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HOUSING IN THE USSR SINCE 1917

The following report is divided into two sections: a brief historical-sketch of how the Soviets have tried to organize the construction and operation of housing resources, and a table reporting housing figures for the USSR from Soviet sources and one Polish source.

Numbers and letters in parentheses refer to appended sources.]

A. Historical Sketch

Since 1917, the Soviet government has formulated several policies for organizing the construction and operation of housing resources.

Even though a decree of 20 August 1918 liquidated the private ownership of land and housing in cities (1), two categories of housing have continued to exist in the Soviet Union up to the present: publicly owned housing, which includes by far the greater part, and privately owned housing. The civil code of 1921 divided publicly owned buildings into two types: nationalized structures which came under the immediate jurisdiction of central state organs and their enterprises, and municipal structures which came under local soviets. The municipalities turned the administration of housing over to the people as quickly as possible. In 1921, Moscow and other towns began to organize cooperatives to which they leased structures under their jurisdiction.(2) By 1924, the municipalities had turned over the main portion of housing to the zhakty (zhilishchnoarendnyye kooperativnyye tovarishchestva, cooperative housing associations). The zhakty were autonomous cooperative organizations subordinate to state regulations in regard to rent and space. They were lessees, while the municipalities acted as lessors. Only a small part of municipal housing remained directly under municipal organs.(3)

After 1921, the Soviet government encouraged private initiative.(4) This was evidently an effort to meet the acute housing problem. Loans were issued to private persons.(5)

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The Bolsheviks abolished rent in the beginning but soon had to return to it as a source of income for housing. In 1921, Lenin issued a decree making residents responsible for the houses in which they lived. A decree of 20 April 1922 reintroduced rent payments, with the amount of the rent depending on the worker's income.(4) On 4 June 1926, the Council of People's Commissars acknowledged the need for working out principles of rent, but left the job to the union republics. The RSFSR worked out a system for establishing rents based on the cost of maintenance, repair, and amortization of improved living space. The system was approved in 1928, has remained approximately the same, and is essentially uniform for the USSR.(6) (For a recent, detailed discussion of this system, [redacted])

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The Soviet government vacillated in maintaining the basic policies it had outlined in the 1920's. Sometimes it supported private housing or state-owned cooperatives, and sometimes it did not. For example, in 1930 loans to private individuals were stopped, but in 1932 they were resumed. From 1939 on, the financing of all individual construction was carried out through industrial enterprise which not only furnished loans, but plans, estimates, technical aid, advice, etc.(5)

A decree of 17 October 1937 revised the whole system of housing administrations and invested local soviets and state institutions as well as industrial enterprises with responsibilities for housing. The decree abolished the whole system of cooperative housing associations and liquidated all housing construction cooperatives except those which could repay state loans received within 6 months. At present, housing construction cooperatives can build only if they have resources of their own with which to do so. Local soviets can and do offer their houses for the use of state institutions and enterprises on the basis of long-term leases which transfer maintenance responsibilities. Local soviets are charged with the immediate administration of municipal resources, technical and sanitary supervision, and control of maintenance.(7)

Theoretically, an over-all, centralized plan and control was and is supposed to exist for housing in the USSR even though its immediate administration has been decentralized. The discrepancies found in soviet figures for housing, shown in the attached statistical table, would seem to suggest that, at most, such centralized control has been only partial.

The Stalin Constitution of 1936 imposed housing responsibilities on union and autonomous republics, subject to over-all economic control from the center. Plans for the growth of housing were to be developed in accordance with general plans for the whole USSR. The credit system was centralized in the Tsekbank under the Ministry of Finance.(8)

Each union republic has a ministry of municipal services which is charged with leadership in the housing field. In addition, a large number of all-union organs of state have special sectors, divisions, administrations, etc., for handling housing problems.(9)

Housing did not escape the destructive impact of World War II. In September 1943, the Committee for Architectural Affairs of the Council of People's Commissars was established for the reconstruction of cities damaged by the Germans. Administrations and divisions for architectural affairs were formed under the councils of people's commissars of union and autonomous republics, in Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev, and also under oblast and kray executive committees. In a number of towns, the office of chief city architect was established. The duties of the Committee for Architectural Affairs included approving plans for important buildings, controlling the quality of construction, etc.(10) The committee was apparently abolished or absorbed into the new Ministry of City Construction in June or July 1949. On 9 May 1950, a ukase of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet USSR established the State Committee for Construction Affairs of the Council of Ministers USSR. Another ukase of 14 March 1951 abolished the Ministry of City Construction. (For further details on these changes, [redacted])

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While these changes occurred in the over-all coordination and control of housing construction during and after World War II, the immediate responsibilities for building and operating dwelling houses continued to belong to ministries, state enterprises and institutions, and local soviets.(11) To speed the construction program, the Soviet government again encouraged individual construction and ownership.(12) On 25 August 1946, enterprises were permitted to build one- and two-family houses for sale to their workers and employees, who could purchase them with the aid of state credit. A ukase of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of 26 August 1948 allowed Soviet citizens to buy or build one- and two-story houses with one to five rooms in towns and workers' settlements.(13) In 1951, credit terms for individual construction were further liberalized. (For more details on individual housing construction, [redacted])

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B. Table on Housing Construction

The following table is intended to provide a basis for developing a general picture of housing developments in the USSR.

The table gives figures on housing construction, primarily in cities and workers' settlements, with a breakdown into public and private. Under each of these, figures are given for (1) the total area and the year-to-year increase (in millions of square meters); and (2) the total capital investment (in millions of rubles), with a breakdown into new construction and repairs. Some figures on the increase in the number of houses in rural areas are also given.

Frequent discrepancies will be noted between Soviet housing figures presented in the table. In some instances, the discrepancies amount to several million square meters.

All documented figures are either taken as cited from the sources, in which case only the source is cited, or calculated on the basis of information contained in the sources. In the latter case, the figures used as a basis for calculations are quoted in the notes accompanying the sources to give the reader an opportunity to check the calculations. Undocumented figures are arrived at by simple arithmetic calculations of available figures.

All modifying terms such as "over," "about," etc., are used in the table as they appear in the sources.

All figures in the "Total" columns are cumulative with the exception of those under "Capital Investment," where each figure represents the amount invested in a particular year or period.

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END OF YEAR	HOUSING CONSTRUCTION IN CITIES AND WORKERS' SETTLEMENTS													
	TOTAL CITY		TOTAL											RURAL
	POPULATION (MILLIONS)	MILLIONS OF SQUARE METERS		CAPITAL INVESTMENT (MILLIONS OF RUBLES)			PUBLIC			PRIVATE			MILLIONS OF HOUSES	
		TOTAL	INCREASE	TOTAL	NEW CONSTRUCTION	REPAIRS	TOTAL	INCREASE	TOTAL	STRUCTION	REPAIRS	TOTAL	INCREASE	TOTAL
1913														
1917	20 ^(a)													
1918														
1919														
1920	16 ^(a)													
1921														
1922		151.635						72.266						79.369
1923	17 ^(a)	152.721	1.086 ^(a)					72.531	0.265 ^(a)					80.190
1924		153.921	1.200 ^(a)	.70				72.921	0.390 ^(a)					81.000
1925		155.770	1.849 ^(a)	156.5 ^(a)				73.688	0.767 ^(a)	1902 ^(a)	53,836 ^(a)	1686 ^(a)	216 ^(a)	82.082
1926	26.3 ^(a)	159.000 ^(a)	3.230 ^(a)	286.7 ^(a)				75.070 ^(a)	1.382 ^(a)	99.731 ^(a)				83.930
1927		163.000 ^(a)	4.379 ^(a)					77.000 ^(a)	1.930 ^(a)	16582 ^(a)				81.390
1928		167.946	4.946 ^(a)					79.306	2.306 ^(a)					86.000
1929		174.805	6.859 ^(a)	508 ^(a)				83.523	4.217 ^(a)					88.640
1930		180.805	6.000 ^(a)	775 ^(a)						4640 ^(a)	4071 ^(a)	569 ^(a)		91.282
1931		187.205	6.400 ^(a)	1115 ^(a)					54,000 ^(a)					86,000
1932		195.000 ^(a)	7.300 ^(a)	1594 ^(a)				109.000 ^(a)	58,700 ^(a)	60,234 ^(a)				92,140
														86,000

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1933	202,200	7,200 ^(c)						
1934	208,200	6,000 ^(c)			1343 ^(m)			
1935	215,000 ^(h)	7,800			1688 ^(c)			
1936	225,000	10,000 ^(j)			12575 ^(a)			
1937	220,500				1159 ^(a)			
1938	225,000 ⁽ⁿ⁾				3065 ^(f)			
1939	55.9 ^(e)				5280			
1940								
1941								
1942								
1943								
1944								
1945								
1946								
1947								
1948								
1949	61 ^(r)							
1950								
1951								
1952								
1953								
1954								
1955								

132,500^(a) }
 140,000^(a) } 7,500
 26,800^(d) }
 10825^(a) } 1750^(a) } AM 2,000^(a)
 88,000 }
 91,000 }
 85,000 }

PLANNED: 3200^(f) } PLANNED: 15500 } PLANNED: 10,000^(g)
 35,000^(a) } 2600^(g) }

70,000^(f) (DESTROYED)
 OVER 12,000^(h) (IN RECAPTURED AREAS)

6000^(j) } 6,000^(e) }
 13,000^(a) } 7000^(j) } 9,000^(e) } PLANNED: 42300^(a) } 4,000^(a) } 4500^(j) }
 100,000^(a) } 84,400⁽ⁱ⁾ } 9520^(j) } 72,400⁽ⁱ⁾ } PLANNED: 12,000^(a) } 1,600^(j) }
 21,000^(g) } 2,700^(a) }
 3,400^(g) }
 0,700^(g) }

27,000^(a) }
 PLANNED: 105,000^(g) } 0,400^(a)

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2. B. B. Veselovskiy, Kurs Ekonomiki i Organizatsii Gorodskogo Khozyaystva (Course on the Economy and Organization of the Urban Economy), Moscow, 1951, p 134
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6. Ibid., p 141
7. Ibid., pp 152-153
8. Ibid., pp 183-184
9. Ibid., pp 184-186
10. Ibid., pp 174-175
11. Ibid., p 178
12. Ibid., p 174
13. Ibid., p 177

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- f. Pravda, Moscow, 3 Feb 36
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- n. Pravda, 12 Jan 35
- o. News (in English), Moscow, 12 Jun 41
- p. Gorodskoye Khozyaystvo Moskvy, No 10, Moscow, Oct 52
- q. Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya, Vol 25, Moscow, 1932

In 1925, public housing construction in cities and workers settlements made up 34.4 percent of the total, and private housing construction 65.6 percent.

In 1926, public housing construction in cities and workers settlements made up 34.8 percent of the total, and private housing construction 65.2 percent.

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