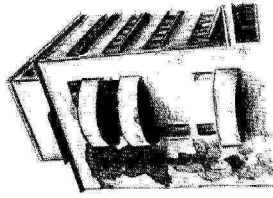

Chapter Eight

CITY OF UTOPIAS AND SLUMS

Just off the Garden Ring, a short way south of Barrikadnaya metro and before you get to the United States Embassy, stands a curious building. Literally crumbling from years of neglect, this six-storey Constructivist edifice made of reinforced concrete with its long, horizontal windows on each floor was once a show-piece for the new Soviet way of life. Designed by Moisei Ginzburg and built in the late 1920s, it provided apartments for staff working at the People's Commissariat of Finance (Narkomfin). The building not only offered a place to live: the idea behind the new apartment block was that it would help to foster a new collective spirit among its residents, all of whom had access to the communal facilities—dining room, nursery, laundry and the like—



which were provided for their use.

In combining private living space with communal facilities, the Narkomfin building was considerably less radical than some of the other experimental projects that were floated during the 1920s and 1930s. In its most utopian form, the ideal communal house was supposed to offer an architectural means by which the old habits of bourgeois individualism could be overcome and women could be truly liberated. Residents might or might not have their own separate rooms

architect Nikolai Markovnikov and built in the 1920s, the Sokol development involved the construction of small individual wooden cottages in a traditional style with plenty of green space around them, all forming part of an attempt to create a Russian variant of the garden city movement. The experiment was eventually rejected as too costly but the houses remain to this day.

Social Engineering

Communal living in its purest forms never really took off and the government was forced to explore other avenues in pursuit of a solution to the housing question. Housing was a critical issue for the post-revolutionary city authorities: on the one hand, reinventing the entire system by which living space was allocated to people offered a golden opportunity both to punish the former ruling classes and to inculcate the habits of communal living into the new citizens of the first socialist society; yet on the other hand, the authorities faced the urgent need to provide homes for the huge influx of migrants from the countryside who flooded into Moscow in a series of waves starting in the late 1920s. As in so many areas of Soviet life, the regime began by giving a free rein to radical experimentation and ended up being forced to take desperate measures to cope with a crisis that was entirely of their own making.

One of the earliest measures taken after the Revolution was to deprive the former ruling classes of their luxurious living-quarters, a process carried out spontaneously by anarchist groups. The British diplomat Robert Bruce Lockhart went to visit some of these houses on ulitsa Povarskaya after the anarchists had been expelled in spring 1918 and described the scenes that met his eyes:

The filth was indescribable. Broken bottles littered the floors, the magnificent ceilings were perforated with bullet-holes. Wine stains and human excrement blotched the Aubusson carpets. Priceless pictures had been slashed to strips. The dead lay where they had fallen.

Workers were resettled in these apartments, with their previous owners either forcibly evicted or, in some cases, permitted to retain one room for their own use. In *Dr Zhivago*, the Gromyko house is divided up after the revolution as Tonya and her father invite the Agricultural

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to sleep in, but all other facilities would be collectivized, freeing women from the daily domestic routines of laundry, food preparation and childcare (in the most extreme versions of such schemes, children would be brought up separately from their parents by professional carers) and offering their residents spaces for leisure activity such as clubs or reading-rooms. Cafeterias and communal dining rooms would take care of meal-times. Several hundred such house-communes were set up in Moscow in the 1920s, some of which took their enthusiasm for the new way of life further than others. One group of young collectivists set up their own political system with committees to decide on all aspects of house policy and slapped a ban on sex between members of the commune; another group collectivized their clothing as well as all other domestic amenities, arguing that the desire to feel a sense of ownership over one's underwear was "a backslide into darkest capitalism..." [a] prejudice originating in a petit-bourgeois ideology".

1920s architects took on the task of designing new housing units for the new way of life. The Association of New Architects held design competitions: the result of one of these can be found on ulitsa Lesteva near Shabolovskaya metro station. The Shabolovka housing estate with its five- to seven-storey houses included communal facilities as well as balconies and courtyard gardens. Further examples of Moscow Constructivism can be seen on nearby ulitsa Ordzhonikidze, where one of the student hostels of the Friendship of the Peoples' University—formerly the Patrice Lumumba University for training students from the developing world—dates from the late 1920s and was built by Ivan Nikolayev as communal housing. The building bears strong traces of the influence of the visionary French modernist architect Le Corbusier, a much-feted figure in Moscow architectural circles at this time. Le Corbusier spent time in Moscow during the 1920s and 1930s, and the office block of the State Statistical Commission, the former Tsentrosoyuz Building on Myasitskaya ulitsa near Chistye Prudy metro station, was built by him.

Another interesting approach to housing that was tried out during the 1920s can be seen in the streets near Sokol metro station, just off Leningradsky prospekt, north-west of the city centre. In the area around ulitsa Vrubelya, ulitsa Polenova and other streets named after famous artists one can wander through a little settlement of wooden houses, reminiscent of a traditional Russian village. Pioneered by the

Academy to take over part of the house. On his return to Moscow, Yury approves of the new living arrangements, commenting that

there really was something unhealthy in the way rich people used to live. Masses of superfluous things. Too much furniture, too much room, too much refinement, too much self-expression. I'm very glad we're using fewer rooms. We should give up still more.

Not everyone dispossessed by the Revolution shared this positive attitude: many propertied Muscovites fled the country, smuggling out whatever jewellery they could, and carved out new lives for themselves in the émigré communities of Berlin, Paris and New York.

Filip Filipovich Preobrazhensky, the professor in Bulgakov's comic novel *The Heart of a Dog*, in which an incautious scientist transplants the heart and pituitary glands of a man into the body of a dog, provides a good literary example of the kinds of difficulties that could beset members of the Moscow intelligentsia after the Revolution. He finds his life severely inconvenienced by the hordes of new tenants who are moved into the apartment building where he lives. Although the professor succeeds in claiming protection from a well-connected patron and is able to keep his unheard-of luxury of having seven rooms to himself against all the attempts of the new House Committee to requisition his living space, he finds that his new neighbours make his life unbearable:

"I have been living in this house since 1903. And from then until March 1917 there was not one case—let me underline in red pencil not one case—of a single pair of galoshes disappearing from that rack even when the front door was open... One fine day in March 1917 all the galoshes disappeared, including two pairs of mine, three walking sticks, an overcoat and the porter's samovar. And since then the rack has ceased to exist. And I won't mention the boiler. The rule apparently is—once a social revolution takes place there's no need to stoke the boiler... I ask you... Why can't the proletarians leave their galoshes downstairs instead of dirtying the staircase?"

"But the proletarians don't have any galoshes, Filip Filipovich, stammered the doctor."

"Nothing of the sort!... The proletarians do have galoshes now and those galoshes are—mine! The very ones that vanished in the spring of 1917."

Following the Revolution, the municipal authorities created a new system whereby rent collection and the management of buildings was supervised by elected house committees. We witness one such committee meeting in *Doctor Zhivago* when Yury visits a patient living in "an old brick barrack of a house built round a courtyard and with covered wooden stairs running up the courtyard walls". A representative from the local Soviet attends the meeting where the caretaker complains about residents failing to carry out their cleaning duties in the communal areas. "Don't worry, Fatima, we'll show them," says the official. "What kind of a house committee is this anyway? They're hopeless. Criminal elements are given shelter, people of doubtful morals stay on unregistered. We'll get rid of them and elect another."

"By the way," Tonya informed Yury, "we don't say rooms any more, it's called living space nowadays." Joint occupation in the notorious communal apartments or *kommunalki* was to become the norm for many Muscovites in the Soviet era and under new housing regulations passed in the 1920s each citizen was entitled to nine square metres of living space. Many had far less and, in any case, the living space directive took no account of the fact that part of the space would inevitably be taken up with walls and corridors. House committees were elected in many apartment blocks to take decisions about communal affairs. From the authorities' point of view, of course, communal apartments provided a useful, as well as an ideologically acceptable, way of ameliorating the housing crisis. Cramming people together in this way brought another advantage: it meant that neighbours could spy on one another.

Communal apartments could be truly ghastly places, throwing together complete strangers often from entirely different generations and backgrounds who, rather than discovering the joys of collectivism through enforced sharing, came cordially to loathe one another. If anything, it fostered greater individualism as people became increasingly possessive about their own property when forced to share with others. Even the authorities recognized this: a report in a communist newspaper in 1920 noted with displeasure that "we have

population; in Moscow it is nearly universal... it is safe to say that 90 per cent of the families in Moscow would improve their housing conditions beyond recognition if they could have to themselves one of these houses which are being pulled down in Manchester as unfit for human habitation.

Migration and Overcrowding

In this sense, housing conditions in Moscow actually got worse in the 1930s, as the overcrowding suffered by a minority of Muscovites in the late nineteenth century became the norm for all but the most privileged. The city's population had increased rapidly in the later nineteenth century as Russian industrialization proceeded apace: from around 600,000 inhabitants in 1871 to nearly two million on the eve of the Revolution. Housing development failed to keep pace with the increasing numbers. Pre-revolutionary housing betrayed the social standing of its occupants: from the ornate classical facades of the aristocratic mansions along ulitsa Prechistenka and the Art Nouveau houses built by wealthy merchants in the late nineteenth century, to the wooden shacks and factory barracks beyond the Garden Ring that provided workers with a place to sleep at nights. The lack of an efficient public transport network meant that factory workers tended to live close to their workplaces. The poorest of the poor rented a corner somewhere: sharing a basement room with other families or bedding down in the hostels of the Khitrov market district.

The municipal government was responsible for making a number of improvements to living conditions within the city in the later nineteenth century, but it was starting from a very low base indeed. In the 1870s the streets of Moscow had been described by a foreign visitor in the following terms:

in spring... owing to bad paving and draining, every street is either a water-course or a morass... the stones sink and become displaced and the black mud oozes between them. A horse that has sunk up to the belly in mud is no uncommon sight in the streets of Moscow... I have in my time seen bad roads of all descriptions, and on both sides of the world, but I have never seen any roads in town or country so atrociously bad as in the streets of Moscow.

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brought our petty bourgeois habits along with us into our communes. Everyone cooks in his own pot, hides in his own room, procures food and utensils for his own family, etc." The lack of available housing meant that divorced couples often had to continue living with one another long after relations had broken down, and feuds between neighbours were commonplace. The novelist Mikhail Bulgakov had his fair share of communal living and the appalling neighbours who often went with it. Confiding in his diary in October 1923 he wrote:

This first day of heating was marked by the fact that the notorious Annushka left the kitchen window wide open all night. I positively don't know what to do with the swine who inhabit this apartment.

Vladimir Mayakovsky described the cramped conditions of one communal apartment room that he lived in during 1919:

*Twelve
square yards of living space,
Four of us
in the room—
Libya,
Olya,
I,
And the dog
Shchenik.*

Sir E. D. Simon, who headed a British commission visiting Moscow in 1936 to examine Soviet methods of town planning, was shocked by the overcrowding that he witnessed:

The overcrowding in Moscow is appalling... what life must be like, under such conditions, is difficult to imagine. How is it possible for people to keep their temper and health under the constant irritation of such close quarters, how brain workers can show anything approaching their full efficiency, is an insoluble riddle to the Englishman... the worst overcrowding in Moscow may not be much worse than the worst in London or Manchester, but in England this bad overcrowding is confined to one or two per cent of the

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By the end of the century, the situation had certainly been improved as dynamic merchant-mayors such as Nikolai Alekseev launched ambitious street-paving programmes as well as building underground sewers and improving the water supply. By the turn of the century, most streets in the city centre had been cobbled or paved. Housing problems continued, however, with a 1915 study indicating that on average, there were 8.7 people living in each apartment in Moscow, compared with figures of around half that for western European capitals. Although the Revolution stopped the city centre from turning into an upper-class ghetto, it did nothing to stem the problem of overcrowding in the longer term.

Population increase was not a steady process: a graph for the post-revolutionary years would indicate sharp falls and equally sharp rises. The Civil War waged from 1918 to 1921 between the Bolsheviks and their "White" opponents turned Moscow into a ghost town. Hunger, disease and emigration slashed the city's population in half. Workers rediscovered their peasant roots and returned to the villages in search of food; members of the former ruling classes fled the country if they could. The upheaval of these years created thousands of homeless children, usually orphans, who became a serious social problem for the city authorities to deal with. These *bezprizorniki*, as they were known, often lived in and around railway stations or in the Khitrov market and begged or turned to crime or prostitution to save themselves from starvation. Moscow was regarded as an attractive destination for these children, in the belief that access to food and shelter might be easier in the capital city. The chief of the secret police, Felix Dzerzhinsky, wrote of how, during the Civil War:

It would be difficult to find in the entire republic a city or town from which there has not been a pilgrimage to Moscow of abandoned children... [Moscow] has become the national refuge to which bezprizornnye stream from all ends of the country.

According to an estimate dating from 1923, there were around 20,000 homeless children living on the streets of the city. They made shelters for themselves along the city walls, and when road repairs required boilers of asphalt to be set up on street corners, the children would flock to these places in search of warmth. One resident described

the scene on the Arbat after the tram lines had been ripped out and the asphalt was in progress: "there were dozens and scores of them there, tattered, half-famished, dirty, all of them sneaking about these big warm boilers like little animals."

The U-turn in economic policy at the end of the 1920s and the advent of state planning brought a massive influx of new migrants into the city. The population is estimated to have increased by seventy per cent between 1928 and 1933 as 1.5 million people flooded in to work in the new factories and on construction sites such as the metro system. Overcrowding was probably worse in Moscow during the First Five Year Plan period than at any time before or since. Workers either lived in shanty towns on the outskirts of the city, in makeshift wooden buildings with no plumbing, electricity or paved roads and grew much of their own food; or they slept in barracks provided by the factories where they worked. These barracks sometimes entailed three people sharing a single bed on an eight-hour shift system. An account by an American visitor describing barracks housing in 1936 describes how in a room with around 500 beds

there were no screens or wall to give any privacy to the occupants of the barracks... I could not stay in the barracks very long. I could not stand the stench of kerosene and unwashed bodies. The only washing facility was a pump outside. The toilet was a rickety, unheated shanty without seats.

Many such buildings lacked a water supply altogether: in 1928 only two-thirds of houses in Moscow had access to the city's water services.

For many of the newcomers from the villages life in the big city could be quite insulated. Peasants tended to move to districts where they already had acquaintances from back home who could help them find work in factories. Lack of transport connections in the early Soviet period meant that they were unlikely to see much of the city centre; descriptions of the lives of factory workers told of how they simply got up and went to work, then returned home to sleep. Moscow may have offered plenty of attractions for new migrants—shops, parks, cinemas and clubs—but many were in no position to take advantage of them.

A Room of One's Own

Living in barracks or communal flats obviously meant giving up any kind of personal privacy. This was far from a new phenomenon: the Marquis de Custine had commented on the "lack of private space" in Russia when he visited in the 1830s, and some would argue that Russia does not really share the western concept of privacy at all (the world itself is difficult to translate accurately). Mary Leder certainly thought so. An American Jew whose family migrated temporarily to the Jewish homeland of Birobidzhan, set up by Stalin in a mosquito-infested swamp in Siberia, she ended up staying in the USSR for more than thirty years. In the early 1930s she spent some months working at an electric motor factory in the Proletarskay district of Moscow and sharing a room with three other girls plus a colony of bedbugs and cockroaches in a workers' commune belonging to the factory. The desire for that unattainable goal of privacy consumed her thoughts:

An empty room! A room of my own where I could close the door and shut out the world—I was obsessed by this dream. It was a fantasy I dreamed of nearly all the years I lived in the Soviet Union.

Leder subsequently moved to live in a curtained-off corner of a room in a communal apartment together with a woman who moonlighted as a prostitute; when she moved out six months later, the woman changed the locks and she was unable to retrieve her suitcase of clothes. Her next home was a room in a communal apartment that she shared with an illiterate old woman who had been a servant in the house prior to the Revolution; later she moved to a shared room in a student hostel in Ostankino with no indoor plumbing. Her experiences were by no means untypical for Muscovites in the Stalin era.

Internal Passports

With the continuing stream of migrants into the city, even squashing people together in communal apartments could not completely solve the housing crisis. The serious famine of 1932 that hit southern Russia and Ukraine, causing somewhere in the region of four to five million deaths (some would argue that this figure should be considerably higher), brought floods of peasants into the cities seeking to escape starvation. It was in response to this sudden crisis that the authorities

decided to clamp down on people's freedom of movement and internal passports were introduced. These passports included a residence permit or *propiska*, allowing the government to regulate how many people were allowed to live within the city. Periodic campaigns to remove unregistered residents were launched: in 1931 homeless children were rounded up and dispatched to orphanages and children's colonies, effectively reform schools for juvenile delinquents. Nikolai Ekk's famous 1931 film *Road to Life*, which enjoyed some success abroad, depicted the work of once such colony. Unregistered workers, including those who had been brought into the city in order to help build the metro, were also expelled.

The residence permit became like gold dust for many. Margaret Wertlin, an American woman who married a Muscovite theatre director in the 1930s recalled in her memoirs how "residence registration buttoned every Moscow citizen onto a square of living space." Her own husband had given up his registration when he divorced his first wife, and she commented that this was "not a dire state in those early days but a fatal one later on when a person could be expelled from the city in twenty-four hours if it was discovered he had no place to call his own."

Mikhail Bulgakov's novel *Master and Margarita* is full of satirical commentary on the housing question. After the literary editor, Berlioz, has his head cut off in an unfortunate accident involving a tram, his uncle comes up from Kiev, desperate to take over his late nephew's Moscow apartment.

An apartment in Moscow is a serious thing... this was a moment it would be sinful to let slip... despite all obstacles, he had to succeed in inheriting his nephew's apartment on Sadovaya [the Garden Ring]. Yes, it was difficult, very difficult, but these difficulties had to be overcome at whatever cost. The experienced Maximilian Andreevich knew that the first and necessary step towards that had to be the following: he must get himself registered, at least temporarily, as the tenant of his late nephew's three rooms.

Taking his papers to the management of the apartment block, Maximilian Andreevich is met by one of the devil's accomplices, the black cat Behemoth, who looks at his passport and comments "I know

that office, they issue passports to anybody. Whereas I, for instance, wouldn't issue one to the likes of you!" Behemoth then flings the passport to the floor and orders the uncle to return to his place of residence at once.

As the devil and his associates explore Moscow further they notice all kinds of interesting phenomena related to the housing crisis. They cite how a Muscovite expanded his living space by partitioning a room to add an extra bedroom and then swapped what was now a four bedroom apartment for two separate apartments, one with three rooms and one with two, then swapping the three roomed apartment for two further ones, each with two rooms, making six rooms altogether. His next trick was thwarted "when his activity ceased for reasons independent of him," and we are left to suppose that his energetic house-moving had attracted the unwelcome attentions of the authorities and he had been arrested. Commenting on how Muscovites had changed over recent years, the devil, Woland, remarks that "they're people like any other people... In general reminiscent of the former ones... only the housing problem has corrupted them."

Stalin's Terror brought with it all sorts of opportunities for poorly housed Muscovites to better themselves as people began to disappear from their apartments at night. Margaret Wetlin, who was a strong supporter of the Soviet system at the time of moving from the US, gave an honest account of her feelings on hearing the news that apartments made vacant by the arrests were to be redistributed:

Did the announcement cause me palpitations of the heart? It did. Did it raise my hopes? Oh, yes! Did I have no qualms about stepping into dead men's shoes? What qualms could there be when the shoes stood empty and my cramped feet were aching so cruelly? Besides, the shoes had belonged to people who had attempted to undermine all that I held most dear.

She and her husband with their two children eventually managed to wangle two rooms in an apartment that was only shared with two other people. Strange as it may seem in a supposedly socialist state, the Wetlin family was not unusual in having the services of a maid: figures dating from 1933 show that 53,000 Muscovites worked as domestic servants.

Elite Housing

As the pigs make clear at the end of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others." Despite the existence of a supposedly classless society, some Soviet citizens were certainly very much more equal than others—and they had the accommodation to prove it. As we have already seen, members of the Politburo and government officials often had housing within the Kremlin; the Cavalry Guards Barracks and the Poteshnyi Palace were given over to apartments for somewhere in the region of five hundred people. Natasha Andreeva, the daughter of one of Stalin's magnates, recalled some of the down-sides of a childhood spent living in such exalted surroundings:

We didn't want to live in the Kremlin. We were constantly told by our parents not to be noisy. "You're not in the street now," they'd say. "You're in the Kremlin." It was like a jail and we had to show passes and get passes for our friends to visit us.

Indeed, one Party worker turned down the opportunity to live there in the late 1920s because of the overbearing security presence: "your every step was noted and you could not even sneeze without the GPU [forerunner of the KGB] knowing it."

Other government workers were housed in the enormous grey apartment block that stands on ulitsa Serafimovicha opposite the Kremlin known as the House on the Embankment. Built in the late 1920s by Boris Iofan, it offered more than five hundred apartments arranged around three courtyards together with facilities including a supermarket, gymnasium, cafeteria, kindergarten, clinic and the Udamnik cinema. The luxury apartments were given to elite Party workers and VIPs; plaques run all along the sides of the building detailing some of the famous residents. The block became notorious in the 1930s for the midnight knocks on the door as the secret police came calling. Yury Trifonov's 1976 novella, *The House on the Embankment*, takes this building as its subject. Trifonov was the son of an old Bolshevik, a hero of the Revolution and Civil War, and he lived here as a child. His father was arrested in the building in June 1937 and never seen again; the novel describes how each morning the porters would tell other residents in the building about who had been arrested during the night.

The house is described by Trifonov as "a huge, grey house with a thousand windows that was like a whole city or even country... The grey colossus loomed over the narrow lane..." The main character in the story, Glebov, is invited to visit a school-mate who lives there and he marvels over the chandeliers, the wide hallway, "so long that you could ride a bike in it" and all the other luxuries enjoyed by privileged Muscovites. Today, there is a private museum in the building, run by a long-term resident, which tells the stories of some of those who were arrested here. Members of the Party elite are probably turning in their graves these days as their former home is now topped by large advertising signs for Adidas sportswear or Mercedes cars.

Party workers were not the only elite members of Soviet society entitled to better housing. Writers, scholars, scientists, composers and other professional or artistic groups also did better than their peers in the housing lottery. A law passed shortly after the Revolution entitled intellectuals to more living space than other people, recognizing the need for an extra room to work in at home. Construction cooperatives were formed to build special apartment blocks for groups of professionals, and these houses sprang up all over the city. Let us explore just two examples, both dating from the 1930s: the Composers' House and the House of Polar Explorers. The Dom Kompozitorov or Composers' House can be seen if you take a short walk down Briusov pereulok from Tverskaya towards the Moscow Conservatoire on Bolshaya Nikitskaya: it is a tall yellow building on the corner of a small courtyard, just past the theatre director Meyerhold's old flat, easily identifiable by its treble clef sign. Other blocks in this area provided accommodation for people employed by Moscow theatres. The Dom Polyarnikov, the House of Polar Explorers, is located on the Boulevard Ring between Nikitskie vorota and the Arbat. It has a series of columns separating out the balconied apartments and a key hole shaped window above the main entrance. Originally built for members of the Navy, it was later allocated to Arctic explorers, and a small exhibition of their exploits can be found in the main entrance hall.

Private housing was very rare in the Soviet period, but one example in central Moscow is the Constructivist house built for his own family by Konstantin Melnikov on Krivoarbatsky pereulok just off the Arbat. Melnikov was a hugely successful avant-garde architect during the first decade of Soviet rule and he had close links with the authorities at this

time: he won the competition to design the sarcophagus for Lenin's Mausoleum and designed the Soviet pavilion at the Paris Exposition of Decorative Arts in 1925. His own house was designed as two intersecting cylinders with massive glass windows on the side that faces the street and a pattern of hexagonal shaped windows on the cylindrical wall at the rear, it was built in the late 1920s; Melnikov's family has lived there ever since. The house is not open to visitors.

The post-war years witnessed an explosion in the construction of elite housing. Several of the seven great wedding cake skyscraper buildings were given over to nomenklatura apartments: the building on ploshchad Vostaniya and the apartment building on the Kotel'nicheskaya embankment to the east of the Kremlin, built by labour camp prisoners. The skyscrapers were the ultimate in Stalinist monumentalism; architects, ordered to create "outstanding works of socialist architecture which reflect the glory and the greatness of the Stalinist epoch" produced massive, striking structures that dominated the skyline of the capital. Gothic-style towers gave the skyscrapers their unique and extraordinary style. One official response to the appearance of these new buildings on Moscow's skyline extolled the way in which "these grandiose works carry us high into the light and the winds to meet the sun and the sky. Their splendid monumental shapes are triumphant symbols of the liberated work of men in our fortunate country."

Luxury apartments for members of the Party elite were put up on Kutuzovskiy prospekt, west of Kievskaya metro and along ulitsa Gorkogo, as Tverskaya ulitsa was named in the Soviet period, from the late 1930s through to the 1950s. Distinguished by their immense size and their façades decorated with classical features—balconies, arches, decorative carvings and columns—these buildings offer an illustration of the "monumental" turn taken by Soviet architecture from the 1930s onwards. Henceforth, buildings in Moscow had to be of a scale and grandiosity commensurate with the prestige of the world capital of socialism. Other areas where elite housing was clustered included the area south of the Arbat, the Khamovniki area to the east of Park Kultury metro station and the Lenin Hills to the south-west, an area that has now returned to its old name of the Sparrow Hills. Brezhnev himself had an apartment on Kutuzovskiy prospekt as well as a dacha in the Kuntsevo region, built in the 1970s, where he enjoyed luxuries such as

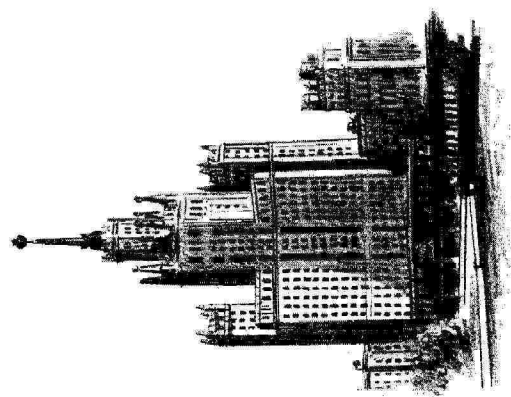
a heated swimming pool and a game park complete with a herd of reindeer.

Members of the Soviet elite not only had better housings; their living standards in general were of a higher order than that of the ordinary man in the street. With their chauffeurs and servants, luxury dachas, access to special shops and permission to travel abroad, they enjoyed a very privileged lifestyle in sharp contrast with the conditions that the majority of people experienced. Most Muscovites were familiar with a life of daily shortages and long queues for food and basic consumer goods. Food rationing was very much the norm, rather than the exception, in the first half of the Soviet period. It was not phased out until 1924, and rationing was then reintroduced from 1929 to 1935 and again from 1941 to 1947 during and after the Second World War.

"Khrushchev-slums" and "Micro-Regions"

It was only in the Khrushchev years that moves started to be made towards housing people in separate, rather than communal, apartments. Five-storey blocks to a standardized design went up in areas such as Novye Cheryomushki in the south-west and Izmailovo in the east. These *khrushchoby* or "Khrushchev-slums" as they came to be known were poor-quality, prefabricated constructions designed to provide mass housing for a population that by the mid-1960s had increased to 6.5 million people. The buildings lacked the extravagant exterior decoration of their Stalin-era counterparts: Khrushchev had made a public criticism of the wasteful expense of earlier building projects such as the skyscrapers.

Ulitsa Novyi Arbat, the "New Arbat", was created during the 1960s, a wide avenue stretching out from the Boulevard Ring as a continuation of ulitsa Vozdvizhenka flanked by multi-storey apartment blocks with shops and restaurants on the ground floors. The street does not make for user-friendly shopping, though, as the vast scale of the buildings and distance between them mean that it is something of a trek for potential customers wanting to visit more than one outlet. Formerly named Prospekt Kalinina after the Soviet President Mikhail Kalinin (it was not until the Brezhnev era that the Secretary-General of the Party combined his position with that of the Head of State), the avenue's construction brought about the demolition of many old houses and



streets in the area. These included Sobachaya ploshchad, Dog Square, described by Alexander Pasternak as

a retired, pleasant little square whose insignificant and irregular shapes gave it a domestic quality unlike the civic pomp of the larger squares... There were many such squares in Moscow then; they have all gradually disappeared, taking with them a characteristic aspect of the vanishing city. Everything here was scaled for the individual, not the crowd as in our bustling central squares today.

In Trifonov's 1966 short story, *Vera and Zoika*, a character discusses the demolition and rebuilding of parts of the capital with her taxi driver:

"I feel sorry for these little houses. After all, this is the Moscow of old, our history. Krasnaia Presnia... And here they are being mercilessly burnt down...."

"And a good thing, too! You shouldn't feel sorry for them, they're only good for breeding bedbugs!" said the driver with unexpected spite. "People used to live on top of each other there, ten people for every seven metres! They don't need your history! Now at least they'll have somewhere to live that is fit for humans."

Moscow's housing problems did not end with the renewed investment of the Khrushchev years, however. Living space was still restricted, waiting lists for housing were long and many people found themselves unable to move out of their communal flats. Even those lucky enough to move into one of the new apartments found cheap, shabby interiors and cockroach problems. The creation of new housing stock put considerable powers of patronage in the hands of local officials, and the composer Dmitry Shostakovich wrote an opera about a corruption scandal in one of these new Khrushchev-era housing estates. *Moscow-Cheryomushki* (1959) tells the story of a group of prospective tenants of an estate who eventually succeed in overcoming the wicked plans of the local bureaucrats.

The later 1950s witnessed the beginnings of the creation of "micro-regions", *mikroraiiony*, dominated by high-rise tower blocks encircling the outskirts of the city intended to provide all essential

services for residents such as schools, food stores and child care facilities on a local basis. This model of housing development was continued into the 1970s and 1980s, with some outlying districts housing up to a quarter of a million inhabitants.

Housing cooperatives became an increasingly common feature of the Brezhnev era when groups of people from the same workplace or professional union could club together to buy an apartment block. This kind of housing was mainly available to professional people who were able to put down the necessary deposit. It was in intellectual homes that the "kitchen culture" emerged: groups of like-minded friends gathered round the kitchen table for food, drink and conversation. Dissidents in the 1960s met in friends' kitchens to swap carbon copies of underground literature, *samizdat*, works that could not make it past the censors.

The 1981 Oscar-winning film, *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears*, plays out its rags-to-riches story against the backdrop of late Soviet housing problems. We first meet the heroine, Karyia, when she is sharing a room in a workers' hostel with two friends from the countryside. When Karyia is asked to house-sit for a professor, she and her friends organize a party in his apartment and invite eligible young men. Karyia falls in love with one of these men, a young sports star, and ends up becoming pregnant but he abandons her when he discovers that she is not in fact a professor's daughter and does not have permanent residence in Moscow. The film then jumps on fifteen years and we see that Karyia has now become a factory director and is living in a spacious apartment with her daughter. She falls in love with a factory worker, Goshia, and although she feels she has to hide her superior social status from him to begin with, the film concludes with a happy ending as they marry and he moves in to become the head of the household. Appropriately, for this Soviet version of the Cinderella story, the prince turns out to be a manual worker and the palace a three-bedroom apartment.

Residence permits, as Karyia's errant lover recognized, were a serious business. It was felt by many within the city authorities that without restrictions on in-migration Moscow could become vastly overpopulated, with shanty towns spreading all around the outskirts. The *propiska* system was therefore strictly policed. For new migrants to acquire a *propiska* they could either marry Muscovites, bribe a corrupt

official or find an enterprise that was willing to sponsor them. Unsurprisingly, fictitious marriages between city residents and out-of-townners were not uncommon. The most common means of gaining residency by legal means was to become one of the *limitchiki*, migrants who were given temporary permits for three to five years to work in unpopular jobs. Following this period, when they were generally housed in hostel accommodation, these people could usually find a way to get themselves onto the housing list and gain permanent residency. Well over half a million people worked in Moscow as *limitchiki* during the Brezhnev years before the system was formally suspended in 1986.

Even with the necessary paperwork, housing remained a real problem for Muscovites. The wait for housing on the city housing queue took years, years in which people might be forced to live with their in-laws, with their estranged spouse or to remain in student hostel accommodation or communal apartments. Popular discontent became more vocal in the *glasnost* era as people were encouraged to air their grievances in the press and in letters to the authorities. One complainant put the issue starkly in a letter to an architectural journal:

I would like to ask our city planners: in what other civilized capital would a woman take her husband for the night into a room where her mother is sleeping? No one finds that surprising here.

According to statistics compiled in the late 1980s, four million people had less than the official nine square metres of living space that had been set as a "sanitary norm" back in the 1920s.

Post-communism

Since 1991 Muscovites living in municipal housing blocks have been able to apply to privatize their apartments and for a nominal fee they can gain the right to buy or sell their homes. The rules have been more complicated for tenants in communal apartments, where either all of the inhabitants would have to agree to go down the privatization route or those wishing to privatize would have to pay off their neighbours, buying up their rooms individually, or finding them alternative accommodation. Although the housing privatization scheme was popular in its early years, the poor state of many apartment buildings

deterred many city tenants who did not wish to take on the financial responsibility for maintenance of their homes.

The booming Moscow property market in recent years has led to a spate of reports about the activities of unscrupulous property developers. Tenants in prestigious neighbourhoods have found their houses bought up by developers who then try to force the long-term residents out in order either to let their apartments to wealthy clients or to demolish the old buildings and rebuild them from scratch. Scare tactics have been employed, with tenants finding their heating turned off in winter or gas taps turned on deliberately; other reports tell of frauds perpetrated on vulnerable, often elderly people to turn them out of their apartments. Violence is not unknown: in one case that reached the courts a group of former police officers were convicted of having murdered two Muscovites in order to seize their apartments.

Homelessness was a criminal offence in the Soviet period. Not to have a *propiska* meant that you were "without fixed abode" and could be punished by imprisonment; so too could long-term unemployment, described by the state as "parasitism". The two conditions went together, of course, because without a residence permit it was impossible to gain regular employment. Since 1991 the attitude to homeless people seems to have barely changed among officialdom. Police still routinely arrest homeless people, deporting those who are not Muscovites. Although some efforts have been made to provide shelters, these are usually unavailable to non-Muscovites, require medical checks prior to admission and are often run along the lines of a prison. There is a massive social stigma attached to homelessness, with widespread assumptions that these people are vagrants and criminals.

Even today, more than a decade after the end of communism, Moscow's housing situation remains a serious problem that has not yet been resolved. Ordinary Muscovites continue to put up with things that residents of western cities would refuse to endure: the ritual turning off of the hot water for a few weeks every summer while the municipal pipes are repaired; the disgusting state of common spaces in apartment buildings. Entrance hallways, lifts and stairwells are left with no one taking responsibility for their upkeep, with the result that if a resident returns home one night, blind drunk, and vomits in a common area, it is unlikely to get cleaned up for weeks afterwards. Even after seventy years living under communism, Muscovites have not yet mastered—

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one might say, they have deliberately and strategically refused to master—many of the practicalities of communal, or even merely neighbourly, living.