

# 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.