

**Communism on Tomorrow Street: Mass Housing and Everyday Life after Stalin.** By STEVEN E. HARRIS. Pp. 394. Washington, DC and Baltimore, MD: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Johns Hopkins University Press. 2013. \$60.00. ISBN 978 1 4214 0566 7.

The post-Stalin transformation of the Soviet Union was declared in the Secret Speech but it was written in concrete. During the years of late Stalinism, following catastrophic wartime destruction, construction trusts and ordinary people built more housing than ever before in Soviet history. But it was only after Stalin's death that a dramatic new imperative for the improvement of living standards was launched. Housing construction accelerated and cities across the Union were physically transformed. Instantly recognizable five-storey blocks of flats came in part to define the Khrushchev era, and while they were sometimes mocked (especially after the event) for the small size of their apartments and low standards of construction, they radically improved the living standards of millions of people. Moving into a new family apartment was one of the signature experiences of many Soviet lives. As a result, the housing programme has figured prominently in recent historical research on the post-Stalin period. Steven Harris' wide-ranging history of post-Stalin housing is a major contribution to that literature.

*Communism on Tomorrow Street* is based on a considerable body of sources, and its empirical depth is itself an impressive scholarly achievement. It draws on a particularly powerful selection of material from Leningrad. But aside from breadth and depth, the book offers new analytical insights. The first of these concerns the long-term origins not of the housing programme as such, but of the small-scale, mass-produced separate family apartment that was its essential component during the Khrushchev era. Harris shows how the infamous Soviet housing norm — by which housing allocations were calculated as square metres of living space (rather than a given number of rooms) per person — was a logical if particular outcome of a century of European urban history. His discussion of the impact of the housing norm on architecture, design, and construction efficiency is original and important, and he rightly argues that the ultimate goal of separate-family occupancy of apartments was intrinsic to the general Soviet attitude to housing. Harris' extended treatment of 'people's construction' (*narodnaia stroika*), the policy which allowed groups of workers themselves to build the apartment block which they would then occupy, is similarly assured. Furthermore, his explanation of how new apartments were equipped with furniture — his description of the intersection of the furniture industry and the domestic interior — adds a new dimension to the extensive literature on post-Stalin domesticity.

Harris' book therefore succeeds in adding new material, novel perspectives and distinctive interpretations to the study of the housing programme. The book also proposes ambitious conceptual frameworks, though these can certainly be challenged. One of the concepts which structures Harris' arguments is 'class'. He refers to 'class' from the first page of the book and devotes a chapter to the subject. Harris argues that class identity organized people's access to housing, with the structures of the housing programme filtering certain types of housing to white-collar employees and other types of housing to industrial workers. In part, this seems indisputable, given that it was much easier for manual workers to engage in 'people's construction' and that the first housing cooperatives were organized through higher-level employers (such as the Bolshoi Theatre and the KGB). Therefore, although the housing programme generated results that were historically equal, both in Soviet and comparative terms, some groups of people still benefited more than others. But class as a category carries tremendous historical and sociological baggage. Its schema for measuring economic, social and cultural differences fit capitalist societies far more convincingly than non-capitalist ones; it is difficult to formulate consistently convincing explanations for the housing programme (or many other areas of Soviet history) in its terms. The Soviet city was far less organized by 'class' than comparable modern cities in the West.

More effective is Harris' demonstration of how other groups, such as native Leningraders and war veterans, were able to extract particular advantages from the housing economy. Such 'entitlement communities' might offer a more plausible way of understanding the particular Soviet context than the notion of class. Harris suggests that Soviet rights were filtered through these groups: that people's sense of what should be theirs by right was constructed not by their status as Soviet citizens, but by their status as, for example, true-born and long-term inhabitants of Leningrad. His interpretation of his own evidence is plausible, but the generalization that flows from this is more problematic, for the evidence points in two directions. Rights were powerfully connected to citizenship, in law, public rhetoric and often in popular discourse. People often characterized the benefits that derived from their rights with reference to social justice. Yet what was fair was often linked not only to one's Soviet citizenship or to one's due as a member of an entitlement group, but also to possession of that other ideologically sensitive currency — one's labour, to how much and where one had worked. Harris is right that the basic driver of the housing programme was egalitarianism, though his conceptualization of Soviet egalitarianism is not consistently convincing. Nevertheless, his book should be read and enjoyed by scholars of post-1945 Soviet history, and they should recommend it to their undergraduate and graduate students alike.