

HOUSING IN THE SOVIET UNION

By GORE GRAHAM

In old Tsarist Russia the living conditions of the mass of the people were simply appalling. Had we space in this article we could relate facts about the former housing conditions of Russia that would almost make the reader's hair stand on end with horror. For filth, insanitation and congestion the housing conditions of the people of Tsarist Russia were unequalled.

When the Soviet regime came into being after years of war it had in housing as in other things a sorry state of affairs to contend with. Nearly a half a million houses had been destroyed in the war period. Nevertheless it began at once to tackle the problem. It promptly put an end to landlordism. It abolished the inequality in which the mass of the people were herded in crowded hovels whilst a minority enjoyed the comfort of spacious mansions. It took possession of the big houses and placed

them at the disposal of the needy. In Moscow alone a half a million workers were moved into houses expropriated from former wealthy owners. Five hundred thousand of the biggest, most valuable and best equipped houses throughout the country were taken away from their private landlords and put to the common good.

The Soviet regime also established just principles in the paying of rent. A system was introduced by which houses are let at a rent

merely necessary to cover the cost of maintenance and repair.

In addition rents are fixed in accord with the means of the tenants. A well-paid skilled worker pays more than a young worker or student with a smaller income.

To be sure, the Soviet regime quickly removed from the people that sickening burden of rent.

Then, of course, the Soviet government set about building new houses; and better houses too than the houses of Tsarist Russia.

For the houses of old Russia were of little value. Of the total number of houses only 15% were made of brick, stone or re-inforced concrete. The rest of the buildings were of wood, clay or other cheap materials. Nine-tenths of all buildings consisted of one story.

During the very early years of the Soviet regime, years of war, famine and distress, little could be done beyond repairing the ruins that history had bequeathed the new republics. But between 1924 and 1928 new houses were constructed with 16,700,000 metres of floor space. Two billion rubles were invested in housing construction during those years.

Then came the four years of the first Five-Year Plan. Between 1928 and 1932 four billion rubles were invested in housing. New houses with 27,000,000 square metres of floor space were erected.

Notwithstanding this, however, housing accommodation by no means fulfilled demand. This was the period of rapid industrialisation. In a handful of years the Soviet Union carried through an industrial revolution that elsewhere took many decades. The old towns were inundated with scores of thousands of new industrial workers. Dozens of new cities sprang up in all parts of the Union. Millions of workers settled around newly erected industrial enterprises. The population continued its annual increase of 3-1/2 millions. And the whole country,

of course, laid its prime emphasis on building the industrial bases of the new socialist society.

The second Five-Year Plan, however, revealed the country's ability to think now of reaping the harvest of its sowing during the first plan. Begun in 1932 the second plan began raising the living standards of the whole people.

For housing construction the plan provided no less than 13 billion rubles.

Already the greater part of this housing construction has been completed. The various cities and rural districts are carrying out their own plans for the future. The ten years' plan for the reconstruction of Moscow, for example, will provide 15,000,000 square metres of housing accommodation in houses so finely planned and built as will make Moscow far and away the most beautiful city in the world.

That period of rapid industrial construction when the first necessity was to secure the quickest possible housing accommodation for the millions of workers who were inundating the new industrial areas has gone by. Two years ago the Government passed a decree on The Quality of House Building. This decree insists that all houses shall be built with modern conveniences and with every regard for beauty and planned lay out worthy of the new cultured people of the country.

As M. Stalin said on one occasion:

"Only those who have become rotten and mouldy through and through can console themselves with references to the past. We must set out, not from the past, but from the growing needs of the workers to-day. We have got to understand that the conditions of the life of the workers have changed fundamentally. The present-day worker is not what he once was. The present-day worker, our Soviet worker, wants to live so that all his material and cultural needs are satisfied; in regard to housing and all his other needs. He has a right to it and it is our duty to secure for him those conditions."

Only the evil nature of an opponent or the foolishness of a romantic friend expects that, in addition to performing all the miracles of construction with which the Soviet Union has amazed the world during the past years, it should also have achieved fulfilment of everyone of the demands of the Soviet people; in short have established a paradise in which every human need is faced with a plentitude and perfection of supply.

And when one knows the facts about housing in the USSR how pathetic indeed appear those malicious efforts to belittle the country by people who expatiate on instances where supply has not yet overtaken the growing demand.

its own constitution, which takes into account the specific features of the republic and is drawn up in full conformity with the Constitution of the USSR.

Article 1: Each Union republic retains its right freely to secede from the USSR.

Article 18: The territory of the Union republics may not be changed without their consent.

Article 19: The laws of the USSR have the same force in the territories of all Union republics.

Article 20: In the event of a law of a Union republic differing from an all Union law, the all-Union law is operative.

Article 21: A single Union citizenship is established for all citizens of the USSR. Every citizen of a Union republic is a citizen of the USSR.

Article 22: The Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic consists of the following Territories: Azov-Black Sea, Far East, West Siberia, Krasnoyarsk, North Caucasus; Provinces: Voronozh, East Siberia, Gorky, Western, Ivanovo, Kalinin, Kirov, Kuibyshev, Kursk, Leningrad, Moscow, Omsk, Orenburg, Saratov, Sverdlovsk, Northern, Stalingrad, Chelyabinsk, Yaroslavl; Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics: Tatar, Bashkir, Daghestan, Buryat-Mongolia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Kalmuck, Karelia, Komi, Crimea, Marii, Mordva, Volga German, North Osetia, Udmurt, Chechen-Ingush, Chuvash, Yakut; Autonomous Provinces: Adygei, Jewish, Karachayev, Oirat, Khakass, Cherkess.

(To be continued)