment inhabited by several families much space has to be taken up by corridors and passageways.

"In a small apartment intended for one family access to the bedroom through the living room causes no inconvenience in the family life and at the same time, makes it possible to avoid unnecessary auxiliary floor area.

"And what about the kitchen? In a communal apartment it has an area of usually seven-nine square meters. Each housewife has to find room there for her little table, and a dish closet. There is one gas stove and one sink for every three families. If one has bought a refrigerator or a washing machine, one can only place it in one's room. Many of our housewives know very well what the

kitchen in a communal apartment is like and what inconvenience it causes to the residents. In individual apartments, on the other hand, the kitchen in effect becomes additional residential floor area, because only one woman uses it.

"As a rule the big foyers in communal apartments are put to no use; families even frequently hang overcoats in their own rooms. In a small apartment, on the other hand, the size of the foyer can be reduced greatly, while leaving space both for a coat-hanger and a built-in closet."

The new apartments also have dressing-rooms with an area of two-three square meters and shelves and hanging space which make it possible to do away with bulky wardrobes.

In one-family apartments rooms are not so carefully insulated from one another; it is thus possible to reduce ceiling heights without upsetting ventilation. In the current seven-year period most apartments will be 2.5 meters high.

There are people who oppose the cutting out of corridors and the lower ceilings.

"Yet those who adopt this point of view miss the most important things; it is incomparably more comfortable to live in an individual rather than in a communal apartment. Furthermore, the fundamental factor is that the present scale of house-building demands the most careful calculation of the economics of the subject,"

reduction of ceiling height from 2.7 to 2.5 meters makes for a reduction in a building costs of at least 1.5%, a saving of over 5 billion rubles for the country as a whole in the Seven-Year Plan. For single people or people with small families who want to avoid housekeeping, special hotel-type houses are being designed.

"Each one-room apartment for one or two occupants will have a wash-basin, lavatory and a small kitchen recess where food can be warmed up."

Canteens, shops and other services will be on the ground floor or next to the house.

RENT IN THE USSR

Timothy Sosnovy

from: The American Slavic and
East European Review - April, 1959

In a free market economy, with the absence of rent control, the cost of housing, as of all other goods, is determined by supply and demand. Characteristic of the USSR and the result of its economic system, which abolished private ownership of land and nationalized two-thirds of all urban housing, is the absence of a free market in the field of housing relations.

The role of the state, as the owner and operator of urban housing, continues to increase.¹ As the largest and, in fact, the only builder of large scale housing,² the state also assumed the function of distributing the dwelling space among the different groups of the population, as well as the function of regulating all questions brought out through its involvement in the housing problems of its citizens. Such questions concerned the rights to dwelling space and the procedures for obtaining it; rights for supplementary dwelling space; established norms of dwelling space for the various socio-economic levels of the population; reservation of quarters for persons temporarily absent; procedures for eviction and quartering; cancellation and exchange of dwelling space between different individuals; temporary residence; regulations covering the conduct of tenants; comradesly courts and many other questions.³

The rigid standardization governing all housing relations has been the inevitable result of a progressively more acute housing shortage that has plagued the regime since its inception. During the period from 1923 to the beginning of 1958, the dwelling space per person decreased from 6.45 sq. m. to 5.12 sq. m., while during the same period the number of persons per room increased from 2.60 to 3.05.⁴ Thus, the severe housing shortage resulted in the adoption of strict regulations covering a series of housing problems and spanning the whole period of the Soviet regime. Among the questions covered by these regulations is that of rent.

Rent paid for all municipal, national or private housing, that is, housing belonging to the city soviets, state institutions, enterprises and private individuals, is firmly prescribed by law.⁵

1. In 1958, of the 463.7 million sq. m. of dwelling space in the cities and workers' settlements of the USSR, 318.6 million sq. m., or 68.7%, belonged to the State (From the author's forthcoming book, "The Development of Urban Centers in Soviet Russia," Harvard University Press.)

2. Of the 333.9 million sq. m. of housing built between 1923 and 1958, the State built 257.6 million sq. m., or 77.2% of the total.

3. John Hazard, "Soviet Housing Law" (New Haven, 1939).

4. 1 sq. m. = 10.75 sq. ft.

5. In privately owned houses and in houses rented by individuals from local soviets, it is permissible to increase the rent by not more than 20%. See "Zhilishchnye zakony." Sbornik vazhnejshikh zakonov SSSR i RSFSR, postanovlenij, instrukcij i prikazov po zhilishchnomy khozjajstvu po sostojaniju na 1 nojabrja 1957 g. (Moskva, 1957), p. 240

During the years immediately following the October revolution the tremendous depreciation of money made rent meaningless and as of January 1, 1921, in accordance with the spirit of War Communism, it was abolished. Rent was reintroduced in 1922, and up until 1926 the Soviet laws dealing with rent were local in character, so that every Union republic independently determined the rent scales and the many other problems that arose with respect to rent.

The lack of uniformity in rent legislation finally resulted in an all-Union rent law in 1926.⁶ The present-day rent system continues to be based on this law, under the terms of which "rental rates for urban areas -- depending on the category of the payer -- are computed in such a way as to cover (a) operating costs and normal amortization of the dwelling, estimated at 35 kopeks per sq. m. of dwelling space per month" and "interest charges on building loans for the purpose of restoring and expanding the housing fund."⁷

The laws of the Union republics permit city soviets certain well-defined freedoms in the determination of rent. Thus, for example, in the RSFSR the basic charge for 1 sq. m. of dwelling space may be set by the city soviet at not less than 30 kopeks and not more than 44 kopeks.⁸ City Soviets of urban areas of less than 40,000 population are permitted to set the basic rate at between 30 and 35 kopeks per sq. m.

The basic rate of 35 kopeks established by the 1926 law is a theoretical rate and is an average for the total residential area of a given city. This rate serves as a base for further calculations of rents in individual buildings. Among the factors which are taken into consideration in the establishment of final rents of different dwellings are the distance from the urban center, the presence or absence of modern facilities, such as running water, plumbing, electricity, gas, central heating, etc. For example, the absence of running water reduces the basic rent by 10%, absence of plumbing - 10%, absence of electricity - 5%. The rent for rooms which are completely dark is reduced by 75%, semi-dark rooms - 50%, damp rooms - 20%, rooms used as a passageway - 30%, rooms located above the fourth floor (without elevator service) - 5%. If an apartment has special conveniences such as a bathroom, gas, hot water, the basic price is increased by 10%.⁹

The final rate per sq. m. of dwelling space for a given apartment is arrived at after all reductions from or additions to the standard rate have been made. This rate, which is known as the apartment tax (kvar-tirnaja taksa), is a constant, determined solely on the basis of the quality of the premises and the dwelling and not on the tenant's capacity to pay. This apartment tax can not be less than 5.5 kopeks per sq. m. per month, even if rebates and adjustments would have forced it below that figure.

6. The passage of this law was motivated by "the necessity of standardizing the rents for, and the use of public housing in the republics of the Soviet Union." See "Sobranie zakonov SSR (Moscow, 1926), II, 754.56.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 754, paragraph 1.

8. S. I. Asknazy, I. L. Braude, A. I. Pergament, "Zhilishchnoe pravo (Moskva, 1956), p. 169.

9. D. L. Broner, A. I. Mal'ginova, P. G. Solovev, "Kvartirnaja plata v RSFSR, 6th edition (Moscow, 1954), pp. 7-14.

Following the determination of the apartment tax, the actual rent is set on the basis of the quality of the quarters and on the social, economic, and family status of the tenant. Only the actual dwelling area is taken into account and kitchens, hallways, bathrooms and other useful but not livable areas are excluded from the rent calculations.

The established norm of dwelling space per person is 9 sq. m. Dwelling space in excess of this maximum is paid at three times the normal rate. The right for dwelling space in excess of the set norm and at the normal rate per meter is limited to a select group of employees representing the top strata of Soviet bureaucracy, and to the better known scientists, artists, engineers, inventors, physicians, authors, composers. The allowable supplementary dwelling space for most of this select group is 10 sq. m., but for scientists, authors and composers it is still higher, and is set at 20 sq. m.¹⁰

Workers and employees and others of similar status, whose income is 145 rubles per month, pay 35 kopeks for every square meter of dwelling space. Those earning less than 145 rubles per month pay a reduced rate depending on the renter's income and family status. Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, the apartment tax may never fall below 5.5 kopeks per sq. m. The reduction of rent for lower-income tenants is determined according to a strictly graduated scale of discounts from the apartment tax of a particular dwelling. At present, as a result of an increase in the incomes of workers and employees, such discounts are seldom necessary.

On the other hand, the rent of workers and employees whose income is over 145 rubles per month is also increased according to a graduated scale. This rate of increase is 3.3 kopeks per sq. m. of dwelling space for each additional 10 rubles in excess of 145 rubles. However, the upper limit is 1 ruble 32 kopeks per month for a single square meter. A higher maximum of 1 ruble 65 kopeks is set for new houses and multi-storied apartments of Moscow.¹¹

Handicraftsmen and members of liberal professions pay from 66 kopeks to 1 ruble 98 kopeks per sq. m. of dwelling space. Officials of religious denominations and persons hired by religious institutions pay the higher rate of 1 ruble 98 kopeks.¹² Military personnel pay from 15 to 80 kopeks per sq. m., and these rates are not subject to change on the basis of location, facilities or family status of the individual.¹³ Special categories of pensioners pay 50% of the established rent for workers and

In communal dwellings the established floor space per person is from 4.5 to 6.0 sq. m. per person, with four to six persons per room.¹⁵ In bunk-type dormitories the bunk-charge includes the municipal utilities and depends on the income of the individual and the type of quarters in which the facilities are located. In the better buildings the monthly bunk-charge fluctuates between 7 rubles per person earning up to 125 rubles per month, and 26 rubles, for those earning over 401 rubles per month.¹⁶

It is important to examine the existing rent as it relates to the "cost of operation and normal amortization" and consider the relative weight of rent in the budget of a tenant.

The average income from rent does not cover the operating expenses and normal amortization and housing in the USSR produces annual deficits. In the 1920's (NEP period), the average monthly income from one sq. m. of floor space was 22.2 kopeks, while the cost of maintenance, current and capital repairs totaled 44.4 kopeks.¹⁷ In Leningrad in 1950, some twenty-five to thirty years later, rent covered 44% of all the operating expenses of the total housing fund of the city, while in 1957 this figure dropped to 27%.¹⁸ In Moscow, the number of housing administrations reporting deficits increased from 82% in 1955 to 94% in 1957.¹⁹ At no time was the low rent increased to cover these deficits, and the State had to make up the difference from other sources of revenue.

In this connection, the important aspect is the relative weight of rent in the budget of the workers. The basic rent law firmly established the principle that "net payment for average dwelling space occupied by a family should not exceed 10% of the income of workers, employees and others of similar status."²⁰ Actually, the relative weight of rent in the budget of workers does not even reach 10%, as may be seen from Table 1. The gradual growth of the proportion of the income that went toward rent, shown in the Table for the 1920's, was directly related to the actual increase in the wages and to the increase in the wages and to the increase in the rent in the latter part of the decade.

15. "Sbornik postanovlenij i instrukcij po zhilishchnym voprosam," 2nd edition (Moscow, 1952), p. 109.

16. S. Bomsh, "Pravila pol'zovanija zhiloi ploshchad'ju" (Leningrad, 1952), pp. 90-91.

17. "Kontrol'nye cifry narodnogo khozjajstva na 1925/26 g." (Moskva, 1926), p. 29.

18. "Finansy SSSR," No. 7, 1957, p. 37.

19. "Gorodskoe khozjajstvo Moskvy," No. 5, 1958, p. 6.

20. "Sobranie zakonov SSSR, 1928, No. 6" "Postanovlenie o zhilishchnoj politike" ot 4 janvarja 1928g., paragr. 10.

TABLE I

Relative Weight of Rent in Budgets of
Workers and Employees in the USSR.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Percent of income spent on rent</u>
1922	
1923	2.8
1924	4.0
1925	5.8
1928	6.1
1930	10.4
1932	7.4
1935	5.7
1937	5.0
1956	4.3
	4.0

Sources: "Russkij ekonomicheskij sbornik, VI," (Prague, 1926), p. 173; International Labour Review, Vol. XXVIII, No. 5 (November, 1933), p. 654; "Trud v SSSR," Statisticheskij spravochnik (Moskva, 1936), p. 342-43; "Problemy ekonomiki," No. 5-6, 1937, p. 195; A. M. Goldenberg, "Osnovnye voprosy organizacii finansov socialisticheskogo zhilishchnogo khozjajstva" (Moskva, 1951), pp. 50-51; N. A. Kokovin, "Kommunal'naja Statistika" (Moskva, 1956), p. 148; data for 1922-24 refer only to Petrograd.

* Beginning with the 1930's, due to the political policies of the five-year plans, the increase in worker's incomes (with a simultaneous drop in their real level) was considerably more rapid than the increase in rent. This resulted in a fairly large movement of tenants from the low-rent to more expensive quarters. This also increased the number of tenants who paid the maximum rate of 1 ruble 32 kopeks per square meter of housing, a rate which remained constant regardless of the future increase in the individual's income. In other words, the increased number of persons paying the maximum rate for rent is one of the principal factors which tends to lower the proportion which rent comprises of the total budget of the workers and employees.²¹

Prior to the revolution, it was not unusual for a worker to pay 15-20% of his wages for rent, while at present he pays only 4%. Soviet authors ascribe the low rent to the "care" of the Soviet regime for the "welfare" of the individual.²² Actually, the reasons why the Soviet authorities do not revise the archaic rent law, despite the deficits that have to be absorbed, are quite different.

In the first place, it must be remembered that the existing system of "the lowest rents in the world" is utilized to the fullest by the Soviet propaganda machine.²³ Soviet authors stress the point that "the proportion

21. The same situation applies to the relative weight of expenses for communal facilities: from 2.3% in 1928 to 0.9% in 1940. See: T. Sosnovy, "Tarify i tarifnaja politika kommunal'nykh predpriyatij SSSR" (Khar'kov, 1935), pp. 40-41; A. M. Goldenberg, "Osnovnye voprosy organizacii finansov socialisticheskogo zhilishchnogo khozjajstva" (Moscow, 1950), p. 50-51.

of the income that the Soviet worker spends on housing and transportation is five to six times lower than the proportions spent by an American worker for the same purpose."²⁴ Theoretically this statement is correct, but does it correspond to reality?

According to the author's calculations, in 1950 one sq. m. of dwelling space cost the American worker 27.3 minutes of labor, while for the Soviet worker the cost was 27.4 minutes of labor.²⁵ Thus, the existing rent in terms of work time, is not nearly as low as the Soviet writers would have us believe.

If the existing scale of rent is compared to the standard of living of the Soviet worker, then even the relatively small rent that is paid is a severe burden to him, especially if he is in the lower income brackets of the workers and employees. In other words, if one takes into account the fact that the standard of living of an American worker is three to four times higher than that of the Soviet worker, then the rent paid by the latter is extremely high.

From the point of view of quality of housing, the Soviet worker is even in a more unfavorable position. Whereas the average worker in the United States occupies a three to four room private apartment, the Soviet worker with a family generally has to live in one room with a communal kitchen. Furthermore, the apartment occupied by the American worker undoubtedly has better facilities than the one occupied by his Russian counterpart. Although in the United States it is taken for granted that apartments have running water, plumbing, gas or electric ranges, a considerable part of the population of the Soviet Union has neither running water nor plumbing, while as late as 1956, only 16.6% of the urban population had gas in the apartment.²⁶

22. V. L. Kobalevskiy, "Zhilishchnoe stroitel'stvo v pjatoy pjatiletke" (Moskva, 1954), p. 5; A. I. Nikolayev, "Zhilishchnoe stroitel'stvo v shestoj pjatiletke" (Moskva, 1956), p. 11.

23. In pre-revolutionary Russia and at present in most of the countries of Western Europe and in the United States, the proportion of the expenses for rent (excluding communal services and heat) fluctuates between 14 and 18%. See: S. N. Prokopovich, "Real'naja zarabotnaja plata promyshlennogo raboche v Sovetskoj Rossii," unpublished manuscript (Russian Research Center, Harvard University, Cambridge, 1947), p. 9; "Recent Family Budget Enquiries," International Labour Review, Vol. XXVIII, No. 5 (November, 1933), p. 654; "Distribution of Family Expenditures on Chief Groups," International Labour Office, Year Book of Labour Statistics, 8th issue, 1933-1944 (Montreal, 1945).

24. N. Voznesenskij, "Vojennaja ekonomika v period otechestvennoj vojny" (Moscow, 1948), p. 119.

25. T. Sosnovy, "The Housing Problem in the Soviet Union" (New York, 1954), p. 180.

26. Pravda, January 15, 1956; Planovoe Khozjajstvo, No. 2, 1956, p. 70.

The Soviet Union has allocated large funds for major residential construction, which is presently under way. At the same time, the State is supplying more and more financial aid to private builders.²⁷ However, as in the past, the urban population lives under conditions of severe housing shortages. Reports from many cities indicate that large numbers of workers are in need of living quarters.²⁸ There are many instances of persons moving into new buildings prior to their completion.²⁹ In the new buildings, the allotted dwelling space is often below the urban average of 5.12 sq. m. per person (1958),³⁰ which is only 57% of the ideal sanitation standard. As in former years, the most common family quarters consist of one room with a communal kitchen.

The easing of the housing shortage has been greatly delayed by the unusually high rate of withdrawal of housing from circulation. This has been due not only to the demolition of houses, as a result of reconstruction of cities, but also due, to a large measure, to the poor quality of construction of the new houses. During the Fifth Five-year Plan, the housing taken out of circulation in the various cities fluctuated from 10 to 30% of the newly completed residential buildings.³¹

Soviet housing literature openly discusses the obsolescence of the existing housing codes, which contribute to the delay in solving the housing crisis. Articles stress the fact that the basic housing laws are over thirty years old and obviously out of date, and that there is a very immediate need for the improvement of codes and methods of construction.³²

Of special concern has been the outdated rent law. "Why," asks one writer, "must a private owner rent his house for such a low return?"³³

27. Whereas in 1940 they received loans totaling 170 million rubles, by 1956 the loans reached 800 million rubles. See: "Finansy i socialisticheskoe stroitel'stvo (1917-1957)" (Moscow, 1957), p. 357.

28. Pravda, July 15, 1958; Izvestia, June 11, 1958.

29. Pravda, June 14, 1958.

30. Planovoe Khozjajstvo, No. 4, 1958, p. 26.

31. Zhilishchno-Kommunal'noe khozjajstvo, No. 8, 1957, p. 2. The available housing in cities may also be decreased as a result of disasters such as fire and flood, as well as through the transformation of residential buildings to non-residential buildings.

32. Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo, No. 3, 1958, p. 68.

33. Ibid., No. 7, 1958, p. 46

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Another writer feels that "it would be expedient to reject the section of the law dealing with the size of the house which may be owned by a private citizen," referring to a 1948 directive.³⁴ He then goes on to stress that the encouragement given by the regime to private builders makes it necessary to expand, not contract, the rights of private ownership. "Why, for example, must a privately owned house be limited to 1 or 2 stories and

What about the family of a 'brother Hero' consisting of 12-15