and a half years' wear on every item.

After food and clothing, housing ranks as the greatest expense facing the poor. Sarkisyan and Kuznetsova budgeted five percent of family income for shelter. The results of our sample suggest that, in reality, the poor spend far more. While the average rent in state-supplied housing was indeed quite low (about nine rubles a month), payments for rent, electricity, gas, telephone, heating, cleaning, and repairs together ran at 20 rubles, or nine percent of family income.

Tight control of urban development and private construction has retarded the formation of outwardly "poor" neighborhoods. But standardized housing at nominal rents, public amenities, and the absence of commercial interests all serve to mask, rather than remove, social inequality. When asked whether richer people in Soviet society had *better quality* accommodations, 90 percent of the respondents considered that was indeed so. The poor were thought to have less of the influence needed—through membership in the Communist Party, deputyships in the local soviet, trade union posts, and so on—to quicken their progress through housing waiting lists, or to find larger apartments.

To what degree do the poorest people in the Soviet Union feel themselves to be a group apart? Only about two percent of the sample admitted to being "very poor" and 21 percent to being "poor" at all. About 13 percent thought that they were not poor, while the remainder, or nearly two-thirds, had no clear conception. (The monthly median income per capita of these families was a mere 59 rubles.) When asked whether they regarded "the urban poor" as a separate group in Soviet society, only one-quarter of the sample replied that they did.

Waiting for Better Days

Perhaps the Soviet poor are in some ways inured to hardship because they feel that such conditions are shared by all fellow citizens. About 90 percent of the respondents believed that poverty was widespread—estimates varied from 25 percent to 80 percent of the population. Meanwhile, no less than 99 percent thought that the average wage in Soviet society was considerably lower than the officially published figure. As Robert Kaiser observed in *Russia* (1976), "There appears to be no embarrassment or sense of inadequacy in a Russian family when parents and children dress in the same shapeless clothes, [or] when the two-room flat is not equipped with an upholstered sofa or colorful curtains."

By all accounts, those who are poor in the Soviet Union blame both society and state for their difficulties. Most of our émigré respondents saw alcoholism as the most important general cause of poverty. Close behind drinking came an "absence of material incentives" and "wrong government policy concerning pay."

None of these factors seems likely to change or disappear soon. Despite a recent crackdown on heavy drinking, few Soviet-watchers predict a lasting decline in alcohol consumption. Over the past decade, the Soviet economy—never a fount of "material incentives" such as personal cars, tape recorders, or home appliances—has become even more sluggish. Finally, Communist Party Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, depicted by many poorly informed Western journalists as a young progressive, is pushing for less, rather than more, equality of income. Last April, he announced that "we must . . . eliminate from our distributive mechanism equal pay tendencies, unearned income, and all that contradicts the economic norms and moral ideals of our society."

The theoretical beneficiaries of the classless socialist state, the Soviet poor, like their peasant forebears in the days of the tsars, must wait for better days.