

LETTERS

Dear Sir:

The University of Chicago Press has just forwarded me Mr. T. Sosnovy's review of my book, *City Planning in Soviet Russia*. I wish to thank Mr. Sosnovy for his kind efforts. There are, however, several false impressions which his review has created in the minds of the readers of your scholarly publication which I would like to correct. I would, therefore, appreciate it if you will be kind enough to publish my rejoinder, in order to set the record straight.

It seems to this author that Mr. Sosnovy was more concerned with such details as whether the author of a certain source listed in the Bibliography spelled his name with a "V" or "B," than with the substance matter of the study. Of course, any such corrections are welcome and I am deeply grateful to Mr. Sosnovy for that, but such matters have little bearing on what the author attempted to do.

The purpose of this study, as stated in the Preface, was to examine the Soviet Government's decisions and policies on city planning and analyze its background and development process (p. v). He did not attempt in this initial work to analyze regional or national planning, although he referred to these problems, as well as to other political and economic spheres only as they were related to the main subject and in order to place the evolution of Soviet city planning policy and practice in proper perspective (pp. 13, 16, 48, 90). Therefore, Mr. Sosnovy's remarks about my lack of concern for regional planning were totally irrelevant.

Mr. Sosnovy failed to see both the limitations and virtues of this study which derive from the same fact: it is a report based almost wholly on available printed materials, for the most part official Russian documents. The limitations inherent in such a study are obvious. There is no first-hand observation or experience to act as a "field-check" in analyzing or interpreting the data. And, of course, printed material from the USSR is likely to present a pretty limited and exclusively "official" picture.

With these limitations frankly accepted by the author (pp. v-vi), there is a certain virtue in this approach. It permits, for one thing, a minimum of personal bias in whatever direction, and eliminates the kind of superficial and half-baked judgements which have too often resulted from quick trips by foreigners to the USSR.

The reviewer, regrettably, failed to give an overall, scholarly evaluation of the major problems of Soviet city planning which the author attempted to present. With his first-hand knowledge in the field of Soviet housing and municipal affairs, it is surprising that Mr. Sosnovy did not recognize nor care to illuminate the *universality* of the problems, issues, mistakes, and trends in this field, almost irrespective of basic differences in political-economic structure. Almost all the issues that the author mentioned in his study that are apparently being debated in Russia—centralization versus decentralization, the curbing of metropolitan overgrowth, central recon-

struction versus suburban extension versus new community development, "neighborhood-unit" planning versus zoning policies that resulted in standardizations over wide areas, historical versus "modern" architectural expression, one-family homes versus apartments, prefabrication versus site-fabrication, "minimum standards" from the top down versus architectural ingenuity to fit local conditions, even "public housing" versus "individual" initiative—are all the same issues that we worry over and argue about here in America. Moreover, they seem to be making the same more or less opportunistic compromises that we are as to the shape of functional organization of cities. In this field, strangely enough, Russia and the United States seem quite close together in some respects.

Now, as to some of the specific issues raised by Sosnovy. Mr. Sosnovy claims that in many instances the author has used Soviet sources without critical evaluation. This seems an unjust accusation, since the author was very careful to point out the difference between what the Soviets themselves claimed and what the author felt was true. In case of the reasons for the failure to fulfill the housing construction goal during the First Five-Year Plan, the author not only cited official Soviet reasons, such as deficiencies in organization, a shortage of materials, insufficiency of transport facilities, but also questioned these reasons by stating that there might have been others which were not stated (p. 20).

In listing a source in the Bibliography on the City of Kiev, the author did not say that "Kiev was destroyed by the Germans," as Mr. Sosnovy claims, but that "Kiev suffered severe destruction from German attack" (p. 182). A slight difference. Moreover, at the time the research was done on this book there were no Russian defectors from the city of Kiev living in the United States whom the author could interview.

The author further fails to see, as Mr. Sosnovy asserts, that he used Soviet sources uncritically when he described the published plans of the proposed amalgamation of collective farms into agricultural cities or "*agro-gorods*." He certainly did *not* "accept the theory for a fact and has even perverted fact" (?). In the first place, as a professional city planner, the author was interested in discovering what was the actual physical pattern of these proposed *agro-gorods* which the Soviet newspapers published. Secondly, he was very careful to point out that this merger campaign had political overtones and quoted experts on Soviet agriculture to the effect that the program might never be carried out; it might even be abandoned (p. 118, n. 38).

Mr. Sosnovy takes the author to task for stating that substantial progress was achieved in the field of housing construction during the 1946-50 period. Granted that only about 77 percent of the goal (100 million square meters of living floor space) was completed, and that at the end of the period the average living space per capita was less than 5 square meters. Nevertheless, the fact remains that it is an impressive record when compared with fulfillment figures of previous Five-Year Plan periods: about 30 million square meters in the Third Five-Year Plan, 26.5 in the Second and 23.5 in the First. (Incidentally, Mr. Sosnovy confuses the sanitary

housing norm with the average, per capita available housing floor space. The norm never changed; only the average amount of floor space per capita varied from period to period.) It was further pointed out, however, that in spite of it the Soviet Government "has not been able to substantially reduce the overcrowding situation that existed in Soviet cities after World War II" (p. 113).

Mr. Sosnovy writes that the author omitted some important sources existing in American libraries. The author wishes to assure the reviewer that if these sources were existing in American libraries at the time the research was made, and if they were important they would have been included in the Bibliography. Perhaps they were made available after the research was completed?

It is true that the author dealt at considerable length with the Moscow Plan. That was because of the centralized planning organization; everything emanates from there. Moreover, Moscow is still considered the laboratory, the testing ground for planning principles and practices for all other Soviet cities. Other cities feel quite safe (politically and professionally) to emulate, even ape Moscow.

Sincerely yours,

MAURICE F. PARKINS

*Office of City Plan Commission
City of Detroit
Detroit 26, Michigan*