
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.

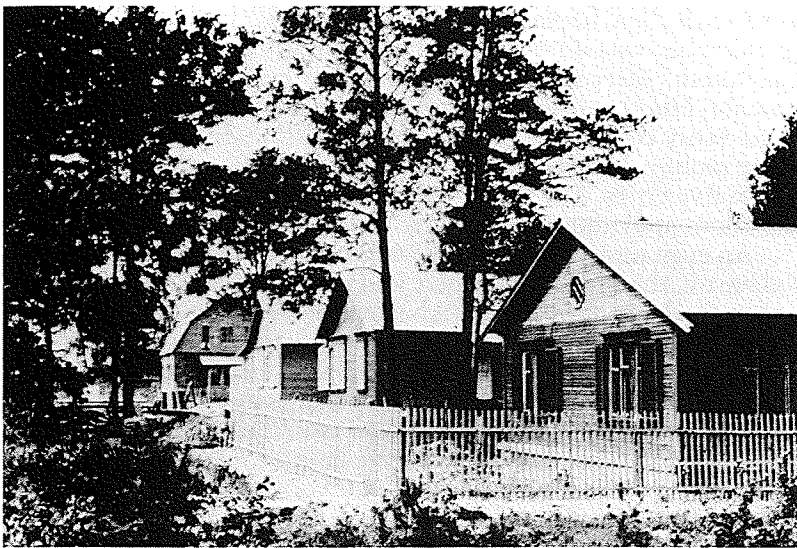
An even more complex exchange was arranged by Andrey D. Sakharov, the nuclear scientist and dissident, before he was exiled to Gorky in 1980. The Sakharovs wanted to move with their daughter, son-in-law, two small grandchildren, and Sakharov's mother-in-law into a four-room Moscow apartment occupied 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.

Every Wednesday, *Vechernaya Moskva* (*Evening Moscow*) publishes ads for such sublet rooms and apartments, which may rent for 50 rubles per month or more—the cost of, say, a decent watch, or one-fourth of the price of a suit. If the renter has a *propiska*, a sublease is usually approved even though officials know that the real rent will be many times higher than the legal fee of a few rubles. Like the high co-op prices, illegal rents are overlooked: In a zero-vacancy situation, black market rentals are a necessary safety valve.

Second homes are also in demand. Each summer more than 25 percent of all Muscovites and Leningraders rent a country dacha.

High party and government functionaries enjoy state-owned dachas, and other senior officials may even own theirs. For less favored city folk, finding and renting a dacha, however small, is a major project, and the annual search begins as early as February. The joy of discovery can turn sour, as a writer related in *Sovetskaya Kul'tura* (*Soviet Culture*): "A friend once rented a dacha and in the summer found that the small house had been divided into nine different 'closets' for as many families. We finally found a suitable dacha, but the price was staggering. For the same amount, the entire family could have gone



A row of modest dachas in the countryside near Moscow. Elsewhere, just east of the capital, near the village of Uspenskoye, are dachas of the elite—multi-story houses surrounded by several acres of land and high walls.

on holiday to the Black Sea for three months." In the sunny Baltic republics, a room in a private home will cost four rubles a day, even with three or four people sharing it.

Those who try to buy are shocked to find that a little shack called a *khibarka* costs about 5,000 rubles. A comfortable country home with four or more rooms and modern conveniences will sell for anywhere from 15,000 rubles—a bit more than the cost of a new Volga car—to 50,000 rubles. Of course, one can build, provided one can obtain a plot of land, which in theory belongs to the state.

Mushrooms in the Rain

One way to get a plot is to buy an abandoned farmhouse. ARTICLE 73 of the Land Code, which implies that land can be transferred only between permanent residents in a rural community, is an obstacle, but it is not insurmountable. "If you can come to an understanding with the local soviet," maintains a dacha expert, "to help them in some way or simply bribe them, you can get a dacha cheap, from 800 to 4,000 rubles."

All in all, getting housing *na levo* (under the table or through influence) is a well-established practice that lubricates rusty bureaucratic machinery. Trying to sniff out which bureaucrats will accept money is tricky because a bribery conviction carries a sentence of eight years. But if an official openly asks for money, there is probably no problem.

Not all bribe-takers can be trusted, however. A middle-aged lady in Astrakhan, rumored to have contact with an important member of the city's executive committee, asked 800 to 2,500 rubles in return for help in getting an apartment. Said the report in the journal *Sotsialisticheskaya Industriya* (*Socialist Industry*): "In four years some 40 desperate apartment seekers, including professional people and party members, paid her a total of 50,000 rubles in bribes before it was discovered that she had no contacts at all."

After a new Party secretary in Georgia, a republic well known for its citizens' high living and disdain for regulations, denounced corrupt housing practices in 1972, a flurry of investigations ensued. It was found, for instance, that a construction cooperative in Tbilisi that initially had announced it would build three housing units of 160 apartments went on to erect 16 high rises with 1,281 apartments—many were sold for high profits to families who did not even live in Tbilisi. In Armenia, the directors of the semiconductor factory in the satellite-town of Abovyan decided to build new housing "for their workers" 11