
pects, 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."

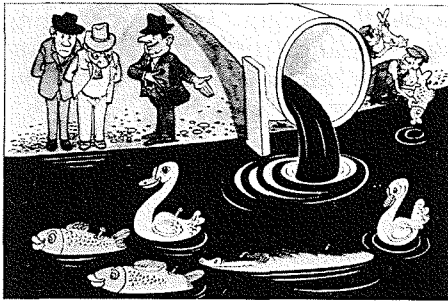
In the past, Moscow has not released comprehensive information about environmental problems. Western scientists are still puzzled by a 1958 accident at a nuclear waste dump in the Ural Mountains of Chelyabinsk Province—a mishap that scarred a 50-square-mile area. Levels of conventional pollution are 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.