

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.