



Главная задача пятилетки
состоит в том, чтобы обеспечить
значительный подъем матери-
ального и культурного уровня
жизни народа на основе высо-
ких темпов развития социали-
стического производства...

Из Доклада XXIV съезда КПСС по пяти-
летнему плану развития народного хозяйства
СССР на 1971-1975 годы.

ВСЕ
НА БЛАГО
ЧЕЛОВЕКА,
ВСЕ
ВО ИМЯ
ЧЕЛОВЕКА

"The main task of the Five Year Plan," proclaims this 1971 poster, "is to ensure a significant rise in the material and cultural standard of living. . . ." Since the mid-1970s, the Soviet GNP—which grew at an average annual rate of nearly five percent from 1960 to 1975—has stagnated, rising in 1980 by only 1.4 percent.

Soviet Life, 1985

Why is the Soviet system, with so many problems, as stable as it is? Princeton University's Stephen F. Cohen argues that the Kremlin has provided most Soviet citizens with security, national pride, and modest "improvements in each succeeding generation's way of life." Other Sovietologists contend that, thanks to the regime's success in repressing dissent, blocking foreign influence, and curbing travel abroad, most Soviet citizens do not know what they are missing. The Kremlin's "command economy" gives the military ample weaponry and thus buttresses Soviet claims to superpower status; otherwise, the system simply muddles along. In some ways, the average Russian industrial worker fares no better today than his American counterpart did 50 years ago. Here, three scholars present their findings on the Soviet "quality of life." Sociologist Mark G. Field examines health care; political scientist Henry W. Morton surveys urban housing; and sociologist Mervyn Matthews describes the experience of the sizable Soviet underclass.

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH

by Mark G. Field

"Either the louse defeats socialism," Vladimir I. Lenin warned in 1919, "or socialism defeats the louse."

As Lenin spoke, the parasite was spreading a deadly typhus epidemic throughout the Soviet Union. Ultimately, of course, Soviet-style socialism won the battle, but not before some three million lives were lost. Other infectious diseases, such as smallpox, relapsing fever, and even plague, claimed an additional five to seven million lives between 1916 and 1924.

Today, deadly infectious diseases are no longer a serious problem for the Soviets. As in the West, heart disease and cancer now rank as the leading causes of death. The Soviet Union provides free medical care to each and every one of its citizens, and it claims more than double the number of hospital beds per 10,000 people (115) and nearly twice as many doctors (some 850,000) as the United States. (And Soviet doctors still make house calls.) Moscow, Leningrad, and a few other major cities boast large medical research institutes. Americans and other foreigners sometimes travel to Soviet hospitals for special medical treatments. About 50 U.S. citizens have visited the Helmholtz Institute of Ophthalmology, which has pioneered treatment of retinitis pigmentosa, a hereditary disease that usually leads to blindness.

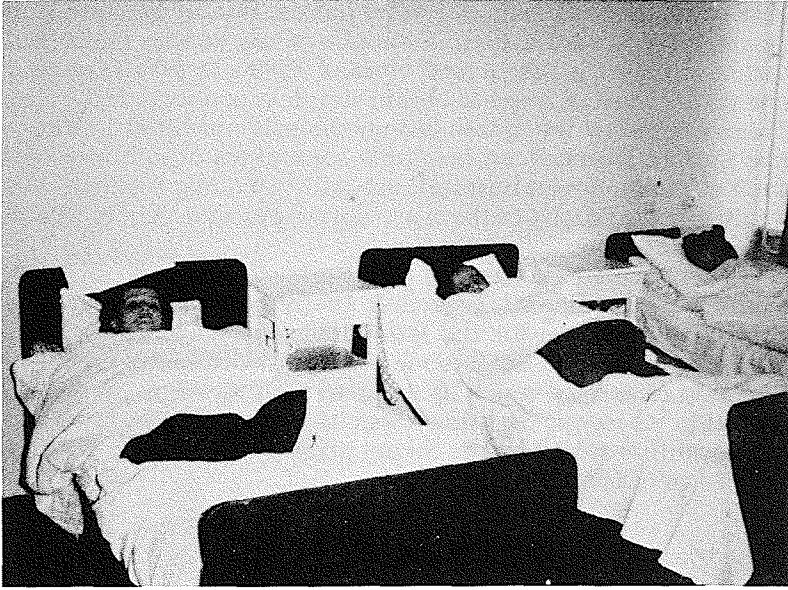
By the early 1970s, however, there were signs that something had gone awry. Moscow simply stopped publishing some kinds of medical data—presumably to avoid embarrassment. In fact, Murray Feshbach, a Georgetown University demographer, has shown that the 1970s dealt the Soviet Union unprecedented reversals in some vital health indicators. Alone among the world's industrialized nations, it experienced a rise in infant mortality. Indeed, death rates are up for all age groups. A Soviet male born in 1966 could expect to live 66 years; by 1979, male life expectancy at birth had dropped to 62, below that of Costa Rica (66.3), Syria (63.8), and Yugoslavia (65.4).

Not Enough Ammunition

Such setbacks probably reflect growing Soviet social problems more than they do defects in Soviet doctors or hospitals. Alcoholism, a diet high in cholesterol, and hypertension (a product of overcrowding and poor living conditions in Russian cities) contribute to heart disease. Poor diets increase the risk of cancer. Frequent abortions among Soviet women can lead to later complications during childbirth.

Yet the Soviet health care system is clearly in trouble. Between 1955 and 1977, the share of the Soviet gross national

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Soviet hospital wards frequently suffer overcrowding. In I. Grekova's novel A Ship of Widows (1983), a stroke patient is turned away by a doctor who says, "We cannot afford to keep incurables. We must account for every bed."

product (GNP) allotted to medical care dropped by more than one-fifth, to about two percent, even though outlays kept growing in absolute terms. Moscow's medical budget was \$28 billion in 1979. Meanwhile, the United States was struggling to hold down total public and private health care costs below \$212 billion, nine percent of the GNP.

Western medicine is a capital-intensive enterprise, dominated by CAT scanners, heart-lung respirators, and radioisotope machines. Soviet health care is, by contrast, labor-intensive. "Like the Red Army of an earlier era," notes Harvard University's Nick Eberstadt, "Soviet physicians assault the adversary in huge numbers, but without sufficient ammunition." (Also thrown into the battle are 2.7 million nurses and *fel'dshers*, or paramedics.)

The quality of care varies widely—it is generally better in the cities than in the countryside, better in the Russian west than in the Asian east. But nowhere is it particularly good (except perhaps in the special facilities reserved for the Soviet elite). The Soviets offer far more hospital beds (3.2 million in a

land of 269 million) than any other nation. But, by Western standards, there is very little in Soviet hospitals besides beds. Medical equipment is scarce and often of 1940's or 50's vintage. It can take a week or more to obtain simple blood tests and x-rays. There are only a few dozen kidney dialysis machines in the entire nation. If American hospitals sometimes do too much for their patients, Soviet hospitals are guilty of doing too little. One might say that many of them are dormitories for people who do not feel well.

There is also a difference in the ethos of Soviet health care. In the West, medicine is regarded chiefly as an expression of humanitarian concern for the individual, and its quality reflects that emphasis. The Soviets view medical care as essential for the good of *society*, much as an army uses its medical corps to maintain its troops' fighting capacity. As an old Bolshevik slogan recently revived by the Soviet press puts it: "Your health is the property of the republic!"

Doctors as Technicians

The Soviet Ministry of Health Protection oversees the sprawling system of medical research institutes, hospitals, sanatoriums, polyclinics, and dispensaries from its Moscow headquarters. The Ministry pays doctors' salaries and is responsible for all health facilities, but city governments and factories foot the bill for construction costs within the vast "territorial" network that serves the general public. The smaller and far superior "closed" network runs by separate rules and is restricted to all but Communist Party officials, leading scientists, and other members of the elite. The military relies on its own doctors and hospitals.

For average folk—everybody from university professors to steelworkers—the neighborhood polyclinic is the center of medical care. Here one finds the general practitioners, dentists, and psychiatrists who serve as the Soviet equivalent of the "family doctor." (In the big cities, specialized dispensaries tend to expectant mothers, the mentally ill, and other distinctive groups.) In theory, there is one polyclinic manned by 20 general practitioners for every 40,000 people, housed in a storefront, a freestanding building, a factory, or sometimes even an ordinary apartment. Also in the polyclinic are pediatricians (one for every 800 children under 16) and part-time specialists. This is the "ground floor" of Soviet medicine, where Soviet citizens take their aches and pains, their migraine headaches and swollen ankles.

More likely than not, they will be offered a dose of common-sense advice and a prescription like "Take two aspirins and call me in the morning"—when aspirins are available. The polyclinics also dispense penicillin and tranquilizers, as well as camomile tea (for ulcers) and nettle leaves (for arthritis). Medicinal herbs are widely used.

Most Soviet *vрачи* (doctors) practice a kind of common-sense, low-technology medicine, based on the assumptions that most illnesses cure themselves, that few patients ought to be referred to specialists, and that the rest are beyond remedy. That is about all they *can* offer. Soviet medical training lasts only six years (including internship) and begins right after high school, at age 18. Unlike American schools, with their eight years of graduate instruction and their professional problem-solving bent, Soviet medical institutes offer basic vocational education. The curriculum stresses hands-on learning and memorization of standard "protocols" of treatment for each condition. Innovation is not encouraged (nor is it often technologically feasible): By 1980, Soviet heart surgeons had performed a cumulative total of 800 coronary bypass operations; their U.S. counterparts completed 137,000 during 1980 alone.

Doctoring tends to be a low-status, low-paying occupation. The newly minted M.D. begins her career (70 percent of all doctors in the USSR are women) after three years of mandatory service to the state, usually in a remote region. She will draw a salary of about \$183 monthly, only 75 percent of the average national wage, and she will live in the same apartment buildings, stand in the same lines, and (except for top medical researchers and administrators) receive the same medical care as any ordinary working woman.

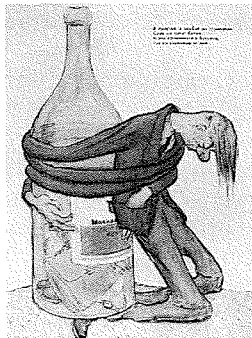
Meeting the Death Quota

At the clinic, patients are assigned to a single doctor, so friendships can develop over the years. (It is hard to imagine that patients feel much affection for their dentists, who usually work without novocaine and are notoriously quick to pull teeth.) The talk during a visit to the polyclinic doctor is as likely to turn to neighborhood gossip as it is to medical matters. But when the waiting lines are long, as they often are, little time remains for chit-chat or the social graces. Polyclinic doctors are expected to see about five patients an hour; yet the Soviets' own studies show that it takes at least five minutes to fill out the numerous forms required by employers and the medical bureaucracy for each patient.

THE 'GREEN SERPENT'

"It is Russia's joy to drink," said Saint Vladimir of Kiev during the 10th century. "We cannot do without it." A millennium later, Saint Vladimir's assessment still rings true. Moscow has restricted the publication of alcohol consumption data since the mid-1950s. But according to Vladimir Treml, professor of economics at Duke University, evidence from retail statistics, trade journals, and other sources indicates that the USSR ranks first in consumption per capita of vodka and other "strong" alcohol. Alcoholism pervades Soviet society, reducing labor productivity, and, by most accounts, increasing crime and divorce rates. Treml estimates that the *zelenaiia zmeya* ("green serpent")—the Russian nickname for vodka—stands behind only heart ailments and cancer as a cause of death.

During the past 25 years, consumption of state-produced alcoholic beverages has risen by 6.9 percent annually per capita. Much of the increase can be attributed to a growing number of teen-age and female drinkers. Alcoholism is worst among the Slavic and Baltic peoples. Only the Muslims of Azerbaydzhan, Central Asia, and parts of Georgia remain temperate, drinking half as much as the Slavs. The difference is partly reflected in lower Muslim rates of crime, divorce, and morbidity.



What explains the surge of alcoholism in the USSR? Part of the answer may involve economics. The past three decades have seen both a shorter workweek and an increase in average real income. Without a comparable improvement in the availability of consumer goods and services or of entertainment and leisure facilities, drinking became the easiest way to escape boredom. A 1981 survey of youth hostel workers near Moscow found that a third of

them drank "because they had nothing else to do."

Other factors include demographics. By some accounts, urbanization in the USSR has brought with it feelings of alienation among millions of transplanted country folk. A lasting male-female imbalance—the result of severe manpower losses in World War II—has made many Soviet women heavy drinkers. In 1979, a *Literaturnaia Gazeta* (*Literary Gazette*) survey of female alcoholics found that half of them drank simply to relieve loneliness.

Not even the Kremlin is satisfied with this basic health care. "The work of polyclinics, dispensaries, and out-patient clinics, which handle 80 percent of all the sick, must substantially improve," Leonid Brezhnev declared in a 1977 speech. "Unfortunately, in a number of places they lag behind the possi-

Whatever the cause, the consequences of alcoholism are there for all to see. Using Soviet forensic medicine statistics, Trembl calculates that deaths from alcohol *poisoning* alone rose from about 12,500 during the mid-1960s to 51,000 in 1978. Such mishaps often result from the Russian *popoi*—a massive binge, usually on an empty stomach. The increase in fatalities is probably due to the use of low-quality alcohol in home-made *samogon*, a vodka-like liquor that now accounts for almost one-third of all alcohol consumed in the USSR. In addition, the relatively high price of vodka—a half-liter bottle costs roughly five rubles, or 12 percent of the average Soviet worker's weekly wage—has driven many Soviets to drink not only more *samogon* but also after-shave lotion, cleaning fluid, varnish, and industrial alcohol.

Heavy drinking has invaded the Soviet workplace. During the 1970s, Soviet economists S. Strumilin and M. Sonin estimated that drunkenness regularly reduced labor productivity by 10 percent. (At the Nizhnyi Tagil Metallurgical Combine, for example, drunken workers caused 608 on-the-job accidents in 1982.) Factory managers compound the problem by dispensing vodka or industrial alcohol as a bonus to hard working employees.

Moscow has made serious efforts to combat alcohol abuse. In the Ukraine, coal miners reporting to work must take daily sobriety tests. So must drivers at most state trucking enterprises. In Moscow, Leningrad, and other cities, sobering up stations, or *vytrezvitel'*, provide overnight confinement for drunks picked up by the police. The guilty must pay fines; their names are reported to their employers. In 1979, between 12 and 15 percent of the Soviet adult population spent at least one night in these *vytrezvitel'*. (In the United States—where drinking problems are serious by Western standards—about 0.6 percent of all adults are arrested annually for drunkenness.) Other penalties are more severe: In 1980, *Trud* reported that one drunk driver who killed six people in Moscow with a ZIL-555 dump truck had been sentenced to death.

Ironically, efforts to reduce consumption can only go so far. Taxes on liquor supply 12 percent of the USSR's annual revenues. That fiscal reality has thwarted any consistent and sustained campaign against drinking. One Moscow store manager summed up the dilemma. "We do have a conscience," he told *Pravda* in 1978, "... but we have our plan, and we want to receive a bonus."

This essay is adapted from a longer paper by Vladimir Trembl in Soviet Politics in the 1980s (1984) and used by permission of Westview Press.

bilities of medicine. [T]here is a cadre shortage, especially of middle- and junior-level personnel, equipment is out-of-date, [and] modern medications are insufficient."

To check into a Soviet hospital is to jump from the frying pan to the fire. It is not always easy to do. In the cities and some

rural areas, speedy ambulance service can be had by dialing 03. But that is no guarantee of quick admission. In the Siberian city of Irkutsk, for example, all emergency admissions are dispatched to a single city hospital after 3:00 P.M. Medical hospitals sometimes refuse to accept patients who are terminally ill. (They must be taken home, since there are virtually no nursing homes.) The reason: Exceeding the "death quota" that the Ministry of Health assigns to every hospital would invite an investigation by Moscow.

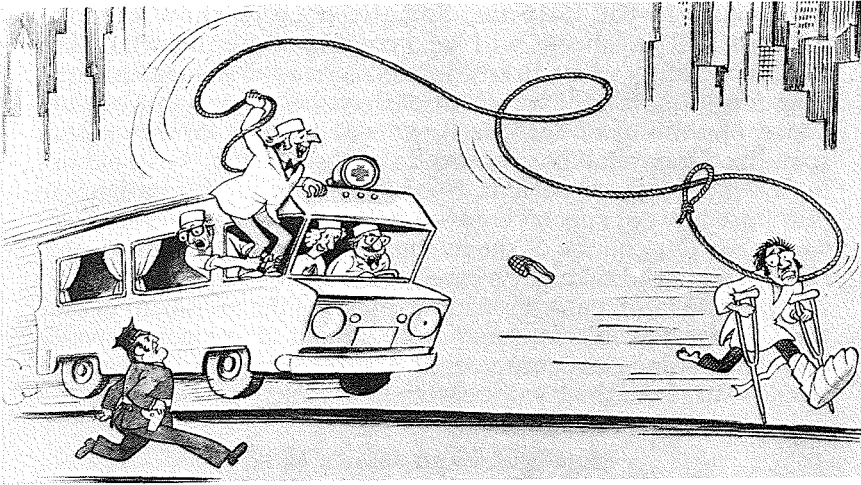
Nevertheless, one out of every four Russians is hospitalized every year (compared to one of seven Americans). Surgery, abortions, and broken bones are the ordinary hospital physician's stock in trade.* Specialized hospitals exist for the treatment of cancer, heart problems, and the like.

Once inside a hospital, patients sometimes find it hard to leave. Generous quotas fix the length of hospitalization for each operation—the stay after an appendectomy is 10 days; a hysterectomy, two weeks. But the rules also prevent patients from leaving *before* their allotted time is up, even if they are already fully recovered. Soviet citizens seem to have adapted to this system: Three San Francisco doctors who have treated many Soviet émigrés note that the "quality of care is judged by a Russian patient as length of time in bed." Indeed, the San Francisco Russians are suspicious of hospital physicians who are eager to send them home.

A Lethal Indifference

The Soviet hospital is a world of top-to-bottom rules, regulations, and quotas. If the number of appendectomies performed at a hospital falls below the annual target set by the Ministry of Health, more cases magically appear on the books. The same is true of hospital occupancy rates. Otherwise, the authorities in Moscow might trim next year's budget. Bureaucratic hugger-muggery extends all the way to the top. A few years ago, Dr. Boris Petrovskii, then Health Minister of the USSR, announced that 60 new special purpose hospitals had been built. "However," he added, "in some cities they exist only formally." By this, Petrovskii meant that the hospitals existed only on paper.

*Moscow condemns abortion and banned it between 1936 and 1955, but it is now available upon demand, except in the case of first pregnancies. Western demographers estimate that the average (non-Moslem) Soviet woman has six abortions during her lifetime; abortions outnumber live births by 4 to 1. Abortion is a major means of birth control, in part because contraceptive pills are in short supply and not widely accepted and because diaphragms come in only one ill-fitting size.



Soviet citizens proudly point to the low cost of health care. This cartoon from Krokodil depicts a patient trying to leave a U.S. hospital without first settling his \$2,000 bill.

In the wards and operating rooms of Soviet hospitals, the bureaucratic indifference that seems merely annoying in shops and government offices turns lethal. One Moscow cardiology clinic is reportedly located on the top floor of a five-story walk-up. Physicians, reduced to the status of state functionaries, often resort to practicing medicine by the numbers. If a patient exhibits some of the symptoms of, say, appendicitis, he may well be wheeled into the operating room without benefit of any further medical tests.*

Frequently, as American doctors treating Soviet émigrés have discovered, patients are kept in the dark about the nature of their illness. The "nine-to-five" mentality flourishes: Soviet physicians will not hesitate to drop everything as soon as their shift ends. Their bedside manner is notoriously chilly. In a 1977 survey of citizens' complaints about the quality of medical care in Kiev, *Literaturnaia Gazeta* told of one doctor who said to a patient: "You have a stomach ulcer and diabetes. You will not survive an operation. I simply do not know what to do with you."

There is no real deterrent to insensitivity and incompe-

*According to Feshbach, data from the Russian Republic for 1971-76 reveal that more than 25 percent of all cancer cases and 18 percent of heart- and blood-related diseases were misdiagnosed.

tence. Patients are seldom assigned to the same doctor on return visits to the hospital, and the doctors know that the patients and paychecks will keep coming no matter what they do. Physicians can be fired for gross errors, but medical malpractice suits and the payment of damages to patients are unheard of. And although the Soviets repeat *ad infinitum* that socialized medicine has removed the capitalistic "cash nexus" between doctor and patient, it is not uncommon for patients to purchase a bit of special care—a ruble or two to a nurse to ensure a regular change of sheets, much more to convince a superior specialist to take one's case.

Despite it all, patients seldom question the judgment of doctors. To do so would be *nekul'turno*, an act of arrogance. Naturally, physicians encourage that attitude—as any bureaucrat would—to make their work easier.

Mud Baths and Mare's Milk

Bureaucratic arteriosclerosis poses some peculiar hazards. Strictly enforced regulations dating from the days when it was believed that most infectious organisms were brought into hospitals from the outside require visitors to shed their coats at the hospital door. Inside, however, hygiene is slackly maintained.

William A. Knaus, a young Washington, D.C., internist, is one of the few American physicians to have spent a great deal of time in Soviet hospitals. In *Inside Russian Medicine* (1981), he tells of an American named David who was hospitalized for chronic gastritis in Moscow's Botkin Hospital. Because Westerners are sometimes brought there, the Botkin, a compound of pre-revolutionary and newer buildings, is probably above average. On David's floor, there were three toilets for 76 men. "These had no seats," Knaus writes, "and, unless one brought a morning copy of *Pravda*, no toilet paper." To make matters worse, Soviet nurses dispense enemas as freely as their American counterparts give back rubs. The toilets at the Botkin constantly overflowed onto the bathroom floor.

More than negligence is involved. The Soviets lack the disposable syringes, needles, and other implements that Western doctors take for granted. Transfusions, for example, are typically performed with steel needles and red rubber tubing, which are then rinsed and reused. Knaus also witnessed intravenous solutions being poured from open jars and doctors performing a minor operation without surgical gowns or masks. As a result of such lax enforcement of sterility, the incidence of postoperative infections is very high, affecting almost one-third of all surgery

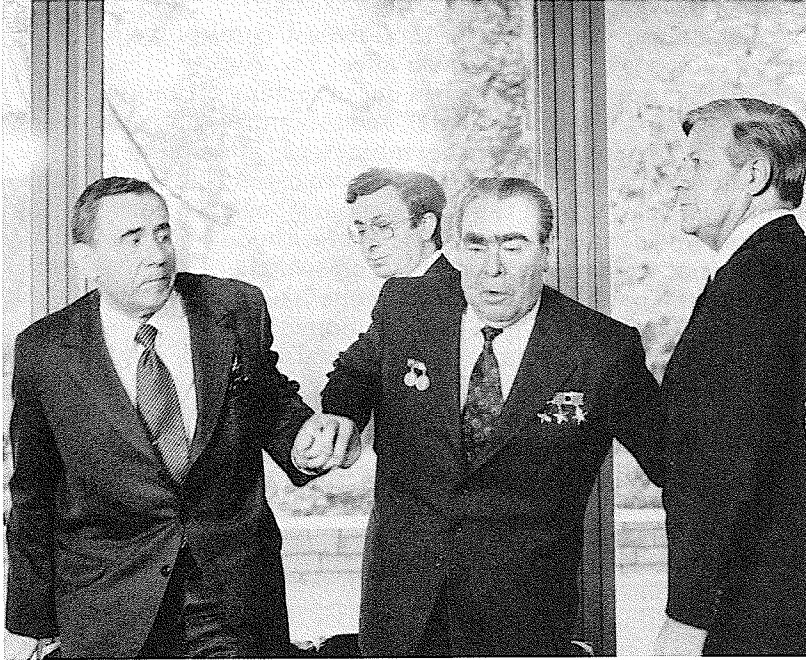
patients—roughly equivalent to the rate that prevails in Afghanistan, according to Knaus.

Shortages, which plague the lowliest rural polyclinic and the best Moscow hospitals, also affect the quality of care. Not only do doctors occasionally run out of certain antibiotics, insulin, glycerine (for heart patients), and other drugs, but even bandages, absorbent cotton, thermometers, and iodine can be difficult to procure at times. The pattern extends to basic equipment. Last year, a West German company began construction of the first wheelchair factory in the Soviet Union; today, patients who cannot walk are carried about on stretchers. A female physician told Knaus, "With a stethoscope like [yours], I could become the best doctor in Siberia." Sometimes even the black market cannot compensate for the legal economy's shortcomings. "Like many other foreign residents in Moscow," notes *New York Times* correspondent Hedrick Smith, "I was frequently approached by Russian friends with urgent pleas for help in obtaining critically needed medicines, unavailable at any price in Moscow."

Perhaps the brightest spot in the Soviet health care system is the sanatorium. There are about 2,280 of these scattered around the country, most of them devoted to the treatment of particular ailments (arthritis, diabetes, hypertension) that do not require regular hospitalization. Here the average citizen can get the kind of individualized care in relatively pleasant surroundings that is lacking elsewhere. A typical stay lasts 24 days, marked by a doctor's visit every fourth day, mud baths and mineral water baths on alternating days, sound wave and heat treatments, regular exercise, and generous portions of food (including *kumys*, or mare's milk, which is believed to have strong curative powers).

A Fundamental Illness

Access to the sanatoriums is controlled by labor unions, which distribute tickets as rewards to productive workers in lieu of raises, or to those workers who require special treatment. The sanatoriums serve some eight million Soviets annually. Tickets are highly prized. Often, a long wait, a bit of negotiation, and perhaps a few well-placed gifts are necessary to secure the privilege of a visit. Nobody knows if the sanatoriums' rather unorthodox treatments are effective, but patients seem to leave feeling happier. As one sanatorium doctor told Knaus, "A person's emotional reaction to disease is very important." In a way, these sanatoriums function as the Soviet Union's sugar pills.



Soviet leaders can turn abroad for medical help. Leonid Brezhnev, here stumbling at a 1978 meeting with Chancellor Helmut Schmidt of West Germany, reportedly had a pacemaker implanted by British surgeons.

At the apex of the Soviet medical pyramid is the complex of medical institutions, rest homes, and dispensaries that are reserved exclusively for the members of the Kremlin elite and their families, and that parallel the other perquisites of rank such as private dachas, chauffeured limousines, seaside vacation homes, and access to restricted shops selling foreign or scarce domestic goods.*

Even at the top, though, the limitations of the Soviet system still show. Restricted hospitals provide the best that Soviet medicine has to offer in the way of doctors, drugs, and technology (much of it imported from the satellite countries or

*Distinctions of rank persist *within* the Kremlin polyclinic. A Soviet endocrinologist told Knaus that "deputy ministers and persons of lower rank are seen in regular private cubicles, but ministers have special examining rooms . . . There are carpets on the floor, bookcases, a leather couch, and heavy red drapes over the windows. It is like a living room, not a clinic."

from the West). Nevertheless, it is not uncommon for Kremlin physicians to transport blood samples needing special analysis to Finland. Top Western specialists are sometimes called in for delicate operations.

Cardiovascular problems are the concern of a growing number of Soviet medical researchers. In 1983, Moscow christened a vast, new 23-building headquarters for its national Cardiology Research Center, built at a cost of some \$117 million. The scientists have their work cut out for them: While deaths from heart disease and other cardiovascular ills dropped steadily between 1960 and 1980 in the United States, they doubled in the Soviet Union. Alcoholism is a major contributing factor, along with smoking, which is on the increase despite vigorous public health campaigns. (Since 1977, some cigarette packs have borne the warning: "Smoking is Hazardous to Your Health.") Cancer, the number two killer and also on the rise (as it is in the United States), is the domain of other specialized hospitals and research institutes.*

No Easy Cure

Accidents, poisonings, and injuries, long the third leading cause of death (as in the United States) have also increased in number, but apparently not as rapidly as respiratory diseases. According to Feshbach, the incidence of influenza, pneumonia, and similar maladies quintupled between 1960 and 1979; they may now constitute the Soviet Union's number three cause of death. Other infectious diseases—whooping cough, diphtheria, measles, mumps, scarlet fever—have also been on the rise. The explanation? Feshbach speculates that Soviet vaccines and medications are inferior in quality, insufficiently refrigerated during shipping, and administered under unsanitary conditions that nullify their effects. And it is also possible that vaccine manufacturers are diluting their products to meet their production quotas.

The harshest indictment of Soviet health care, however, is the unprecedented upsurge in deaths of children before their first birthday. Between 1970 and 1980, these increased by

*If past performance is any guide, there is little cause for optimism about Soviet research. Russian medical scientists have pioneered a few new medical techniques—an ultrasound treatment that shatters gallstones without surgery, a surgical procedure called radial keratotomy that alleviates severe myopia—but they lag behind in most areas. One reason is money. The United States outspends the Soviet Union 25 to 1 in medical research. Complicating matters is the lack of cross-fertilization between theory and practice: Physicians are barred from laboratories, and researchers are confined mostly to their institutes and seldom teach.

roughly 25 percent, to 28 per 1,000 births. Better medical reporting in remote rural areas may account for 25 to 50 percent of the rise, but poor maternal health, exacerbated by smoking and drinking, as well as the revival of widespread infectious diseases doubtless play a large role. A concerted prenatal care and education effort by Moscow seems to have had little success. (The Soviets have published no official data on infant mortality since 1975.)

What conclusions can one draw about the overall quality of medical care in the Soviet Union?

With its plethora of physicians and hospital beds, Soviet medicine seems impressive. Its progress since the 1917 Revolution has been monumental. And yet the quality of care is low by Western standards. Indeed, in some respects, it resembles what one sees in the Third World.

Part of the problem is the Kremlin's tightfisted approach to medical care, which is unlikely to ease as long as military budgets remain high. But it would be foolish to argue that there is nothing wrong with Soviet medicine that a few billion rubles would not solve. The problem is not only that Soviet hospitals are short of cash but that the factories do not manufacture certain antibiotics, sutures, or respirators, and that the medical industry's suppliers do not deliver sufficient raw materials and component parts. The dead hand of bureaucracy is everywhere. The ills of Soviet medicine are the same as those of the Soviet system in general, and they cannot be cured without first treating the underlying problems.

THE HOUSING GAME

by Henry W. Morton

In "The Exchange," a story by the late Yuri Trifonov, a popular Russian writer who often dealt with the stratagems of the Soviet urban middle class, a Moscow woman changes her official apartment registration and legally moves in with her husband's dying mother—whom she hates.

She makes the shift for one important reason: to prevent the old lady's precious single room from reverting, upon her death, to the state. The woman reckons that, through the bartering system used by millions of city folk, she will be able to use the place to swap for more space for *her* family.

As the story suggests, urban housing remains one of the Soviet Union's major problems. Housing was bad under the tsars; it grew worse during Josef Stalin's reign (1924–53), when headlong industrialization policies drove peasants to urban factory sites and World War II destruction left more than 25 million homeless. The crowding of many families into one apartment became universal. By 1950, the average city resident had less than five square meters (about seven feet by seven feet) of living space to call his own. As late as 1960, some 60 percent of all city families lived communally, sharing rooms with others.

I vividly remember sitting in the office of M. I. Romanov, the vice-chairman in charge of housing for the Leningrad District of Moscow, one day in 1964. In four and a half hours, he saw 31 people, all of them seeking separate apartments. They came as supplicants entreating an official representative of Soviet power to grant them this favor, small for him but enormous for them, that would immeasurably improve their lives. Only three, all very sick, got satisfaction. The others accepted their fate with resignation, except for a few who began berating Romanov for having failed them in their hour of need.

Stalin's successors decided to try to eliminate the housing shortage, and since 1957 the state has built an average of 2.2 million units yearly, far more than any other country. In most cities, old housing districts are now outnumbered by new ones, ranging from "Khrushchev slums," four- or five-story walkups thrown up in the late 1950s,* to clusters of taller elevator build-

*Appalled by the housing shortage, Nikita Khrushchev approved hasty, slipshod construction. "Do you build a thousand adequate apartments or 700 good ones?" he asked. Rapid urbanization argued for mere adequacy. The USSR had two cities (Moscow and Leningrad) of more than one million in 1926; today it has 23, and apartments are the staple. Single-family houses may not be built in towns of more than 100,000.

ings (nine to 25 stories) built during the 1970s and '80s to limit urban sprawl. By 1982, the average urban living space per capita was up to nine square meters, or almost 100 square feet.

Typically, however, some citizens have fared better than others. Some Soviet families I knew and officials I interviewed in Moscow and Leningrad during the 1970s had their own apartments; a decade earlier, they were squeezed into one room and sharing kitchens and toilets with strangers. The knowledge that a class of housing "rich" exists has bred resentment among the millions of housing "poor" still awaiting a place of their own.

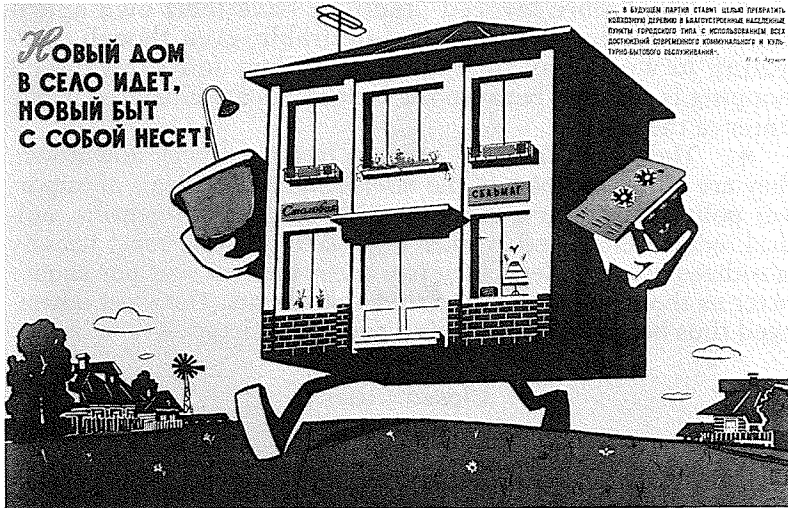
Even today, 40 years after World War II, the USSR has the worst housing shortage of any industrial nation. New construction notwithstanding, Soviet cities are still overwhelmed by the numbers of people who have come to them, or want to. Twenty percent of urban "households" were sharing apartments in 1980, and five percent lived in factory dormitories. The Soviet government claims that every year 10 million people improve their living situation in one way or another. But no statistics are published (as they are in other countries) on the gap between numbers of households and housing units. Yet the gap remains wide. Between 1973 and 1982, new marriages exceeded the number of new housing units built by 6,175,226. Young Soviet couples are destined to live with in-laws for years, perhaps decades.

Not surprisingly, good housing, being scarce, is one of the Soviet regime's rewards to the deserving. Along with a car and a country dacha, an apartment is one of any city family's most sought-after material goals. Unlike an auto, which costs about four times the average annual pay of an industrial worker, and an even more expensive dacha, a state-owned apartment is allocated free to the fortunate family that gets one. Rent, heavily subsidized, typically accounts for only five percent of a family's monthly earnings (versus roughly 30 percent in America).*

But low cost does not mean easy availability. Government agencies allocate state housing and approve all private housing transactions. (The state owns 75 percent of all urban units.)

*The Soviet cost of housing, as a percentage of income, was the lowest in the world when it was set in 1928. It has never been raised. The cheap rent, which today covers only one-third of the average cost of maintaining state-owned housing, is very popular with city-dwellers, although they pay for the rent subsidy through higher prices for clothing and other goods.

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"A new home is coming to the country, and with it, a new way of life." Despite the optimism of this 1960 poster, most rural folk still live in izbas, squat log cabins that lack indoor plumbing.

They do not do so on the basis of need, and never have.

After the Bolshevik Revolution, homes and apartments of the nobility and the bourgeoisie were divided among workers and peasants; some got more than others. In *Hope Abandoned* (1974), the second volume of her memoirs, Soviet author Nadezhda Mandelstam recalled how, during the early 1920s, writers in favor with the regime received privileged housing, even if only a room, as well as extra food rations; those not so highly regarded received nothing. Today, quarters are still apportioned, to a certain extent, by degree of "favor":

- The "least favored" urban-dwellers are those clustered beyond the borders of Moscow, Leningrad, and other large cities; they commute long distances to work by bus or train. Living in crowded tenements and dormitories, often in sight of the city's outermost high-rise buildings, they are the Soviet "urban poor," people who lack access to the amenities of the cities in which they toil, such as shops, theaters, and parks. Comfortable suburbs, as Westerners know them, do not exist.

- The "less favored" folk are usually relegated to shared apartments and dormitories, but these quarters are within the city limits. Possessing a legal right to live there, they can at least aspire to an apartment of their own. Meanwhile, they can enjoy urban amenities.

- The “more favored” families have their own apartments in new housing districts—desirable, even though commuting to work may take an hour by bus and subway and shopping is difficult because the best stores are clustered in the center of the city.

- The “most favored” citizens live in or near downtown. They are often members of the *nomenclatura*—officials of important political, military, state security, economic, scientific, cultural, educational, and worker organizations. The most heavily subsidized city-dwellers, they pay the same low rent per square meter as those elsewhere in shared apartments. The most advantaged thus become the system’s biggest beneficiaries.

Closed Cities

Whether they are old inner-city residences or new, prefabricated apartment blocks that seem to have sprung from a single blueprint, most urban housing structures are not “differentiated” for middle-class or working-class folk. In one older building, a typical 450 square-foot apartment with four bedrooms, kitchen, and one bath may house: a retired couple; a factory worker and his divorced wife and their daughter, all still together because he cannot find other lodging; a widow; and a young couple who work during the day and study at night. Another apartment of similar size may have only two families. A third may accommodate just one (privileged) family.

But “differentiation” is increasing. Government departments, the armed forces, the Committee of State Security (KGB), individual factories, and other organizations build apartments solely for their own employees. In the buildings erected by the Writers’ Union on Moscow’s Red Army Street near Dynamo Station, high-ranking people not only get first crack at apartments but can also obtain them for their relatives.

Class also counts in cooperatives, the state-built apartments primarily purchased by professionals and other members of the “intelligentsia” who pay to get better housing faster than do ordinary workers. The down payment for a two-room (plus kitchen) unit may be 6,500 rubles, more than three years’ pay for the typical industrial worker averaging 175 rubles a month. And space in the rare co-op that is near a subway station (most are built in remote districts) may require bribes of 1,000 rubles to the co-op chairman and the inspector who processes the application. Still, owners exhibit much pride of place. A Moscow engineer told a Westerner: “See our block. . . . We live in one made up entirely of cooperative apartments. Around us—over there,

and there—are workers' apartments. You see the difference very clearly in the mornings. The lights in workers' homes go on at seven, or earlier. In cooperative housing they may not be on until eight or nine."

Most of the Soviet Union's smaller cities and towns are unexciting and short of meat, butter, and better quality consumer goods and services. But the authorities do not want Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Kharkov, and other better supplied centers to be overrun by migrants; permission to move to the Big City is rarely granted. No lists of "closed" cities are published, but entry is controlled by a system built around the *propiska*, a residence permit that is affixed to the internal passport that everyone must carry. To live in a large city one must have a *propiska*. To be eligible for this permit, one must have housing. For that one needs—a *propiska*!

For a would-be migrant from perhaps the Caucasus or Murmansk, success depends on several factors, among them the popularity of the city (Moscow is the hardest to get into) and the person's profession, need, and "trustworthiness" based on his *kharakteristiki* (references). The steps, from acquiring a *propiska* to receiving comfortable housing, may take decades.

Without the sponsorship of, say, a government agency or factory, or an apartment elsewhere to exchange, one's chance of moving to a prized city is next to nil. The more prestigious an individual's job, the greater the demand for his skills, or the higher his party rank, the better his chances. Ordinary laborers may also succeed, if their services are needed—and if dormitory beds are available. A person from the provinces may become a *dvornik*, the live-in concierge who cleans the hallways of an apartment building and serves as an agent for the local police; it has been difficult to get Muscovites to take such work.

Beating the System

How does the would-be urbanite proceed? First, a residence must be acquired; the *propiska* is always for a specific street address. Thus, to get on a waiting list for an apartment, one must first find a room to occupy as a subtenant. Then one goes to the local housing office to see the *pasportist*, the official in charge of residence permits. He takes the *propiska* application to the district police station, where it is processed.

The next hurdle, for one who gets a *propiska*, is to move into an apartment of his own. If one already enjoys the minimum "sanitary norm" of nine square meters of space, getting on the waiting list for new quarters is virtually impossible—without



Muscovites peruse apartment exchange notices. Compounding the urban housing shortage is the fact that retired people make up a large portion of the cities' population and have no desire to move to more primitive rural areas.

connections. In newer towns, of which there are now over 1,000 in the Soviet Union, housing is controlled primarily by the industries that "run" the area. In older towns and large cities, as much as half or more of the residential stock is owned by the municipality. A commission of the local district council decides who goes on the waiting list, and in what order.

In Leningrad, for instance, priority consideration is promised to (among other categories) long-time permanent residents with less than seven square meters of space, those living in housing declared unfit, and those who have worked for many years in some local enterprise. Some applicants can legally be taken out of turn, such as holders of high awards like Hero of the Soviet Union, and World War II invalids.

Still other categories of people may be entitled to more than the standard nine meters of space. Most of these categories were established in the early 1930s by Stalin as part of a campaign against egalitarianism intended to reward those citizens who could do most for industrialization. Those favored include a deliberately vague category of "responsible workers"—colonels and higher ranks in the military, inventors, and industrial efficiency specialists. Particularly blessed, presumably because many work at home, are writers, composers, sculptors, archi-

sects, and scholars who are Ph.D.s. They may have 20 square meters above the norm.

The *propiska* system, like other controls in Soviet society, is in the good Russian tradition—beatable. One quick route out of the provinces and into Moscow, Leningrad, or Kiev is to find a marriageable resident with a *propiska*. A 1970 *Izvestiya* article told of a “marriage broker” named Leonid Kazakevich. A resident of Baku, he got into the business when he married a woman named Marina to obtain his Moscow residence permit (it cost him a car). To recover expenses and make further profit, he married Lyuba, Natasha, and Margarita in succession so that they could live legally at his address. Then he began to arrange marriages for others. He made thousands of rubles before he was apprehended.

Fictitious divorces are another urban stratagem. A Soviet account in *Sotsialisticheskaya Zakonnost'* (*Socialist Law*) tells of a “Leonid” and his family of three who were all living in one room when they got on the waiting list for a larger apartment. By the time they were assigned a three-room flat, Leonid refused to give up his room, arguing that he had divorced his wife. Later it was found that all four still lived together and that they had exchanged their housing *and* the “divorced” husband’s room for grander quarters.

In the Soviet “society of connections,” who you know will dictate how well you are housed—as well as what food you eat, what clothing you wear, and what theater tickets you can get. While it may be essential at some point to “buy” an official, more important will be one’s *blat* (influence) or family ties. Many commodities can be obtained only as a favor, which must be repaid, and a good apartment is one of the scarcest commodities. “Too often the decisive factor is not the waiting list,” a *Pravda* article complained, “but a sudden telephone call . . . [after which] they give the apartments to the families of football players and the whole queue is pushed back.”

Trading Up

And like any scarce commodity, housing is hoarded. Why give up something valuable when it can be put to good use in exchange for something else? As the woman in the Trifonov story well knew, two apartments (or parts of them) can be swapped for a larger apartment, held as a stand-by in case of divorce, or used for rental income and as a legacy to one’s children.

Those discouraged by the official allocation process can also try their luck in the officially sanctioned housing market, a

THE PRICE OF PROGRESS

Early in the evening of September 15, 1983, one billion gallons of caustic potassium waste burst through a dam at the Stebnikovskii Fertilizer Plant in L'vov Province, roughly 650 miles south of Moscow.

Cascading through Ukrainian villages and grainfields to the Dnestr River, the toxic flood killed plant and animal life along the river for 300 miles. "L'vov Canal"—the name given the spill by U.S. Embassy officials—led to a high-level Soviet investigation. Almost two years later, *Izvestiya* announced the jailing of five officials at the plant for, among other things, "a lack of the necessary technical and working discipline."

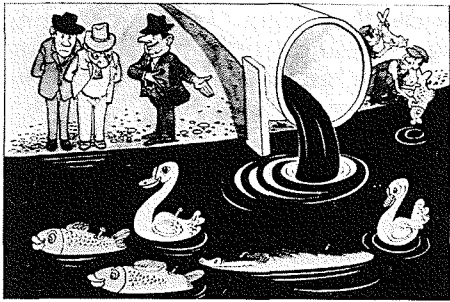
In the past, Moscow has not released comprehensive information about environmental problems. Western scientists are still puzzled by a 1958 accident at a nuclear waste dump in the Ural Mountains of Chelyabinsk Province—a mishap that scarred a 50-square-mile area. Levels of conventional pollution are no easier to verify. One underground, or "samizdat," book, *The Destruction of Nature in the Soviet Union* (1980), describes wide-scale abuses of land, sea, and air. As yet, no documentation of its assertions exists.

Even Soviet leaders now admit that pollution, once dismissed as a "capitalist evil," has become a socialist reality. Three months after L'vov Canal, Communist Party Secretary Yuri Andropov stressed that "the protection of nature requires even more persistent . . . efforts." The Soviet press notes that cities from Lipetsk to Leningrad suffer from air pollution; that oil spills, agricultural pesticides, and chemical wastes are poisoning the waters of the Baltic, Black, and Caspian seas; and that many nuclear plants suffer from faulty design. Some 300 miles south of Moscow are the iron ore deposits of the Kursk Magnetic Anomaly. Visitors to the area can see pits 1,500 feet deep next to 300-foot mounds of rich, black earth. In 20 years, none of the topsoil has been returned to the land.

Overall, pollution of air and water in the Soviet Union is probably slightly lower than in the United States, largely because Soviet manufacturing output is roughly half that of the United States. But the centrally planned Soviet economy creates problems not encountered in the West. Driven by a bonus system that rewards output alone, Soviet factory managers pursue production quotas with single-minded devotion. They will gladly incur fines for polluting in order to earn a year-end production bonus. As V. Petrov, the Soviet author of *Ecology and Law* (1982), observed, "Victors are not judged." The USSR has no counterpart to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Instead, bureaus such as the Health Ministry and the Water Inspectorate must find and punish polluters on their own.

Another obstacle to a balanced environmental policy is ideology. The exploitation of nature by man figures prominently in the Soviet production ethic. One example: The Soviets are pressing forward with plans to reverse the northward flow of Siberia's Ob' and Irtysh

rivers in order to bring water to the vast, arid plains of Central Asia to the south. Tampering with the river system has had unhappy results elsewhere. Twenty years of tapping the sources of the Aral Sea—once the world's fourth largest inland body of water—has left it half its former size. By the year 2000, it will be dry. Not only will



the region's climate change, but concentrations of salt from the lake bed will poison surrounding farmland.

The USSR does have an "unofficial" conservation movement. But access to pertinent data is restricted; scientists and technocrats, not ordinary Soviet citizens, are usually the environmentalists. Their efforts

have met with little success. During the 1960s, in an unprecedented act that brought *okrana okruzhayuschei sredi* (environmental protection) into the Soviet vocabulary, the scientific and literary community fought the construction of a pulp plant on the shores of Siberia's Lake Baikal. The Ministry of Timber, Pulp and Paper, and Wood Processing built the factory anyway. But it did agree to install pollution control devices—the first in the industry's history. Unfortunately, the machinery has not worked properly, and the USSR Academy of Sciences reported in 1977 that the lake was "on the brink of irreversible changes."

The record of pollution-control technology is equally dismal in other areas. In Kazakh's capital of Alma Ata, a manufacturing center in the Tian Shan mountains near the Chinese border, fewer than one-third of the factories have filtration equipment. Smoke pollution there in 1976 was 11.6 times the maximum permissible level; soot, 27 times; and coal dust, 31 times. Since then, the levels have risen—a sign that air filters and sewage treatment plants remain an afterthought in the minds of Five Year Planners.

In theory, the centralized Soviet regime could quickly rescue Mother Nature. Compared to Western governments, the Kremlin wields enormous decision-making power. National wilderness preserves can be—and have been—established at the stroke of a pen. But Moscow frequently bends the rules that it makes. Logging and mining on the preserves is not unusual. Until the Soviets adopt a consistent policy, their environment will continue to suffer.

—Susan Finder

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world of various private deals. Except in the case of cooperatives, where the price is set by the government, the cost of a transaction is based on a going rate that is always much higher than the permitted price, and therefore illegal.

People can trade up to better housing, provided they have a room or apartment—state-owned or cooperative—registered in their name already. Notices that begin “I am exchanging” are plastered all over kiosks, bus and trolley-bus stops, lamp posts, fences, and building walls, and a *Bulletin for Housing Exchanges* is published in most large cities.

Walking Want Ads

The ads tend to be revealing. A Moscow *Bulletin* offering: “Adjoining. 18 & 7 m² (one additional family with 4 persons), kitchen 9.5 m², hot water, 8th floor of an eight floor bldg., lift, balcony, incinerator; Denis Davidov St. (Kutusov Metro Station); telephone number; from 5 P.M.

Wanted: 2 rooms in different bldgs. except ground floor in the Kiev, Kuntsevo districts.”

The ad indicates that a couple is divorcing and seeking separate rooms. They wish to remain close to their excellent location near the center, yet not too far from the Moscow woods. The phone is a big plus.* That the flat is communal (“one additional family”) and that the rooms are adjoining rather than off a hallway are drawbacks.

The ideal Moscow apartment has one more room (including the kitchen) than the number of persons living in it. It should be in the center of town in an old brick or stone building with high ceilings and have gas, hot water and central heating, a toilet separate from the bathroom, and a balcony as well as a telephone. It should be on an upper floor, but not the top (the roof might leak), close to a subway station, and equipped with an elevator and an incinerator.

Would-be swappers haunt the Bureau of Housing Exchanges in every large city for months, even years, while poring over notices and contacting “interested parties.” Suggestions that municipal bureaus could help out with match-ups via computers have fallen on the deaf ears of officialdom. What does function is a lively open-air “stock market” in rooms and apart-

*The Soviets claim to have 24 million phones, for a population of over 262 million. (The United States has 151 million phones, for 235 million people.) Though all but four million of the phones are in urban areas, many city-dwellers lack them, and even those who are equipped are bedeviled by inadequate directories. Some areas have no books. Moscow’s book contains no residential numbers; one obtains a private number by calling information and supplying the party’s patronymic and birth date.

ments that operates near the bureau. The *New York Times's* Hedrick Smith described the scene outside the bureau on Moscow's Prospekt Mira on a blustery November Sunday:

"Hundreds of people, hands thrust in their pockets and scarves wound tightly against the cold, carry placards around their necks or hand-scrawled signs pinned to their sturdy cloth coats. Occasionally, they would pause to converse quietly in twos and threes and then walk on.

"But these are not Soviet strikers, they are walking want ads: Muscovites advertising apartments for exchange, eager to improve their living quarters. . . . At the far end of the lane, students and officers swarm around a few landlords offering a room, a bed, or a small apartment for rent. Some students turn up their noses at a two-room unit in an old building with gas heat but no indoor plumbing. But a middle-aged woman and a married couple, less fussy, compete for it. In minutes, the apartment is gone for 50 rubles monthly, paid a year in advance."

5,000-Ruble Shacks

Strong sponsorship helps. A Moscow family of three had a car accident in which the wife was killed. The widower's parents, living about 100 miles away, wished to move to the capital to be with their bereaved son and three-year-old grandson. The grandfather was a retired senior Army officer with a two-room apartment. After months of trying, the grandfather, lacking a sponsor, failed to organize an exchange. Finally he visited prominent Army colleagues in the capital. With their help, and much bribe money, he arranged a chain of exchanges involving families in five cities. The grandfather and his wife got permits for a one-room apartment in Moscow.

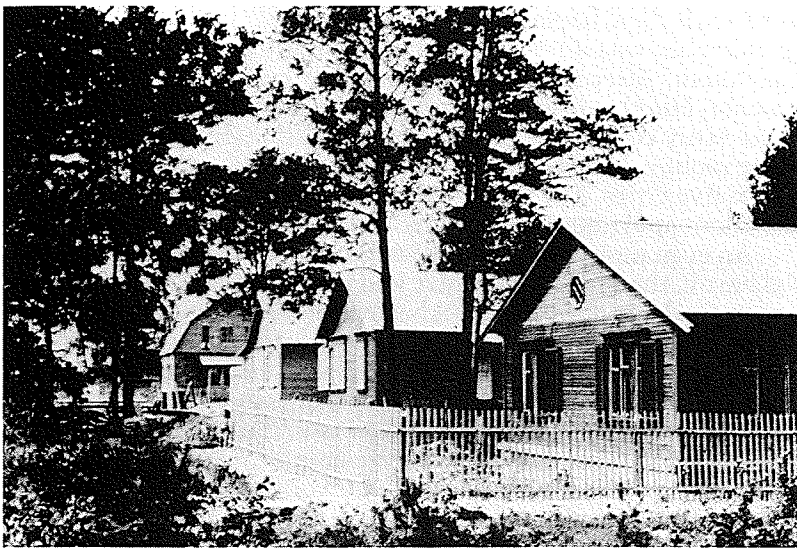
An even more complex exchange was arranged by Andrey D. Sakharov, the nuclear scientist and dissident, before he was exiled to Gorky in 1980. The Sakharovs wanted to move with their daughter, son-in-law, two small grandchildren, and Sakharov's mother-in-law into a four-room Moscow apartment occupied by three other households. In all, the exchange involved 17 persons and five apartments and took a year to arrange. Then it was vetoed by the district soviet executive committee in Moscow. The declared reason: One of the women involved in the deal already had six square meters of living space above the legal norm and would gain another three-quarters of a square meter if the shuffle were permitted.

Diplomats, armed forces members, bureaucrats, and others who are transferred temporarily may profit from subleasing.

Every Wednesday, *Vechernaya Moskva* (*Evening Moscow*) publishes ads for such sublet rooms and apartments, which may rent for 50 rubles per month or more—the cost of, say, a decent watch, or one-fourth of the price of a suit. If the renter has a *propiska*, a sublease is usually approved even though officials know that the real rent will be many times higher than the legal fee of a few rubles. Like the high co-op prices, illegal rents are overlooked: In a zero-vacancy situation, black market rentals are a necessary safety valve.

Second homes are also in demand. Each summer more than 25 percent of all Muscovites and Leningraders rent a country dacha.

High party and government functionaries enjoy state-owned dachas, and other senior officials may even own theirs. For less favored city folk, finding and renting a dacha, however small, is a major project, and the annual search begins as early as February. The joy of discovery can turn sour, as a writer related in *Sovetskaya Kul'tura* (*Soviet Culture*): "A friend once rented a dacha and in the summer found that the small house had been divided into nine different 'closets' for as many families. We finally found a suitable dacha, but the price was staggering. For the same amount, the entire family could have gone



A row of modest dachas in the countryside near Moscow. Elsewhere, just east of the capital, near the village of Uspenskoye, are dachas of the elite—multi-story houses surrounded by several acres of land and high walls.

on holiday to the Black Sea for three months." In the sunny Baltic republics, a room in a private home will cost four rubles a day, even with three or four people sharing it.

Those who try to buy are shocked to find that a little shack called a *khibarka* costs about 5,000 rubles. A comfortable country home with four or more rooms and modern conveniences will sell for anywhere from 15,000 rubles—a bit more than the cost of a new Volga car—to 50,000 rubles. Of course, one can build, provided one can obtain a plot of land, which in theory belongs to the state.

Mushrooms in the Rain

One way to get a plot is to buy an abandoned farmhouse. ARTICLE 73 of the Land Code, which implies that land can be transferred only between permanent residents in a rural community, is an obstacle, but it is not insurmountable. "If you can come to an understanding with the local soviet," maintains a dacha expert, "to help them in some way or simply bribe them, you can get a dacha cheap, from 800 to 4,000 rubles."

All in all, getting housing *na levo* (under the table or through influence) is a well-established practice that lubricates rusty bureaucratic machinery. Trying to sniff out which bureaucrats will accept money is tricky because a bribery conviction carries a sentence of eight years. But if an official openly asks for money, there is probably no problem.

Not all bribe-takers can be trusted, however. A middle-aged lady in Astrakhan, rumored to have contact with an important member of the city's executive committee, asked 800 to 2,500 rubles in return for help in getting an apartment. Said the report in the journal *Sotsialisticheskaya Industriya* (*Socialist Industry*): "In four years some 40 desperate apartment seekers, including professional people and party members, paid her a total of 50,000 rubles in bribes before it was discovered that she had no contacts at all."

After a new Party secretary in Georgia, a republic well known for its citizens' high living and disdain for regulations, denounced corrupt housing practices in 1972, a flurry of investigations ensued. It was found, for instance, that a construction cooperative in Tbilisi that initially had announced it would build three housing units of 160 apartments went on to erect 16 high rises with 1,281 apartments—many were sold for high profits to families who did not even live in Tbilisi. In Armenia, the directors of the semiconductor factory in the satellite-town of Abovyan decided to build new housing "for their workers" 11

miles away in the center of Yerevan, Armenia's capital. All 48 units were assigned to the factory's management.

Local party and government officials, state bank directors, and others often use their influence to build oversized homes (far in excess of the 60 square meters of space permitted for such persons' households) on illegally assigned plots, using stolen building materials and purloined state machinery. They may own several private homes, although legally only one is allowed per household, while still maintaining a state-owned apartment in the city. *Pravda* once reported that in Zaleshchiki, a resort town on the Dnestr River in the Ukraine, "two- and three-story homes are popping up like mushrooms in the rain" with illegal dimensions (average space: 100 square meters) on illegally obtained plots. In Georgia in 1974, it was found that 990 "imposing" mansions were built in the small community of Tskhvarichamia with materials and manpower whose costs, for the most part, were charged to the state. The intended occupants included the first secretary of a district committee in Tbilisi and the deputy director of the Tbilisi restaurant trust.

And so on. Self-aggrandizing provincial officials, and those of the small republics, are periodically criticized and sometimes even removed for their sins. But the travails of honest functionaries also get some notice, as in Leningrad writer Daniil Granin's poignant novel, *The Picture*.

The story deals with a provincial Party boss named Losev, mayor of Lykov, a small town. "Everywhere in his job," Granin writes, "he kept running into the bloody problem of housing. The shortage of living space tormented him relentlessly day in and day out. . . . People waited for flats, for a room, for several years; the queue did not get any shorter. It was a kind of curse."

New housing blocks rose in Lykov, but demand climbed faster. "All the neighborhood kids, who had only just been born, were suddenly shaving or putting on makeup and then getting married, and sitting in his office—plump, doleful madonnas and strapping great lads with moustaches—all asking for flats. Their rapid growth and fecundity mortified him. He was besieged on all sides by queue jumpers; everyone's circumstances were urgent, catastrophic, unique . . ."

This was not the struggling 1950s or '60s. *The Picture* was published in 1980.

POVERTY IN THE SOVIET UNION

by Mervyn Matthews

In August 1978, while visiting the Soviet Union, I decided to take the local train from Moscow to Vladimir, the capital of a former principedom some 100 miles to the east.

At Moscow's Kursk station, a rather disheveled man in his mid-30s boarded the crowded car and proceeded to address his fellow riders. "Comrades," he began, "would you help me?" He then went on to relate how, as an epileptic, he could find no steady work and was surviving on a pension of a mere 25 rubles a month—about \$37.50 according to the prevailing official exchange rate, and less than one-sixth the average Soviet wage. Ending his speech, he went around the car with hat in hand, collecting a few rubles and kopecks.

The panhandling seemed to upset none of the other passengers. But to me, a foreigner in Moscow, so open a declaration of hardship came as a surprise.

Westerners familiar with the beggars and street people of New York, Paris, or London would have trouble finding their counterparts on the broad avenues that cross the Soviet capital. People whom we would recognize as "poor" tend rather to congregate at places like the waiting hall of Kiev Railway Station, where crowds of homeward-bound peasants huddle on wooden benches, surrounded by overstuffed suitcases bound with string; or at Danilov Cemetery on the city's outskirts, where indigents stand by the gates, soliciting spare change from passers-by and keeping a watchful eye out for the local militia. None of these locales are on the visitor's standard Intourist itinerary.

Statistical evidence of poverty is equally well hidden. The official ideology is discreetly silent about its existence. Theoretically, the advent of the workers' state was to ensure the gradual elimination of social evils. During the late 1920s, Josef Stalin encouraged that belief by suppressing the publication of data pertaining to crime and other "negative" social phenomena; later, he had the compilers of the 1937 census arrested. Soviet statisticians have since been obliged to reconcile their bleak pictures of socialist reality with bland socialist theory.

As outside observers, we must consider ourselves grateful to Nikita Khrushchev, leader of the USSR from 1953 to 1964, who relaxed the censorship of some scholarly findings and al-

lowed the publication of (idealized) *minimum* family budgets. But even today, the term "poor" cannot be used in official Soviet publications to describe any social group. To avoid any embarrassing semantic problems, Soviet sociologists still rely on the euphemism "underprovision," or *maloobespechennost'*, in place of "poverty."

During the late 1950s, the Kremlin instructed a number of institutes to assess the minimum consumption requirements of a contemporary urban family. By 1965, several "minimum budgets" had been prepared. One of the later variants, published by G. S. Sarkisyan and N. P. Kuznetsova in 1967, may still serve, with reservations, as a yardstick for measuring poverty in the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1980s.

The budget covered the monthly needs of an urban worker's family, comprising a husband and wife, both working, a 13-year-old boy, and an 8-year-old girl. With due allowance for state subsidies and services, the monthly expenses were set at 51 rubles and 40 kopecks per head.

Food purchases took up a relatively high proportion of expenses (56 percent); clothes required some 20 percent; housing and communal services, such as laundry and garbage collection, claimed only 5.4 percent, partly because they were state-subsidized and partly because provision of these services was meager.* The small sums allocated for furniture and household goods—among them a TV set and refrigerator—betokened spartan accommodations. No funds were allotted for medicine and education, since both were provided by the state at no cost. There was no provision for savings.

Sarkisyan and Kuznetsova also devised a minimum budget for the early or mid-1970s. The new version required an income per capita of 66.6 rubles but maintained roughly the same proportion of expenditures. It required two after-tax wages of 133.2 rubles each—a national average reached only by 1976. No detailed changes seem to have been made in Sarkisyan and Kuznetsova's original figures—at least, no one has published them. If we revise them by a very cautious four percent to cover inflation,

*In 1984, an average-size U.S. family (2.7 "members") with total earnings of \$10,116 (below the poverty threshold of \$10,614 for a family of four) spent 33 percent of its income on housing, 22 percent on food, 18 percent on transportation, and five percent on clothing.

Mervyn Matthews, 52, teaches Soviet studies at the University of Surrey in England. He received a B.A. from Manchester University (1955) and a D.Phil. from Oxford University (1962). Among his works are Class and Society in Soviet Russia (1972), Privilege in the Soviet Union (1978), and the forthcoming Poverty in the Soviet Union.



During the famed "kitchen debate" on July 24, 1959, Premier Nikita Khrushchev brushed off Vice President Richard Nixon's guided tour of an American kitchen exhibit in Moscow, saying: "Many things you've shown us are interesting but they are not needed in life."

the 267-ruble poverty threshold allowed for in the mid-1970s would rise to about 278 rubles in 1981. By then, the *average* Soviet wage had reached 172.5 rubles, or \$233 according to the (admittedly artificial) official exchange rate. After taxes, two working parents would have taken home about 310 rubles, still uncomfortably close to the earlier "minimum threshold."

The question of *how many* of the USSR's 270 million inhabitants are poor can be answered only in terms of probabilities. The Soviet Union publishes no comprehensive data on wage and income distribution. To do so would reveal the existence of a socioeconomic pecking order, a distinctly capitalist phenomenon that undermines the theory of a unified, egalitarian society.

Only by examining articles in Soviet labor journals, directors' handbooks, and the few available generalized statistics can one gain some idea of the extent of poverty in the Soviet Union. In rough fashion, these sources suggest the nature and size of those groups that cling to the bottom rungs of the Soviet income ladder, as well as those higher up.

Disparities in income between the richest and poorest folk

do not seem to be nearly so great in the Soviet Union as they are in the United States. If one were to depict the income distribution of the USSR's 114 million nonfarm labor force in the shape of a diamond, it would be much shorter on the top, much broader at its midpoint, and much longer on the bottom than its U.S. counterpart. Nonetheless, differences in income have at times been serious enough to trouble the leadership itself—including Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev, who both made big efforts to narrow the differentials.

At the top of the income diamond are the elite members of the Soviet "intelligentsia," a group defined broadly by Lenin in 1904 as "all educated people, representatives of mental labor as distinct from representatives of physical labor." The very pinnacle is made up of the top party and state officials, marshals in the Soviet Armed Forces, and first secretaries of artistic organizations like the Union of Musical Composers. Just beneath them, one might find directors of academic research institutes, factory managers, and slightly lower ranking military and diplomatic personnel. During the early 1970s, such people probably accounted for the roughly 0.20 percent of the Soviet citizenry that received monthly salaries of 450 rubles or more.

Poverty for 40 Percent

Moving down the diamond, one encounters professors at universities or research institutes, engineers, artists, writers, and a horde of middle-grade Party and state officials. The physical laborers most likely to earn above 200 rubles are those in mining and heavy manufacturing: Coal miners in the Kuznetsk Basin, steel mill workers in the Urals, and oilmen in western Siberia might earn anywhere from 200 to 300 rubles a month.

The Soviet labor force, however, still contains many low-skilled industrial laborers and poorly paid service sector workers (perhaps 30–40 million in 1981). Although in general most of these Soviet workers toil at less skilled tasks than their U.S. counterparts, some occupations that are well paid in the United States bring little remuneration in the USSR. A Soviet doctor, for example, might earn only 120 to 170 rubles. Less remarkable is the fact that teachers could take home from 85 to 135 rubles, or that janitors, cleaners, and doorkeepers could earn as little as 70 rubles a month.

Most surprising, however, is that so many Soviet citizens evidently received less than the 133.2 ruble single-income poverty threshold contained in the Sarkisyan-Kuznetsova budget. Counting the 13.2 million collective farm members—most of

**THE COST OF LIVING:
A TALE OF THREE CITIES**

Keith Bush, director of Central Research for Radio Liberty, compared the purchasing power in 1982 of industrial workers in the capitals of the United States, France, and the Soviet Union. His calculations of how much work-time is required to buy certain items are based on average gross earnings and prices as of December 1981.

	Washington	Paris	Moscow
	(minutes of work-time)		
Loaf of white bread (one pound)	7.26	8.16	7.71
One pound of sausages	14.97	34.01	72.56
One dozen eggs (cheapest)	9.33	15.33	55.00
One pound of fish (cod)	27.66	53.51	21.32
One pound of butter	25.40	21.77	100.68
One roll of toilet paper	3.50	6.50	16.00
One bottle of aspirin (cheapest)	5.00	21.00	246.00
One pack of cigarettes (20 cigarettes)	9.00	8.00	15.00
One subway fare (two-mile ride)	7.00	4.00	3.00
	(hours of work-time)		
Monthly rent	51.00	39.00	12.00
Color TV	65.00	106.00	701.00
	(months of work-time)		
Small car	5.00	8.00	53.00

whom earned less than 100 rubles a month—the “poor,” as defined by Soviet statistical parameters, must have numbered no less than *two-fifths* of the entire Soviet population in 1981.

Salaries tell only part of the story. Many higher ranking Soviet citizens live not just on their official income but by means of a special network of goods and services. As journalist Hedrick Smith observes, such advantages “are beyond the reach of ordinary citizens because they are a dividend of political rank or personal achievement in the service of the state.”

A large proportion of the country’s wage earners also

manage to supplement their income by dabbling in the illegal "second," or "black," economy: Petty bureaucrats solicit bribes; delivery men haul freight on the side; doctors, plumbers, and house painters make undeclared house calls. Having control over fewer commodities or services, poor families evidently reap fewer rewards from any illegal activities, perhaps 20 to 25 rubles a month.

Those Soviet citizens who, by hook or by crook, cannot make ends meet may turn to the state for support. Pensions are normally paid to men over 60, women over 55, and to those who are disabled, widowed, or have lost their principal means of support. (Others eligible for some state assistance include some eight million single-parent households.) In 1981, the Soviet Union dispensed 35.4 billion rubles in pension payments of various kinds. Divided among the country's 50.2 million recipients, that worked out, in crude terms, to only 58.8 rubles a month—below the 66.6 ruble per capita poverty threshold. (In addition, the minimum monthly pension for peasants was set at a mere 28 rubles.) Many elderly citizens take jobs after reaching retirement, a trend strongly encouraged by the authorities. Others survive by pooling resources with their children.

Three Decades Behind

Such conditions mock the 1961 Communist Party Program's expansive prediction that, by 1980, the Soviet Union would boast "the highest living standards in the world." Indeed, the survey that my colleagues and I have conducted among Soviet émigrés suggests that members of the Soviet "underclass" live under significantly worse conditions than their Western counterparts. Sponsored by the U.S. National Council for Soviet and East European Research, this work drew on the responses of 348 families, all of whom left the USSR after 1977. They were chosen on the basis of their income per capita (below 70 rubles) and asked not only to describe their living accommodations but also how their lives compared with those of other Soviet citizens.

The past three decades have seen impressive gains in the *overall* Soviet standard of living. Since 1950, real consumption per capita has risen at an average annual rate of 3.4 percent—equivalent to a tripling of the goods and services purchased by the average Soviet citizen.

Yet as economist Gertrude Schroeder points out, "Soviet living standards remain drab and essentially primitive by Western standards and also compare unfavorably with much of Eastern

Europe." Even those statistics that the Soviet authorities are proud enough to publish show a big lag. In 1981, some 65 percent of all Soviet households had refrigerators, against over 90 percent in the United States, 85 percent in Spain, and 80 percent in Poland. Only 55 percent had washing machines, versus 74 percent in the United States, 90 percent in Italy, and 80 percent in Yugoslavia. If the living standards of the average Soviet citizen trail two or three decades behind those of the average U.S. resident, those of the Soviet poor are certainly even less advanced.

No Fruit, No Lettuce

Nowhere is this truth more evident than in their diet. Food ranks as the most important consumer commodity of the poor, taking up over 60 percent of the income of families in the émigré sample. The diet they reported was in many respects way below the norms stipulated by the idealized 1967 Sarkisyan-Kuznetsova budget. In general terms, the Soviet poor today eat as well as the average Soviet citizen did some 15 years ago. But the average Soviet citizen still consumes far less meat, fruit, and vegetable oil and vastly more bread, potatoes, and milk than his American counterpart.*

Those émigrés whom we interviewed reported that they had bought very few vegetables other than the most common, such as cabbage, beets, onions, and carrots. During the winter, 60 percent purchased no fruit and 25 percent no lettuce or other salad vegetables. One-third rarely, if ever, ate imported oranges, lemons, and bananas, or cakes and other confectionaries.

Lack of income was not the only problem. Excluded from the network of restricted stores used by the more influential and affluent, the poor had to purchase much of their food at state enterprises, where long queues all too often lead to nothing but neat, empty shelves. The collective markets run by peasant farmers offer a more reliable supply of market produce, but the prices are usually at least double those of the state shops.

Surprisingly, 28 percent of those interviewed termed their diet "satisfactory"; another 10 percent had no particular opinion, which amounted to the same reaction. Most likely, their answers reflected perennially low expectations or an ignorance of what might be bought under more plentiful conditions.

*In 1980, for example, Soviet consumption per capita of beef (11 kilograms) stood below not only that of the United States (46.9 kg.) but also below that of Poland (18.5 kg.) and Yugoslavia (14.8 kg.). To judge from data published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Americans who lived in households earning from \$6,000 to \$10,000 in 1977—when the poverty threshold was \$6,191—annually consumed 30 percent more meat and fish, 45 percent more fruit, and roughly the same amount of vegetables as those interviewed in the émigré survey.

A beggar on the streets of Kazan, capital of Tatar. Strict vagrancy laws normally keep indigents—usually alcoholics or invalids—off the streets.



Feelings about the supply of clothing, however, were much less benign. Sixty-seven percent declared that clothing was an “acute problem,” and another 30 percent called it a “problem.” Almost daily, *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* feature articles or letters lamenting the quality and quantity of Soviet clothing; in February 1985, Soviet Premier Konstantin Chernenko devoted much of a Politburo speech to discussing a chronic shortage of footwear. The “poverty” wardrobe detailed by Sarkisyan and Kuznetsova contained, for some reason, a relatively lavish assortment of garments. The husband, for example, was assumed to have a winter coat, a light coat and mackintosh, two suits, working clothes, a “half coat,” two pairs of trousers, seven pairs of socks, shirts, linen, and hats. Shoes, oddly enough, were omitted.

In their wisdom, Sarkisyan and Kuznetsova allotted 43 rubles per month to cover clothing costs. But clothing, at least in Moscow, is relatively expensive. In 1982, a T-shirt cost \$4.17 (versus \$1.79 in Washington, D.C.); a pair of men’s socks, \$3.45 (versus \$2.50); a men’s raincoat, \$121.70 (versus \$69.95). By our estimates, the Sarkisyan-Kuznetsova wardrobe—including shoes—would have cost a minimum of 1,100 rubles per person, which at 43 rubles per head would mean the equivalent of eight

and a half years' wear on every item.

After food and clothing, housing ranks as the greatest expense facing the poor. Sarkisyan and Kuznetsova budgeted five percent of family income for shelter. The results of our sample suggest that, in reality, the poor spend far more. While the average rent in state-supplied housing was indeed quite low (about nine rubles a month), payments for rent, electricity, gas, telephone, heating, cleaning, and repairs together ran at 20 rubles, or nine percent of family income.

Tight control of urban development and private construction has retarded the formation of outwardly "poor" neighborhoods. But standardized housing at nominal rents, public amenities, and the absence of commercial interests all serve to mask, rather than remove, social inequality. When asked whether richer people in Soviet society had *better quality* accommodations, 90 percent of the respondents considered that was indeed so. The poor were thought to have less of the influence needed—through membership in the Communist Party, deputyships in the local soviet, trade union posts, and so on—to quicken their progress through housing waiting lists, or to find larger apartments.

To what degree do the poorest people in the Soviet Union feel themselves to be a group apart? Only about two percent of the sample admitted to being "very poor" and 21 percent to being "poor" at all. About 13 percent thought that they were not poor, while the remainder, or nearly two-thirds, had no clear conception. (The monthly median income per capita of these families was a mere 59 rubles.) When asked whether they regarded "the urban poor" as a separate group in Soviet society, only one-quarter of the sample replied that they did.

Waiting for Better Days

Perhaps the Soviet poor are in some ways inured to hardship because they feel that such conditions are shared by all fellow citizens. About 90 percent of the respondents believed that poverty was widespread—estimates varied from 25 percent to 80 percent of the population. Meanwhile, no less than 99 percent thought that the average wage in Soviet society was considerably lower than the officially published figure. As Robert Kaiser observed in *Russia* (1976), "There appears to be no embarrassment or sense of inadequacy in a Russian family when parents and children dress in the same shapeless clothes, [or] when the two-room flat is not equipped with an upholstered sofa or colorful curtains."

By all accounts, those who are poor in the Soviet Union blame both society and state for their difficulties. Most of our émigré respondents saw alcoholism as the most important general cause of poverty. Close behind drinking came an "absence of material incentives" and "wrong government policy concerning pay."

None of these factors seems likely to change or disappear soon. Despite a recent crackdown on heavy drinking, few Soviet-watchers predict a lasting decline in alcohol consumption. Over the past decade, the Soviet economy—never a fount of "material incentives" such as personal cars, tape recorders, or home appliances—has become even more sluggish. Finally, Communist Party Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, depicted by many poorly informed Western journalists as a young progressive, is pushing for less, rather than more, equality of income. Last April, he announced that "we must . . . eliminate from our distributive mechanism equal pay tendencies, unearned income, and all that contradicts the economic norms and moral ideals of our society."

The theoretical beneficiaries of the classless socialist state, the Soviet poor, like their peasant forebears in the days of the tsars, must wait for better days.



BACKGROUND BOOKS

SOVIET LIFE, 1985

Westerners' attempts to understand life in the Soviet Union have always been hampered by shortages of reliable information, a secretive political system, and a history and culture that present a tangle of Western and Oriental influences.

Enigma number one, writes Oxford's Ronald Hingley, is **The Russian Mind** (Scribner's, 1977). Ivan the Terrible, the great 16th-century tsar, was imperious enough to order the slaughter of an elephant that failed to bow to him, yet too superstitious to order the arrest of a "lunatic naked monk" who wandered the countryside denouncing him as "a limb of Satan."

Today's Russians, says Hingley, share Ivan's propensity to do "everything in excess" and his radically contradictory traits: "Broad, yet narrow; reckless, yet cautious; tolerant, yet censorious; freedom-loving, yet slavish; independent, docile, tough, malleable, kind, cruel."

Extremes are characteristic of the Russian past, judging by Nicholas V. Riasanovsky's scholarly **History of Russia** (Oxford, 1963; 4th ed., 1984). A Berkeley historian, he begins his chronicle with the creation of the first Russian state during the ninth century. Noting that "the Bolsheviks won control of a backward agrarian country and transformed it into the second greatest industrial power in the world," Riasanovsky argues that the Soviet Union is still, in many respects, a developing nation.

Twentieth Century Russia (Houghton, 1960; 5th ed., 1981) is Donald W. Treadgold's comprehensive volume on recent developments, from the fall of Tsar Nicholas II in 1917 to the last years of Leonid Brezhnev's reign.

Inequality is a key feature of the

new "classless" society. One handy indicator, sociologist David Lane writes in his survey of **Soviet Economy and Society** (N.Y. Univ., 1985), is the number of medals awarded. During the first 23 years of Communist rule, when egalitarianism was still strong, only 1,900 citizens were singled out for praise (and perquisites) as Heroes of Labor, Honored Artists, and the like. Between 1946 and 1957, however, Moscow handed out 196,600 such decorations.

Soviet researchers themselves have identified four elements of "social stratification." They see class divisions between urban workers and collective farmers (13 percent of the population), as well as distinctions between urban and rural folk, between blue- and white-collar workers, and between people with different skills and incomes in various occupations.

In the Soviet Union (as elsewhere), Lane notes, this translates into social and economic inequality. In the pecking order of the collective farm, for example, the agricultural expert stands above the tractor operator, who overshadows the field laborer.

A more exhaustive study of inequality is Mervyn Matthews's **Class and Society in Soviet Russia** (Walker, 1972).

In **The Contemporary Soviet City**, edited by Henry W. Morton and Robert C. Stuart (Sharpe, 1984), Richard Dobson, a Soviet analyst at the United States Information Agency, notes that the Soviet school system is one of the chief means by which inequality is perpetuated. The schools provide "all youngsters with free access to any type of education that they may wish to pursue." The catch is that at the best schools there are only a limited number of openings,

and favoritism is not unknown.

Yet, Dobson adds, Moscow does deliver on its promise of education for the masses. It introduced universal 10-year secondary education during the 1970s (although the legal minimum is eight years), and it claims a literacy rate of 99 percent.

About 20 percent of Soviet high school students go on to some kind of college, reports University of Birmingham researcher John Dunstan in *Paths to Excellence and the Soviet School* (NER, 1978, cloth & paper).

Journalist Susan Jacoby sees some similarities between Soviet schooling and her own education in American parochial schools. "Both were deeply concerned with perpetuating an ideology as well as transmitting knowledge," she writes in *Inside Soviet Schools* (Hill & Wang, 1974, cloth; Schocken, 1975, paper). "Both were more interested in obtaining 'right' answers than questioning minds; both set strict standards of conduct for their students; both adopted certain authoritarian tactics in the classroom, at least partly because of severe overcrowding."

Jacoby adds some interesting qualifications and found some schools to which she would have been happy to send her own children. She also discovered genuine policy differences among educators. And while, on paper, the Soviet curriculum seems more advanced, Soviet and American students receive roughly comparable schooling.

Outside the schools, children enjoy a kind of privileged existence. Coddled, overdressed, hugged, and pampered at every opportunity, Soviet kids live in a fantasy world of parental indulgence. Detsky Mir (Children's World), a huge toy store in downtown Moscow, is a kind of Eveschild's F. A. O. Schwarz, a haven of

plastic and glitter and rapturous delight that epitomizes the Soviets' sentimental view of childhood.

Yet, notes *New York Times* man David K. Shipler in his dour survey of Russian life, *Russia: Broken Idols, Solemn Dreams* (Times Books, 1983, cloth; 1984, paper), even children's toys contain bitter lessons. Cheaply made, they quickly break. "They teach something about the child's powerlessness over his world . . . promoting . . . later contentment within an adult system that is also physically deprived."

Comparing **Two Worlds of Childhood: U.S. and U.S.S.R.** (Russell Sage Foundation, 1970, cloth; Touchstone, 1972), Cornell psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner finds much to recommend the latter. As he and his wife discovered, child-rearing is very much a collective business: "When our youngsters . . . would run about the [park] paths, kindly citizens of all ages would bring them back by the hand, often with a reproachful word about our lack of proper concern for our children's welfare."

Bronfenbrenner finds that while Soviet children are more conformist than their American peers, they are also much less prone to "anti-social behavior." One reason: Parents and other adults enjoy much more authority over children, peer groups much less, than in the United States.

Children may enjoy a somewhat privileged existence, but their mothers bear a double burden.

Marxist theory calls for equality of the sexes (albeit somewhat ambiguously), and the Soviet constitution forbids gender discrimination, notes Berkeley's Gail Warshofsky Lapidus in *Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development, and Social Change* (Univ. of Calif., 1978, cloth; 1979, pa-

per). But the realities of Soviet life largely rob such promises of meaning.

Women suffer most from the Soviet economy's failings. About 85 percent of women between the ages of 20 and 55 work. They have little choice: A second paycheck is a must for most families. Yet women are often relegated to low-status, low-paying jobs. They earn roughly 70 percent as much as men. At home, they are still expected to fill the traditional roles of wife and mother. That means cooking meals, standing in line to shop daily (prepared and frozen foods are scarce), and handling household chores without dishwashers and other modern appliances. Day-care centers accommodate only 37 percent of preschool children.

Yet feminism does not have much of a following in the Soviet Union. "The inspiration and the theoretical rationale" for a reassessment of women's roles, Lapidus concludes, will have to come from the West.

William M. Mandel's view of **Soviet Women** (Anchor/Doubleday, 1975) is much more optimistic. He notes, among other things, that "sexploitation" is absent from movies and magazines.

One of the great compensations of Russian life is the special intensity and warmth of friendships and family life. In a curious way, observes

émigré sociologist Vladimir Shlapentokh, these are also "subversive" relationships. In **Love, Marriage, and Friendship in the Soviet Union** (Praeger, 1984), he writes that "connections" are indispensable in obtaining many of life's necessities—clothes, food, jobs. One minor example: Soviet people know by heart the sizes of all their friends and will buy them shoes or shirts if a shipment should arrive suddenly at a local store.

Andrea Lee's **Russian Journal** (Random, 1979, cloth; 1984, paper) provides an intimate first-person account of Russia. During her 10 months in Moscow with her student-husband, she attended drunken all-night parties, listened to unprovoked emotional confessions, and visited country dachas.

Pressed by a Russian friend to defend what he considered Americans' materialism and shallow friendships, she said that she found her Russian acquaintances at least as obsessed with money and possessions as were her American friends.

"Oh no," he responded. "In a capitalist society, you can't help but think about money—to the detriment of friendship. We Russians are poorer. Our lives are Spartan, and because of that, we have more time to consider things of the heart."

—Bradford P. Johnson

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