'How do you live?': experiments in revolutionary living after 1917

Article

Accepted Version

‘How do you live?’: Experiments in Revolutionary Living after 1917 [Special ed.: Social Condenser]

Journal:	*The Journal of Architecture*
Manuscript ID	RJAR-2016-0087.R1
Manuscript Type:	Original Paper
Keywords:	Social Condenser, October Revolution, Urban Communes, Philosophical Materialism, Revolutionary Living, Experimentation

'How do you live?':

Experiments in Revolutionary Living after 1917

In 1902, surveying the state of revolutionary politics in Russia, Vladimir Lenin wrote one of his most important works: *What Is to Be Done?* This publication would set the tone of Bolshevik policy for the next twenty years; here Lenin pondered how revolution would arise in a country like Russia, with its backward economy and limited proletarian population.[1] Seeking the fastest route to socialism, he proposed that power be seized by a professional band of revolutionaries acting in the name of the proletariat. The answer to the question he had set himself was direct and to the point: an avant-garde force would take over the instruments of state by whatever means necessary, nurture the first tentative signs of a proletarian consciousness, and shepherd in the next phase of History.[2]

But, upon securing 'All Power to the Soviets' and establishing the first avowedly socialist state in history, a new question came to dominate revolutionary thinking. This question was present in newspaper editorials and leading Bolshevik op-eds, as well as a proliferating early Soviet advice literature.[3] It manifested itself in concerns about everyday life, popular custom, and habit. It was seen in an expanding Soviet discussion on hygiene, health, and modern practice.[4] Nikolai Bukharin made reference to it as he encouraged youths—that all-important first generation of socialists—to break with the mores and morality of the past.[5] Iosif Stalin and Lev Trotsky surely had it in mind when they were debating whether swearing and foul language should be viewed as a sign of solid working-class character or, alternatively,

as a roadblock to social harmony and popular enlightenment.[6] And, increasingly, this question became tied to the idea that domestic life could be redesigned to foster socialist attitudes. Essentially, as one Soviet journal came to express it, the question boiled down to this: 'How do you live?' (*Kak ty zhivesh'?*).[7]

In many ways, this was both a question and a call to action. It had something in common with Lenin's famous *What Is to Be Done?* in this regard. But, fundamentally, focus had shifted from the acquisition of proletarian power to the construction of a new type of society—the collective society promised by socialism. This new question sought to redraw the battles lines, turning everyday life into a 'third front' in the struggle for socialism—following on the heels of the political and military fronts. It dared revolutionary thinkers to look to the historical horizon, to imagine the future society. And it encouraged individuals to be worthy of the new dawn, to live up to the prospect of being a citizen of socialism.

This was a question, a call to action, a preoccupation that came to occupy the minds of the architects and spatial theorists behind the social condenser—the communal design concept at the heart of this special issue. Yet, as this article contends, the social condenser was, in fact, but one answer among many. It was not a concept that appeared out of thin air or unearthly genius; it was rooted in the realities and concerns of the early Soviet state and the opening decade of the 'Great October Socialist Revolution'. It was a concept built on a broader revolutionary discourse fixated with the 'socialist way of life', as well as a number of ad hoc yet ambitious attempts to implement this discourse—efforts to turn theory into reality. These efforts, as we will

see, included the endeavors of young activists who sought to repurpose existing spaces and domestic residences into bastions of socialism, forming what became known as urban communes. These activist formations were fuelled by a basic understanding of philosophical materialism, a belief that the built environment and structure of daily life had to reflect new comradely values if true comrades were to come into being. What is more, concern about the deficiency of the housing stock served to elevate the strategic importance of the home when it came to the battle for the 'third front'. So such activists were situating their revolutionary struggle in the heat of the action.

However, something else we will see in this article, such formations also drew on a broader reverence among Russian radicals for small collective alliances—a reverence stretching back, before 1917, to the revolutionary underground and the collective ideals exhibited by Russian socialist thinkers. This begs the question, were these smaller, human-scale alliances and communal visions more important than grand architectural projects when it came to grounding revolutionary principles among the Soviet population—a citizenry that had grown up admiring such alliances and would continue to see them as a standard form of organization, most notably in the worker brigades (*brigady*) of the First Five-Year Plan? At the very least, such engagements with the wider discourse on collectivism, communalism, materialism, and socialist life can be seen to foreground the social condenser, challenging us to better understand the origins of this architectural concept. This article utilizes archival materials and previously unseen sources from Russian repositories to recreate the

Comment [AW1]: I am unable to insert a new endnote here without causing an issue with formating, so I will used the comment boxes to indicate a new reference. (See below).

Comment [AW2]: Add here a new endnote/footnote:

As such this article takes from Vladimir Paperney's seminal account, Architecture in the Age of Stalin: Culture Two, the belief that 'it is more important to consider the character of the transformation of the borrowed ideology (organization, style) than the ideology itself'. (Cambridge University Press, 2002 edition, p. xxi). However, by seeking to contextualise the 'social condenser', it also seeks to complicate the ideas and ideals that populated what Paperney referred to as the period of Culture One—the revolutionary culture of the opening decade or so of the Soviet state. (See esp. chap. 1).

revolutionary vibrancy embedded in the question 'how do you live?', as well as the discourse that surround it.

———

When it was asked, the question 'how do you live?' conjured up connotations of the Nietzschean 'Superman' (*Übermensch*)—a 'New Soviet Person' (*Novyi sovetskii chelovek*), no less—striving to attain a higher social and cultural level in the development of man and society. [8] Leading Bolsheviks, such as Aleksandra Mikhailovna Kollontai, insisted that individuals could be 'taught to think like a communist', if only they lived by a new revolutionary 'code of ethics'.[9] That is, they could attain a higher level of consciousness and better serve the advance of a comradely society if their present lifestyle was designed to reflect future collectivist values. To this end, Kollontai supported the idea of building large municipal canteens in every Soviet city. These canteens, it was theorized, would replace the private kitchen, release women from domestic slavery, and provide the urban population with a modern, collective facility where a sense of unity and joint responsibility could be forged.[10]

In 1923, 'People's Nutrition' (*Narodnoe pitanie*, a.k.a. *Narpit*) was created to manage the nations communal kitchens and canteens, but it was immediately beset by funding troubles. At the end of the 1920s, stimulated by the grand projects of the First Five-Year Plan, and with a renewed desire to build communal visions, Narpit formed its own journal. But, alas, even these pages failed to live up to Kollontai's ambition. They served to promote collective dining, yes, but on a much smaller scale than

originally hoped. In truth, the operations of Narpit developed in a somewhat ad hoc fashion, as this state-backed organization looked to establish collective regimens within existing canteens, often becoming waylaid by prosaic technical issues, such as a lack of basic cooking equipment.[11] The end result: the large municipal canteens, serving thousands of workers at a time, fostering comradely bonds and promoting equality, well, they remained largely restricted to the confines of revolutionary imagination.[12]

Nevertheless, the ambition remained. Visions of the future society, and the infrastructure that would help to make this society, continued to saturate revolutionary discourse across the opening decade of the new Soviet state. Preceded by seven years of war, revolution, and civil war, the Soviet state inherited an economy that was not particularly well placed to realize ambitious infrastructural projects. And holding on to the power acquired at the end of 1917 remained a political priority. Yet the question of 'how do you live?', and the visions it inspired, continued to occupy the minds of leading Bolsheviks and aspiring revolutionaries alike.

This was no truer than in the area of housing and housing design. A fact that is hardly surprising. The October Revolution, being premised on the rejection of private property, was soon followed by a series of decrees outlawing private ownership of urban land and residences. The first of these decrees, passed in December 1917, outlawed the sale or purchase of urban property and land. The second, passed in August 1918, abolished private ownership of all real estate in urban areas.[13] 'Landlordism' was caste as ideologically unacceptable. The Bolsheviks also issued decrees sanctioning 'revolutionary housing repartition' (*revoliutsionnyi zhilishchnyi*

peredel), which legalized the requisition of empty dwellings and the homes of the former elite.[14] These spaces were to be appropriated for the worker. The largest apartments and properties were to be subdivided, turning superfluous grandeur and opulence into something utilitarian and respectful. Local city soviets were nominally in charge of the 'housing repartition' process, compiling lists of houses within the area of their jurisdiction in the hope of establishing a system of planned distribution. In reality, the process of acquisition and resettlement was often left to self-appointed housing committees and local activists. These were the cathartic policies and cathartic acts that helped bring a Soviet polity into being. They were based on the rejection of the old order, and they show all the brashness and promise of the new.

At the same time, revolutionary dreamers, artists, and architects looked to redesign the fundamentals of domestic life. As early as 1918, the first Soviet architectural competitions called on entrants to reimagine the home. Competitors were asked expressly to design domestic facilities with communal kitchens, dinning-halls, and bathrooms. They were also asked to include plans for collective libraries, shared study spaces, as well as nurseries, kindergartens, and schools.[15] And so the 'house-commune' (*dom-kommuna*) entered architectural and revolutionary parlance. These were to be the self-contained phalanxes, or microcosms of socialism, where exemplary communities could be cultivated. The idea was that new comradely norms might take root here before spreading across the Soviet state.[16] The banner above these creations may well have read: 'How to be socialist'. The infamous *kommunalka* (communal apartment) that increasingly became a standard part of the Soviet housing stock after 1930—when apartments were divided up, entire families squashed into single rooms, often sharing single kitchens and toilets—was a poor impersonation of

the *dom-kommuna*, another sign of shortage. The *dom-kommuna* was not seen as a compromise, but as a rational and idealised form of domestic organisation.

Comment [AW3]: Add endnote/footnote:

See Richard Stites, Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Visions and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 239-241.
For more on the general housing of later years, see Christine Varga-Harris, Stories of House and Home: Soviet Apartment Life during the Khrushchev Years (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015); Steven E. Harris, Communism on Tomorrow Street: Mass Housing and Everyday Life After Stalin (Baltimore, MA: John Hopkins University Press, 2013); and Mark B. Smith, Property of Communists: The Urban Housing Program from Stalin to Khrushchev (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press).

Similar logic was employed when the Bolsheviks had luxury hotels, such as the Astoria and *Hotel de l'Europe*, in Petrograd, turned into collective residences for party officials. These became known as 'Houses of the Soviets' (*Doma Sovetov*), and they, too, were adapted to provide collective amenities, communal canteens, and spaces that encouraged social interaction.[17] This was seen as both rational and practical. Collective laundry facilities, for instance, would be more time efficient and enable officials to pursue their revolutionary duties with minimum disruption. But, as students of Marxist materialism, the Bolsheviks also believed that the base (infrastructure) maintains the superstructure (cultural system) and that matter determines consciousness—thus it was also ideologically pertinent to establish living examples of socialism in this manner. Marx had taught them that private ownership of the means of production and an individualistic culture were mutually reinforcing. So, just as Tommasco Campanella's *The City of the Sun* (1602) depicted a world where the built environment determined the ideal organization of society, and edifying public art elevated the philosophical level of each individual, so the Bolsheviks envisioned a socialist revolution that would advance through the rational redesign of domestic housing and everyday life, buttressed by Lenin's Plan for Monumental Propaganda, which would replace old statues with copious busts of Marx and other inspiring revolutionary figures.[18]

Perhaps the loudest and most well known example of early Soviet attempts to remake human consciousness through design can be seen in the projects of Constructivist

architecture. Most notable among these projects, Moisei Ginzburg's Narkomfin Communal House was constructed between 1928 and 1930. Situated on Novinskii Bulvard, in central Moscow, it still stands today—a disheveled reminder of past ambitions.[19] Ginzburg, along with the Vesnin brothers, Viktor and Aleksandr, was a founding member of the Union of Contemporary Architects (*Ob'edinenia Sovremennikh Arkhitektorov*, or OSA). Formed in 1925, this architectural body looked to extend on the practice of inculcating socialism through the reformation of existing domestic spaces, promising to create change through a new type of architecture. They vowed to use their craft and skill for the common good; this was part of a wider constructivist philosophy that rejected the idea of 'art for arts sake', promoting art and design with a revolutionary purpose.

At the forefront of the OSA's architectural mission statement was the idea of the building as a 'social condenser'. This was an idea premised on the notion that residential spaces could be designed to maximize communal interaction, enhance an individual's sense of social responsibility, and encourage cooperation. The founders of OSA would later reiterate: 'We support the construction of large [phalanx] buildings. We think that the collective way of life is possible only if one leads a communal life with a large number of people in constant communication.'[20] In the case of Narkomfin, alongside similar OSA designs, the social condenser was not necessarily meant to represent the realization of an ideal socialist settlement. It was, however, intended as an important transitional mechanism.[21] Narkomfin contained a mix of private (bourgeois) and communal (socialist) domestic units within a complex of interconnected zones and collective facilities. The thinking here was that as the building encouraged greater social interaction, tempting its occupants to shed

conventional habits, so individuals would choose to transition from the bourgeois units—with their separate kitchens, dividing walls, and private spaces—to the socialized units—with their open, airy design and only the most basic personal facilities.[22] Ultimately, it was hoped, inhabitants would come to rely on the building's communal kitchen, canteen, gymnasium, and library. And, in the process, each individual would be eased into a socialist lifestyle. This was architecture as a steppingstone to socialism.

However, just as practical matters restricted Narpit's ambitions, so Narkomfin, the *Doma-Sovetov*, and the *dom-kommuny* remained isolated affairs. New constructions and complete phalanx-style reworkings were the exception not the rule. That is not to say these projects were Potemkin villages in socialist form; they were never designed as mere façade. Yet the most ambitious deigns and redesigns never became standardized. As was shown with the First Five-Year Plan, political and economic priorities laid elsewhere—the party leadership believed that Russia had to be dragged into the modern, industrial world by what ever means necessary before resources could be allocated to the mass production of such projects. The vast majority of OSA plans and earlier architectural visions remained limited to the page. Russians even came to refer to such projects as *bumazhnaia arkhitektura*, or 'paper architecture'.

Influential though such visions were, to fully understand the drive to redesign everyday domestic life, and the discourse that developed around this revolutionary theme, we need to cast our net more broadly. As is clear, these visions did not operate in a vacuum. Indeed, if we return to the activism and volunteerism first elicited with the implementation of 'housing repartition' in 1918, one can see aspiring

revolutionaries beginning to engage with the idea of spatial reformation. Among those requisitioning homes in the name of the proletariat were bands of inspired youths and would-be radicals who formed the first self-declared urban 'communes' (*kommuny*).[23] These were cohabitating alliances that attempted to live their understanding of socialism and the socialist lifestyle. Coming together in old city apartment blocks, university dormitories, and factory barracks, they quickly set to repurposing the space around them. Pooling money, resources, and sometimes even their underwear, commune alliances were founded on the principle of equality, collectivism, and mutual cooperation. They wanted their newly acquired domestic settings to both reflect and enhance these principles.[24]

Typically, the first urban communes were small, numbering between three and six members. They often had to make do with little more than one or two cramped rooms between them. In such spaces, the layout and use of the room took on added significance. Some of the earliest student communes—those formed inside university dormitories—tended to place a table at the centre of the room, pushing the beds to the periphery or clustering them in a corner. The table was where collective meals and group activities were undertaken. It was also where fellow students and neighbours were invited to cluster for revolutionary discussion.[25] Many of these communes came to fashion their own 'little red corner' (*krasnyi ugolok*), subsequently labeled 'Lenin corners'—spaces dedicated to Soviet literature and reading. This was where urban commune groups housed their 'collective libraries' and, if they had them, journal subscriptions. They were decorated with revolutionary regalia and/or portraits of Lenin.[26] These were symbolically significant formations. By creating these spaces the communes were re-appropriating and replacing the traditional Russian Orthodox 'red

[vis-à-vis sacred] corner' (*krasnyi ugol*), where icons honored both the church and tsarist autocracy. Now these 'corners' were drenched in revolutionary red, honoring socialist enlightenment and the pursuit of proletarian consciousness.

Some early urban communes debated knocking down internal walls. They viewed this as an assault on individualism and the bourgeois taste for privacy. Others worried that such actions would make buildings structurally unsafe.[27] Some tried to expand in number, and across rooms and hallways, too. They wanted to see their commune physically grow, and they wanted to spread the idea of a new approach life. Others found that their collective lifestyle could soon give way to acrimony, bitterness, and resentment. Indeed, it is worth stressing that the urban communes did not develop uniformly. Unlike the *dom-kommuny*, they did not start life on the page, as an idealized housing design, but as activist alliances, agitating for practical and immediate changes to domestic life. They looked to turn the theoretical into reality, and they had no intention of waiting for someone else to make it happen.

FIGURE 1: Youth commune in their 'red corner' (Moscow, 6 Mokrinskii)
SOURCE: 'Za fabrichnymi vorotami. Zaglianem v kommuny i obshchezhitiia rabochei molodezhi', *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 16 April 1927, 4.

FIGURE 2: An urban commune comes together in their allocated 'red corner'
SOURCE: 'Zhizn' desiati', *Smena*, no. 19 (1929): 5.

Between 1918 and 1920, the first such communes began to spring up across the urban landscape of central European Russia. A small cluster of groups had formed in the higher education institutes of Petrograd, where they rearranged their dormitory rooms to reflect their revolutionary intentions. They extended on the example of the (in)famous debating 'circles' (*kruzhki*) established by the pre-1917 radical student body: inviting fellow students to debate the virtues of revolution and collective living, they then went on to practice what they preached.[28] Producing their own commune bulletins for the university noticeboards, the student press soon picked up on these remarkable ventures and started to run their own stories on them. The press organs of the Communist Youth League (Komsomol) were eager to foster and promote signs of activism that promoted ideologically acceptable messages. Indeed, many within the Komsomol and party were growing concerned about their ability to stimulate the mass participation necessary for the construction of socialism. Before long, similar undertakings were reported in Moscow's higher education institutes.[29] In 1919, with the introduction of 'worker faculties' (*rabfaky*)—foundation departments designed to prepare workers for entry to university-level courses—a further wave of revolutionary beneficiaries came into contact with the idea of the urban commune. Students and workers combined to form more urban communes in requisitioned apartments and housing blocks.[30]

FIGURE 3: Student noticeboard (with youth literature attached).
SOURCE: 'Za bytovoi pokhod!', *Kranoe studenchestvo*, no. 14 (1928): 28.

Starting from a handful of urban communes and commune activists, this phenomenon took on a moment of its own. For aspiring or actual Komsomol members, the urban commune became a means of participating in socialist revolution. It offered many youths a way to implement and experiment with broader revolutionary ideas and

imperatives. Reports suggest that from an impulse limited to a few hundred student and worker activists between 1918 and 1920, the number of people engaged in urban commune activity grew steadily into the low thousands during the early 1920s.[31] Capturing the attention of youths and the Soviet youth press, commune experimentation continued to grow across the 1920s, with numbers expanding most rapidly during the mobilization campaigns that accompanied the opening years of the First Five-Year Plan. By 1929, the leading youth press newspaper, *Komsomol Truth* (*Komsomol'skaia pravda*), estimated that 30,000 Soviet citizens were engaged in urban commune alliances.[32] This estimate would rise to over 100,000 within the year, as urban commune activity became entangled in industrial expansion, massive urban migration, the promotion of new team-based labour practices, and the resultant proliferation in factory barracks.[33]

If we view Narkomfin and the idea of the social condenser as a steppingstone to socialism, then we must see the urban communes in the same vein. Wherever these formations took root, they were concerned with the repurposing of domestic space, furthering the chance of collective or communal interaction, and promoting what was seen as socialist behaviour. In the university dormitories, some commune alliances went on to help organize 'cultural-life inspections', which monitored student life and the management of individual rooms, giving out prizes to those that maintained the cleanest and most well organized rooms, before then naming and shaming those deemed to have failed in their duty towards socialism.[34] The most successful and ambitious student communes even acquired a role managing their dormitory canteens. Some petitioned university management to provide more funds towards canteen operations and the promotion of collective mealtimes.[35] At the heart of the commune

was the notion of exemplary practice. The commune alliance was seen as an example of mutual cooperation and shared living in and of itself. But those involved also spoke about commune life as a means of creating a new type of person who could go out into society and promote the cause of socialism. In other words, commune inhabitants were trying to perfect their socialist credentials so that they might better serve the revolution. This is what was so appealing about the commune to Komsomol members. The student communes of Petrograd/Leningrad, for instance, referred to the 'guidance' (*shefstvo*) that they tried to offer within their institutes and the surrounding environment.[36] They were moulding the 'New Soviet Person' who would beat a path to socialism.

Formed inside a dormitory attached to the Petrograd Polytechnic Institute, in 1923, one twelve-person student commune looked to rearrange their domestic life by apportioning specific tasks and activities to specific times and spaces within the rooms they had managed to obtain.[37] This included set times and locations for undertaking group exercise, reading, study, and discussion. Writing to the journal *Red Student* (*Krasnyi student*), one member proudly noted that they established a 'collective library', which housed 'all the latest subscriptions' and important revolutionary works. Agreeing to pool 30% of their individual stipends into a 'common pot' each month, all food, clothing, equipment, refurbishment, and general maintenance was to be funded at the common expense. It was predicted that the percentage of their personal income going to the 'common pot' would gradually increase as they all became more attuned to the socialist lifestyle. This approach to everyday life, it was argued, would eliminate the 'rudiments of private instinct' from each commune inhabitant.[38]

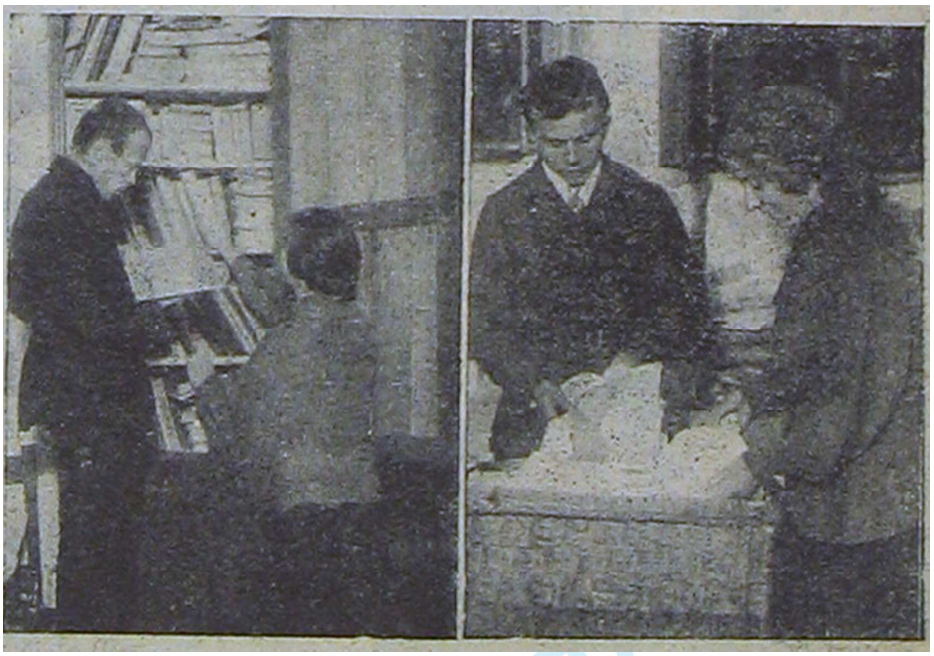


FIGURE 4: Collective library and shared work in a student commune (Moscow State University).
SOURCE: 'Fabriki novogo chelovek', *Smena*, no. 19 (1929): 7

FIGURE 5: Leningrad-based household commune in their 'study and quiet zone'.
SOURCE: 'Kommuna – ne mechta', *Smena*, no. 10 (1930): 10-11.

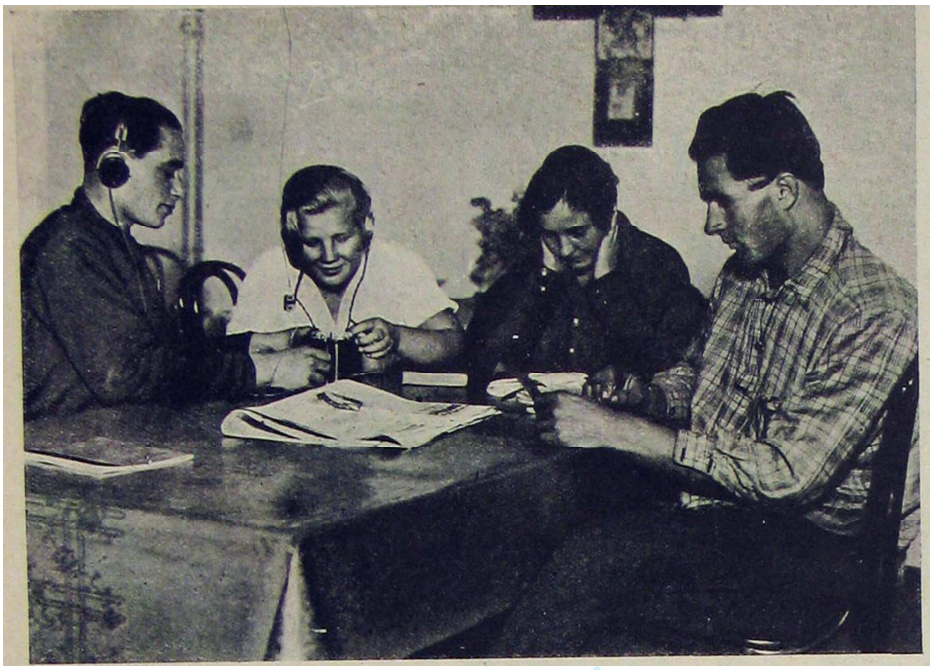


FIGURE 6: Moscow-based household commune experiments with their 'ham' radio set in their 'leisure area'.
SOURCE: 'Kommuna – ne mechta', *Smena*, no. 10 (1930): 10-11.

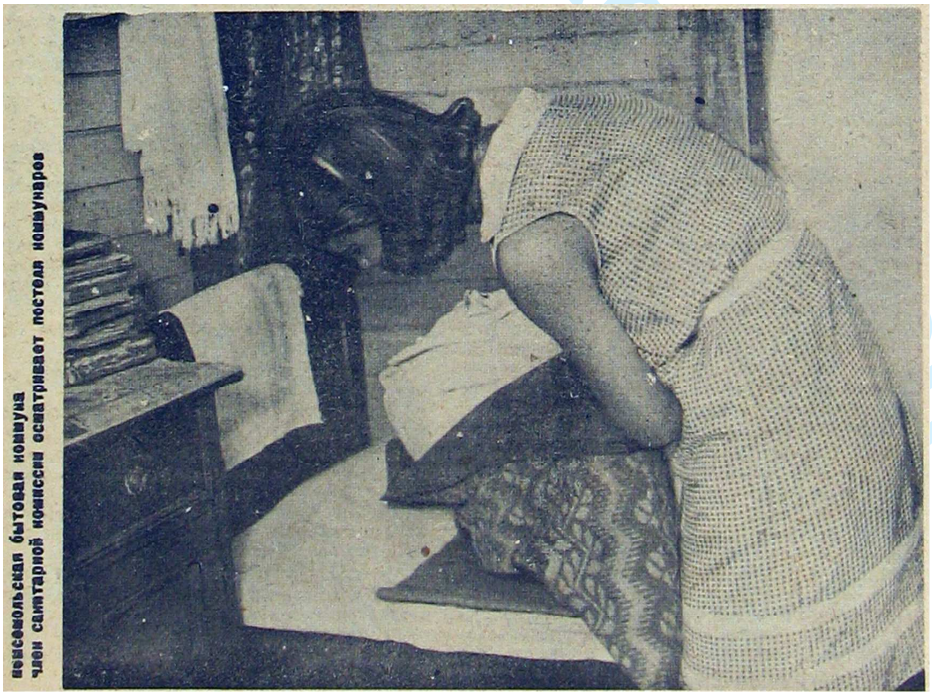
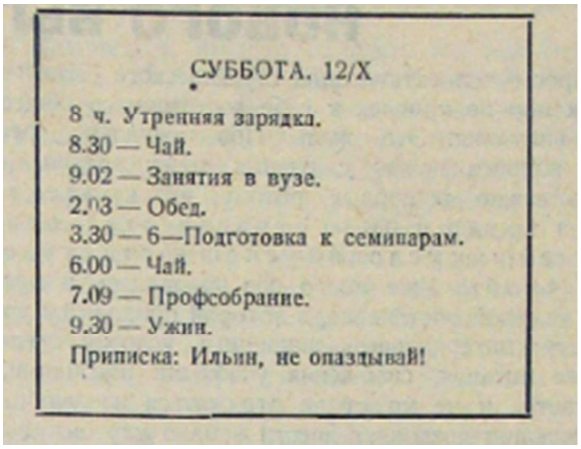


FIGURE 7: A Komsomol household commune. A member of the internal 'sanitary commission' inspects the beds of resident communards.
SOURCE: 'Kommuna v puti, *Smena*, no. 30 (1931): 12.

This commune was overtly inspired by the notion of 'scientific management' emanating from the West, where the time-management tactics and efficiency directives of the industrial engineer Fredrick Winslow Taylor had already been appropriated by those who believed that everyday life could be elevated to a science.[39] Taylor's theory was that workers and their daily regimens could be regulated to improve their productivity. Lillian Gilbreth, who met Taylor in 1907, helped disseminate such thinking in the public realm by writing about the regulation of domestic life and taking advice literature to the point of setting daily timetables for new mothers to follow.[40] Along with her husband, Frank Gilbreth, she famously went on to apply the idea of efficiency planning to domestic interior design, helping to pioneer what has come to be known as 'ergonomics'.[41] It might seem surprising that such ideas held resonance with would-be socialists in early Soviet Russia—'scientific management' and ergonomic design would, after all, become synonymous with American capitalism and American life. But many early Soviet thinkers appreciated the modern concept of progress through design—the idea that the arbitrary and the accidental could be replaced by rational planning. These principles entered the Soviet world under the label of 'Scientific Organisation of Labour' (*Nauchnaia Organizatsiia Truda*, a.k.a. NOT).[42] The prominent Bolshevik, Platon Mikhailovich Kerzhentsev, was an early champion of NOT, even establishing the 'League of Time' (*Liga vremeni*), which was an umbrella body that sought to oversee the implementation of time management and rational reorganization in factories, schools, and universities across the Soviet state.[43] Such projects and ambitions made for good stories in the press. And the keen readers of the polytechnic commune wanted to be a

part of it all.[44]

Hence, as soon as possible, members of the polytechnic commune set about creating their own 'time management' systems, introducing set schedules for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, as well as recreation, reading, study, sleep, and socialist agitation. What is more, 'duty boards' allocated daily chores to each member. This was an exercise in equality and modern practice. By 1925, expanding across the dormitory hallway, becoming a collective entity of 76 persons, the commune had fully embraced the language of 'rational time management', 'scientific planning', 'time savings', and 'efficiency'. These were the things that commune inhabitants attributed to their success and their ability to attract new collective enthusiasts.[45] They, again, repurposed the space made available to them, creating an enlarged 'red corner', complete with checkers sets and room for group activities. They even started to harbor broader ambitions, contemplating a further expansion that would see commune control extend across more, possibly all, of the dormitory building.[46]


СУББОТА. 12/X

8 ч. Утренняя зарядка.
8.30 — Чай.
9.02 — Занятия в вузе.
2.03 — Обед.
3.30 — 6—Подготовка к семинарам.
6.00 — Чай.
7.09 — Профсобрание.
9.30 — Ужин.
Приписка: Ильин, не опаздывай!

FIGURE 8: Extract from a student commune timetable:
Saturday, 12/10
8.00 – Morning exercise
8.30 – Tea

9.02 –Classes in the institute of higher education
2.03 – Lunch
3.30 – 6.00 – Preparation for seminars
6.00 – Tea
7.09 – Trade union meeting
9.30 – Dinner
Note: Il'in, don't be late!
SORUCE: *Krasnoe studenchestvo*, no. 6 (1930): 11.

Indeed, from the mid-1920s there was a contingent of student communes that openly discussed the idea of expanding to establish a general dormitory-commune facility. As new rooms were added to their remit, the possibility of 'rationalizing' entire domestic buildings was suddenly placed on the agenda.[47] New descriptions emerged in the local student press, which started to distinguish between the 'room-commune', the 'floor- or hallway-commune', and now the 'dormitory-commune'. [48] Few communes came close to realizing the 'dormitory-commune'. But one or two did manage to expand their membership into the hundreds and spread across large sections of their dormitory. These communes allocated entire rooms to collective study and recreation, moving beds into newly designated collective sleeping quarters in order to free up this space. They dreamed of creating a 'full commune' in the not too distant future.[49] In this context, the urban communes were seen as a practical means of advancing the 'third front'—these activists were making space socialist by virtue of their actions; they were not beholden to costly building projects.[50]

Such ambition excited many youths and activists. And, needless to say, it also stirred further interested from the Soviet press, which was still eager to find stories that might mobilize mass participation in revolution—the infrastructure of state, at this

time, not really able to live up to the 'totalitarian' label it would subsequently acquire. This opens our eyes to the true significance of these communal experimental constructs: they were engaged in a cyclical relationship with a developing Soviet discourse obsessed with the concept of 'restructuring the way of life' (*perestroika byta*). In this sense, the urban commune can be seen as a trend born of a youthful desire to turn revolutionary readings into tangible realities. Preceding Narkomfin, the urban commune gave young activists and aspiring Komsomol members a place to experiment with materialist understandings of the home, 'scientific management' or NOT, the eradication of the traditional family unit, the concept of a 'new way of life' (*novyi byt*), and the socialist idea of mutual cooperation—all the things they read about in the press. In turn, when the press saw activists-and-aspiring-Komsomol types taking the ideas exhibited on their pages and implementing them in the real world, they reported on their activities—and so the urban commune itself became part of the discourse.

This was most evident from 1923, when Trotsky elevated the issue of domestic reform with the publication of his influential collection *Problems of Everyday Life*. 'Not by politics alone', was Trotsky's refrain: the revolution could only succeed, he suggested, if a change in government was accompanied by the seeds of new habit and custom, a new type of family, a new culture, and a 'new way of life'.[51] With interest in the transformation of everyday life duly heightened, the press increasingly associated the urban communes with the promise of a 'cultural revolution' and the dawning of a 'new way of life'. The urban communes appeared in features dedicated to envisioning and documenting the formation of this 'new way of life'. To be sure, some sections of the Soviet press tried to sweep the less positive commune stories

under the carpet, including reports of groups that descended into petty bickering and groups that fell apart after less than a day spent together. Although, at the same time, some commentators maintained a dose of healthy skepticism when reporting on these formations. Soon the press came to refer to these assertively collective formations as '*bytovye kommuny*'—a phrase which might be translated as 'household communes', but, in this context, the root word '*byt'*, meaning 'way of life', also connects these groups to the concept of a 'new way of life' and the idea of 'restructuring the way of life'.[52] These words and phrases, already familiar to the inhabitants of the urban communes, became part of a common lexicon.[53] For activists and the press alike, '*bytovye kommuny*' seemed to become a catchall phrase, covering all variants of commune at this time.[54]

The original choice of the word 'commune' (*kommuna*) is equally telling. A French word, it was actively appropriated by a Bolshevik revolutionary leadership that wanted to draw parallels between their own revolution and the first socialist insurrectionary uprising, the Paris Commune of 1871. Lenin drew many lessons from the Paris Commune: he saw the Parisian rejection of national government authority, and its program of radical reform, as an example of modern socialist organization and administration; he argued that the regime's brutal repression of this municipal organization after 73 days was, in fact, proof enough that all class conflict should be considered 'civil war'; he believed the Bolsheviks could learn from the mistakes of the Commune, namely the failure of its leaders to seize banks and private assets; and he insisted that 1871 was the first socialist martyr story, and that it should be publically commemorated as such.[55] But, crucially, drawing on Friedrich Engel's observations of 1871, Lenin also paid particular attention to the practical lessons that

the Paris Commune had to offer with regard to housing and accommodation.[56] In his oft-quoted *State and Revolution* (1918), Lenin said that the leaders of the Paris Commune had set an important precedent when it came to the 'rational utilization of … buildings' and the broader 'housing question'. He argued that they had shown how domestic space could be re-appropriated and reapportioned to benefit the proletariat.[57] Taking their lead from Lenin, as they so often did, the Soviet press reproduced these words and reflections when reporting on the 'housing question' in the Soviet Union. In this way, the Paris Commune became associated with the 'housing question' and, in turn, the renovation of domestic and interior life became increasingly identified with socialism itself.[58]

Embracing the word *kommuna* was, then, a statement of intent. For those that formed and lived in the urban communes of the early Soviet state, it was a way of drawing parallels between their actions, the much-lauded example of 1871, and the broader discussion surrounding the 'housing question'. These parallels would have been live and obvious to contemporaries. In this context, 'commune' became a signifier for a wider set of assumptions and ideals. In activist circles, as in the press, 'commune' became associated with collective action and domestic reformation.[59]

But this is not to suggest that the urban commune was itself an imported Western construct—just as the architecture of Ginzburg and the Vesnin brothers was no mere interpretation of Le Corbusier, and just as the kinetic shapes of Natalia Goncharova and Kazimir Malevich's early cubo-futurist painting was no mere homage to Pablo Picasso. While today we see the Paris Commune was a city-wide municipal association, the urban communes and the Soviet press clearly read a very Russian

revolutionary experience into the events and meaning of 1871. Laden within their interpretation of the Paris Commune was a deeper revolutionary and collective heritage.

This heritage bestowed upon Russia's revolutionary movement and Russia's revolutionary leaders a propensity towards small, group-based collective association. Restricted, as it was, to the underground, Russia's pre-1917 revolutionary movement was organised around small bands of trusted people: radical students and the radical intelligentsia met in their selective *kruzhki*, or circles; and socialist revolutionaries, keen to avoid the police, organised around local 'cells' (*iacheiki*) that could be easily dispersed. Similarly, from the 1890s, as the term 'collectivism' (*kollektivizm*) became synonymous with socialism in Russia, so 'collective' (*kollektiv*) became the general label for those that united in pursuit of a common cause or a revolutionary agenda.[60] These were necessarily close-knit forms of organization. The activists of the urban communes were aware of this revolutionary heritage, at times using the terms 'cell', 'collective', and 'circle' to describe their own formations and activities.[61] Some also associated themselves with a much-romanticized vision of the pre-revolutionary '*arteli'*—unofficial, in some cases semi-official, worker alliances that tended to band together in shared accommodation and sell their labour collectively.[62] In this way, the concentrated nature of the urban communes, emerging inside requisitioned apartments and student dormitory rooms, was understood as part of a continuum of *kollektiv* revolutionary methods. Fostering brotherhood and shared enterprise as part of the revolutionary mission held particular resonance in the Russian revolutionary psyche.

Briefly returning to Lenin's famous political tract *What Is to Be Done?*, it is also

impossible to ignore the significance of the novel—written by Nikolai Chernyshevsky in 1863—from which the title was taken. Lenin's favourite novel, Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?* earned the description the 'handbook of radicalism'.[63] It inspired the agrarian socialist movement known as Populism to look to Russia's peasant community as an example of mutual cooperation and brotherly alliance. And even as Marxism started to surpass this agrarian preoccupation in the 1880s and 1890s, the themes and characters of this book continued to occupy the minds of Russian revolutionaries.[64] The character of Rakhmetov—an archetypal 'new man', intensely rational and ascetic—is said to have inspired Lenin to adopt his plain aesthetic and simple manner. Even after 1917, Rakhmetov and his superhuman traits continued to serve as shorthand for the struggle to elevate humanity—for the 'New Soviet Person'. In Chernyshevsky's own theory of philosophical materialism, only this type of exemplary character could raise himself above the individualism induced by a world that had been shaped to reflect the greed, self-interest, and vulgarity of the Russian aristocratic elite.[65] In many ways, the activists that formed the urban communes, and all those engaged in the Soviet discourse on the 'new way of life', were trying to create their own Rakhmetov.

And Chernyshevsky's cast of characters was not limited to Rakhmetov. In fact, the majority of the novel is concerned with the journey of revolutionary self-discovery undertaken by the heroine, Vera Pavlovna. Pavlovna escapes the restrains of the family home and seeks to emancipate herself from patriarchal control. Rakhmetov appears quite late in the novel: an 'extraordinary man' who helps Pavlovna on her revolutionary journey. One of the lessons Pavlova is forced to learn over and over again is that she must 'strive' to bring about the change she wants to see in the world:

there is no point accepting life as it is, she must live her life the way she thinks life ought to be lived by all. In a crucial part of the novel, Pavlovna unites with a group of seamstresses to form a workshop. Coming together to escape a world of patriarchy and misogyny, they all agree to share their wages and work for the common good. What is more, they pool their resources and acquire a 'common apartment' where they seek to build for themselves a new way of living. They establish a clean and rational space, full of books and the potential for self-betterment; a space that contrasts greatly with the outside world—a dusty and dirty world, run on stale and irrational principles that are nothing other than an affront to human dignity.[66] In a way, the urban communes and the social condenser both sought to operate in a similar manner to this, providing protection from a still imperfect world, while simultaneously nurturing that first generation of 'new people' who would go out into wider society and help to implement change.

Hailed as a revolutionary classic in the Soviet Union, Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?* stood as a popular source of inspiration. In some cases, Rakhmetov, Pavlovna, and the 'common apartment' even offered a guide to the transformation of society. Key tropes and motifs were constantly reproduced in the early Soviet press. For the activists of the urban communes, these tropes and motifs offered a cultural foregrounding to their actions. Chernyshevsky and the heritage of the Russian socialist movement privileged the *kollektiv* and cooperative units of socialism as a means of implementing revolutionary agendas. Chernyshevsky, in particular, taught the communes that ideology had to lived and breathed—and made into a daily reality. The revolutionary environment of the 'common apartment', moreover, might be seen as the first urban commune: an exemplary socialist space designed to produce

exemplary socialists—the first steppingstone to socialism.

———

'How do you live?' What was it to be socialist? How to be socialist? Well, as such questions were being asked, the urban commune was offered as an expressly collective arrangement designed to rewire human interaction and human consciousness. This was the answer from those aspiring-revolutionary-Komsomol types: those reading, rereading, and then implementing the things they came across in the Soviet press. The urban commune exhibited all the confidence and possibility of socialist modernity. It was a reflection on the goals and ambition of the October Revolution and the early Soviet state. It also reveals the zeitgeist in which projects such as Narkomfin were conceived.

There has been a tendency among both historians and scholars of material culture to draw the line backwards, from the radical architecture of the late 1920s—from Narkomfin and the social condensor—to the *dom-kommuny* and formations like the urban communes.[67] The assumption has been that the campaign to refashion everyday life was led by left art theorists and the Constructivists.[68] This has allowed us to separate out the utopian visions of creatives and the subsequent horrors of Soviet history—to celebrate the former without the stain of the latter. It has encouraged us to view these dreams in isolation. But, by looking more closely at formations such as the urban communes—what they tried to achieve, and what influenced them—we can see a far more dynamic picture. The activists that formed the urban communes emerged from a revolutionary discourse that was far more prevalent and dynamic than previously assumed. The 'new way of life', the 'cultural revolution', and the 'third

front' were intrinsic to the October Revolution. The question 'how do you live?', for good or bad, informed so much. The urban communes picked up on this question, various pre-1917 revolutionary influences, Bolshevik ideology, and Soviet discursive developments. They reveal a Russian revolutionary inflection when it comes to collective principles, philosophical determinism, and spatial reformation. In other words, formations such as the urban communes, and by extension *dom-kommuny*, were not tangential to the big architectural projects of the Constructivists and leftist theorists at the end of the 1920s; rather, they were part of the body of ideas and ideals that made such visions possible. The social condensor was very much a product of this time and this discourse. In many ways, it provided an architectural language to that which already existed—a grand architectural variation on a theme.

[1] V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), Vol. 5, 347-530.
[2] Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, esp. 373-387, 510-516.
[3] For example, for advice on 'how to live like a communist', see A. M. Kollontai, 'Pis´ma k trudiashcheisia molodezhi: Kakim dolzhen byt´ kommunist?' *Molodaia gvardiia*, no. 1–2 (April–May 1922): 1–10. Also see Catriona Kelly, *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture, and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2001), esp. 230-320.
[4] Tricia Starks, *The Body Soviet: Propaganda, Hygiene, and the Revolutionary State* (Madison, WI: Wisconsin University Press, 2009), esp. 95-134.
[5] N. I. Bukharin, 'Ob uperiadochenii byta molodezhi', *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 24 May 1925, 2.
[6] Cf. Stephen A. Smith, 'The Social Meanings of Swearing: Workers and Bad Language in Late Imperial and Early Soviet Russia', *Past and Present,* no. 160 (1998): 167-202, esp. 196-197.
[7] 'Kak ty zhivesh'?', *Stroitel'tvo Moskvy,* no. 3 (1927): 25-27.
[8] Cf. Bernice G. Rosenthal (ed.), *Nietzsche in Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), esp. 251-293; and Bernice G. Rosenthal (ed.), *Nietzsche and Soviet Culture: Ally and adversary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), esp. 283-287.
[9] A. M. Kollontai, 'Pis'mak trudiashcheisia molodezhi: Moral', kak orudie klassovogo gospodstva i klassovoi bor'by', *Molodaia gvardiia* no. 6-7 (October-November, 1922): 8-16.
[10] A. M. Kollontai, 'The Family and the Communist State,' speech delivered to the First All-Russian Congress of Women, 1918; reproduced in William G. Rosenberg (ed.), *Bolshevik Visions: First Phase of the Cultural Revolution in Soviet Russia* (Michigan, MI: University of Michigan Press,

1990), 79-80.
[11] See F. Sokolov, 'Nashi nedostatki. O nekotorykh problemakh obshchestvennogo pitaniia' *Narpit. Ezhemesiachnyi illiustrirovannyi zhurnal paevoro t-va 'Narpit' ('Narodnoe pitanie')* no. 1-2 (January-February, 1929): 9-12.
[12] While the grandest of dining visions did not come to fruition, the basic canteen did become a ubiquitous aspect of Soviet life, providing cheap, utilitarian food in nearly every workplace, institution, and public facility. A more heavy-handed attempt to implement municipal-style dining on a population can be see in the development of the communal canteen (*shitang*) in China during the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960). See Kimberly Ens Manning, 'Communes, Canteens, and Crèches: The Gendered Politics of Remembering the Great Leap Forward' in *Re-envisioning the Cultural Revolution: The Politics and Poetics of Collective Memories in Reform China* (eds.) Ching Kwan Lee and Guobin Yang (Standord, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 93-118.
[13] 'Dekret o zapreshchenii sdelok s nedvizhimost'iu (14/12/1917)' in *Sobranie ukazonenii i rasporiazhenii pravitel'stva za 1917-1918gg. Upravelenie delami Sovnarkoma SSSR* (Moscow, 1942), 152 and 'Ob otmene prava chastnoi sobstvennosti na nedvizhimosti v gorodakh. Dekret Vserossiiskogo Tsentral'nogo Ispolnitel'nogo Komiteta Sovetov Rabochikh, Soldatskikh, Krest'ianskikh i Kazach'okh Deputatov' in *Sobranie ukazonenii i rasporiazhenii pravite;'stva za 1917-1918gg. Upravlenie delami Sovnarkoma SSSR* (Moscow, 1942), 833-836. Also see John N. Hazard, *Soviet Housing Law* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939), 3.
[14] *Sob. Uzak. RSFSR*, 1918, No. 48, Art. 410; cited in John N. Hazard, *Soviet Housing Law* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939), 4-5.
[15] 'Iz primery programmy dlya sostavlenaya proekta pokazatel'nogo, razrabotannoi', 16 October 1918; reproduced in K. N. Afanas'ev (ed.), *Iz istorii sovetskoi arkhitektury 1917-1925 gg. Dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1963), 17.
[16] Iz primery programmy dlya sostavlenaya proekta pokazatel'nogo, razrabotannoi', 16 October 1918; reproduced in K. N. Afanas'ev (ed.), *Iz istorii sovetskoi arkhitektury 1917-1925 gg. Dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1963), 17.
[17] See N. B. Lebina, *Povsednevnaia zhizn' sovetskogo goroda: normy i anomalii, 1920-1930 gody* (St Petersburg: Letnii sad, 1999), 161.
[18] David Crowley and Susan E. Reid (eds.), *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 11.
[19] See Victor Buchli, *An Archaeology of Socialism* (Oxford: Berg, 1999).
[20] *Ekonomikekaia gazeta* no. 281, (December, 1929); cited in Selim O. Khan-Magomedov and Catherine Cooke, *Pioneers of Soviet Architecture. The Search for New Solutions in the 1920s and 1930s* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1987), 178.
[21] Victor Buchli, *An Archaeology of Socialism* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 67-68.
[22] See Buchli, *An Archaeology of Socialism*, 67-73.
[23] I. Gromov, 'Zhilishchnaia nerazberikha', *Kommunar*, 1 November 1918, 3.
[24] See Po kvartiram rabochikh', *Kommunar,* 9 October 1918, 3; and 'Pervaia rabochaia domovaia kommuna', *Pravda*, 12 August 1919, 2.
[25] A. E. Bezzubtsev-Kondakov, 'Kommuny Leningrada,' *Klio,* no. 3 (2004): 158-163.
[26] See G. Levgur, 'Komsomol'skaia kommuna "Kauchuk"', *Iunyi kommunist,* no. 9 (1923), 26-27; and 'Pervaia komsomol'skaia bytovaia kommuna', *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 3 April 1930, 4.
[27] See A. Kaishtat et al., *Kommuny molodezhi. Po materialam obsledovania i pod redaktsiei instituta sanitarnoi kul'tury* (Moscow, 1931), esp. 3-16.
[28] N. A. Filimonov, *Po novomu ruslu, vospominaniia* (Leningrad: Leninizdat', 1967), 3-15; and A. S. Balezin, F. B. Glinkina, E. G. Zak, and I. A. Podol'nyi, *Stepan Afanas'evich Balezin, 1904-1982* (Moscow: Nauka, 1988), 9-10.
[29] N. B. Lebina, *Povsednevnaia zhizn' sovetskogo goroda: normy i anomalii, 1920/1930 gody* (St. Petersburg: Letnii Sad, 1999), 164-165. Also see student reflections from Moscow State University M. Ts. Kranoe studenchestvo no. 11 (1926), 24-26.
[30] See Peter Konecny, *Builders and Deserters: Students, State, and Community in Leningrad, 1917-1941* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), esp. chap. 2.
[31] Statistical data on the urban communes was not compiled in a systematic fashion until the end of the 1920s. See S. Samuelii, 'Rabotu proizvodstvennykh kommun i kollektivov - na novye rel'sy', *Partiinoe stroitel'stvo*, no. 15-16, (1931), 12; and P. Dubner and M. Kozyrev, *Kollektivy i kommuny v bor'be za kommunisticheskuyu formu truda* (Moscow, 1930).
[32] 'Kommuny' *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 18 January 1930, 4.

[33] A. Andropov, *Na novykh putiakh studencheskogo byta* (Moscow, 1930). Also see Z. L. Mindlin and S. A. Kheinman (eds.), *Trud v SSSR* : *statisticheskii spravochnik*, (Moscow 1932), 123; also cited in Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and The Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 46.
[34] Konkursnaia kommissiia, 'Itogi konkursa', *Pedvuzovets,* 28 April 1928, 3.
[35] S. Vodovol, 'Za kommunu', *Pedvuzovets,* November 1929, 4.
[36] S. A. Balezin, 'Istorii ZhBK', *Krasnoe studenchestvo,* no. 16 (1928): 64-67.
[37] [Signed: 'Member of the commune'], 'Kommuna studentov-vodnikov', *Krasnyi student* no. 4-5 (1924): 44-45.
[38] [Signed: 'Member of the commune'], 'Kommuna studentov-vodnikov', 44-45.
[39] Cf. Edward P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism', *Past & Present*, vol. 38, no. 1 (December 1967): 56–97.
[40] Jill Lepore, *The Mansion of Happiness: A History of Life and Death* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 104-105.
[41] Lepore, *The Mansion of Happiness,* 106-107.
[42] See Charles Maier, 'Between Taylorism and Technocracy: European Ideology and the Vision of Industrial Production in the 1920s', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1970): 27–61; Kendall Bailes, 'Alexei Gastev and the Soviet Controversy over Taylorism, 1918–1924', *Soviet Studies*, no. 29 (1977): 373–94; Stephen A. Smith, 'Taylorism Rules OK?', *Radical Science Journal*, no. 13 (1983): 3–27.
[43] P. M. Kerzhentsev, *Bor'ba za vremia* (Moscow, 1923).
[44] [Signed: 'Member of the commune'], 'Kommuna studentov-vodnikov', 44-45.
[45] Kommunar Mai, 'God raboty kommuny Studentov-vodnikov', *Krasnyi student* no. 1 (1925): 22.
[46] Mai, 'God raboty kommuny Studentov-vodnikov', 22.
[47] See student reflections in: D. Chezhin, 'Za perestroiku byta', *Pedvuzovets*, January 1930, 2.
[48] See 'Za kommunu', *Pedvuzovets,* 28 November 1929, 4; 'Za perestroiku byta', *Pedvuzovets,* 13 January 1930, 3.
[49] S. Vodovol, 'Za kommunu', *Pedvuzovets,* November 1929, 4.
[50] This was certainly the view of Party Secretary Lazar' Moiseevich Kaganovich. See his *Socialist Reconstruction of Moscow and other Cities in the USSR* (Moscow, 1931), 85–6.
[51] See L. Trotsky, *Problems of Everyday Life and other writings on culture & science* (New York: Monad Press, 1973), esp. 15-80.
[52] An overview of contemporary press reports on the urban communes was compiled in A. Kaishtat et al., *Kommuny molodezhi. Po materialam obsledovania i pod redaktsiei instituta sanitarnoi kul'tury* (Moscow, 1931).
[53] Kollektiv, 'Stroiut novyi byt', *Iunyi kommunist,* no. 1 (1924), 45.
[54] Z. Karpenko, 'V kommunakh rabochei molodezhi', *Smena*, no. 3 (1926), 8.
[55] Cf. Marian Sawer, 'The Soviet Image of the Commune: Lenin and beyond' in *Images of the Commune. Images de la Commune* (ed.) James A. Leith (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978), 245-263.
[56] See Robert Service, *Lenin, A Political Life. Volume 3, The Iron Ring* (London: Macmillan, 1995), 34-37.
[57] Lenin, *State and Revolution* (intro. and ed.) Robert Service, (London, Penguin Books, 1992), 53.
[58] Cf. Michael David-Fox, 'What Is "Cultural Revolution"?', *The Russian Review*, vol. 58, no. 2 (1999): 181-201, esp. 199.
[59] Dnevnik odnoi kommuny', *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 9 July 1930, 5.
[60] Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 76.
[61] Levgur, 'Komsomol'skaia kommuna Kauchuk,' 26-27.
[62] K. I. Kochergii, 'Bor'ba za reformu universiteta', *Na shturm nauki. Vospominaniia byvshikh studentov fakul'teta obshchestvennykh nauk leningradskogo universiteta* (ed.) V. V. Mavrodin (Leningrad, 1971), 16-23.
[63] Michael R Katz and William G Wagner, 'Introduction: Chernyshevsky, What Is to Be Done? and the Russian Itelligentsia', in *What Is to Be Done?* (trans. and annotated) Michael R Katz and William G Wagner, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 31.
[64] Katz and Wagner, 'Introduction', 31-33.
[65] Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?* 271-307.

[66] Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?* 193-194.

[67] Cf. Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*: *Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) esp. chs 9-10; and Hugh D. Hudson, *Blueprints of Blood: The Stalinization of Soviet Architecture, 1917-1937* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994) esp. intro.

[68] See Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 35.

[Social Condenser special edition, 2017 – eds. Michal Murawski & Jane Rendell].

‘How do you live?’:

Experiments in Revolutionary Living after 1917

Andy Willimott

Department of History

University of Reading

Reading, RG6 6UR

Mob. 07776186632

a.willimott@reading.ac.uk

Author Bio:

Andy Willimott is Lecturer in Modern Russian/Soviet History at the University of Reading. He first became interested in the world of modern dreamers and the idea of redesigning everyday life while studying History at UEA, surrounded by the architecture of Denys Lasdun and Norman Foster. Between 2012 and 2015, he was Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at the UCL School of Slavonic & East European Studies. He is author of *Living the Revolution: Urban Communes & Soviet Socialism, 1917-1932* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

Acknowledgments:

This work was supported by The Leverhulme Trust under Grant ECF-2012-588.

Abstract:

This article places the idea of the social condenser in its historical and revolutionary context. It reveals the broader discourse from which this architectural theory was born, drawing on examples of activist experimental living and attempts to put Marxist visions of philosophical materialism (or material determinism) into practice. It puts forth the urban communes—collective cohabitative arrangements between youthful enthusiasts, usually based in student dormitories, requisitioned apartments, or worker barracks—as the human (non-architectural) equivalent or precursor to the social condenser. Like the social condenser, it is argued, these groupings attempted to mould their material and social setting. They tried to remake everyday life, and recreate human consciousness in the process. In this sense, they offered a steppingstone to socialism: a means of instilling the requisite habits, morals, and customs in the first generation of Soviets. By presenting the example of the urban communes as part of a wider ecosystem of experiments in revolutionary living, this article suggests that the social condenser was not designed to determine behaviours that had not yet been witnessed, but rather sought to enhance and extend collective and communal ideals already taking root in the world's first socialist state. Indeed, while the social condenser can be seen as a shining beacon of Soviet attempts to refashion life, the importance of this wider ecosystem is highlighted by the fact that contemporary attempts to fashion new architectural designs often remained isolated affairs. Beset with financial restrictions—the Soviet state coming into existence off the back of seven years of war, revolution, and civil war between 1914 and 1921—such grand visions were never likely to become standardized creations. And yet, as this article makes clear, collective and communal experimentation would not be bound by these limitations.

Keywords:

Urban communes, Everyday life, Revolutionary living, Experimentation, October Revolution, Utopia, Social condenser, Philosophical materialism, Marxism, Socialism, Ideology, Discourse, Culture, Apartments, Dormitories, Barracks.

JoA, Illustrations:

Andy Willimott,
'How do you live?'

[Social Condenser special edition, 2017 – eds. Michal Murawski & Jane Rendell].

[NB. I have original PDF scans from the archives/repositories – I have cropped and cut these images from larger, full-page scans].

Copyright:
All proposed images (figs. 1 to 8) come from early Soviet journals and newspapers (held in a variety of repositories across the globe, including the UK, America, and Russia). The latest image from 1930.

I have researched Russian/Soviet copyright law a bit. After the collapse of the Soviet state, the Russian Federation acceded to the Berne Convention in 1994. Furthermore, the Berne Convention is retroactive in principle. This means the 50-years post-mortem duration, as mandated by the International Berne Copyright, still applies in the Russian Federation today.

http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/about/copyright-issues.html

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_copyright_relations_of_Russia

According to present Russian copyright law, then, copyrights owned by entities in existence before 1993 were given a 50-year term from creation or publication. Furthermore, works belonging to the former Soviet government or other Soviet legal entities published before the 1 January 1954 are in the public domain. (see: Stephen Fischman, *The Public Domain: How to Find & Use Copyright-Free Writings, Music, Art & More*, 2010, p 307-308.) All my proposed images were printed by the now defunct Soviet government or one of its agencies (Komsomol or Party presses), i.e. legal entities. So all are considered in the public domain.

FIG. 1 Youth commune (Moscow, 6 Mokrinskii)
Source: 'Za fabrichnymi vorotami. Zaglianem v kommuny i obshchezhitiia rabochei molodezhi', *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 16 April 1927, 4.

FIG. 2. An urban commune comes together in their allocated 'study zone'/'red corner'

Source: 'Zhizn' desiati', *Smena*, no. 19 (1929): 5.

FIG. 3. Student noticeboard (with youth literature attached).
Source: 'Za bytovoi pokhod!', *Kranoe studenchestvo*, no. 14 (1928): 28.

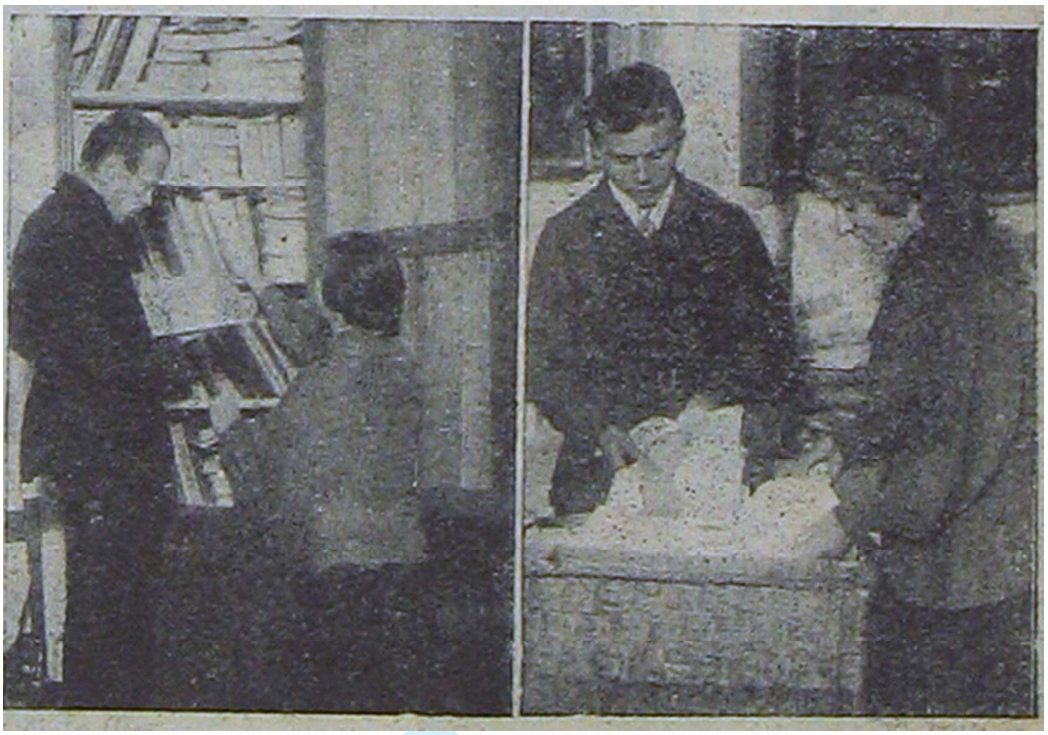


FIG. 4. Collective library and shared work in a student commune (Moscow State University).
Source: 'Fabriki novogo chelovek', *Smena*, no. 19 (1929): 7

FIG. 5. Leningrad-based household commune in their 'study and quiet zone'.
Source: 'Kommuna – ne mechta', *Smena*, no. 10 (1930): 10-11.

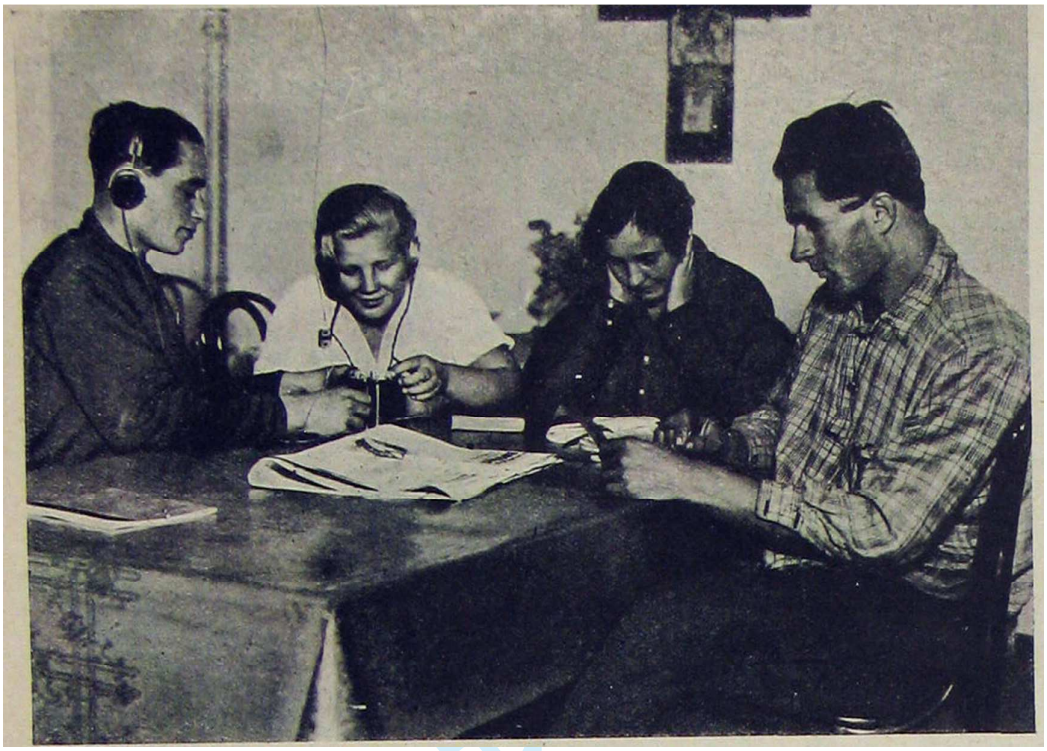


FIG. 6. Moscow-based household commune experiments with their 'ham' radio set in their 'leisure area'.
Source: 'Kommuna – ne mechta', *Smena*, no. 10 (1930): 10-11.

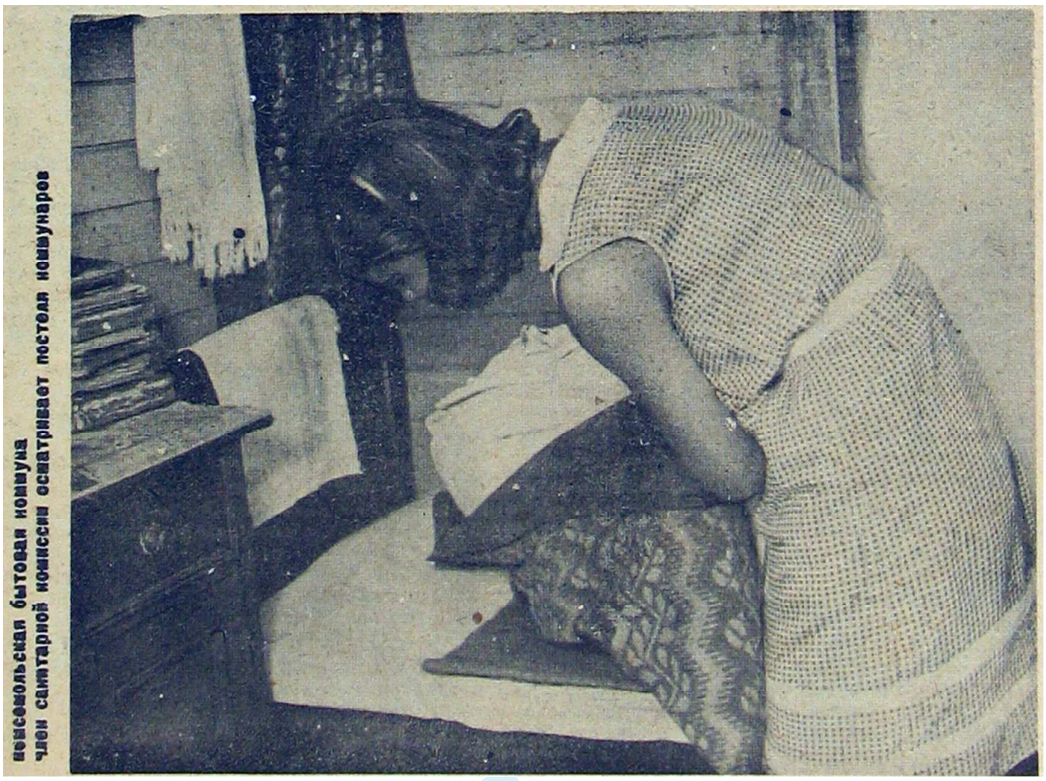
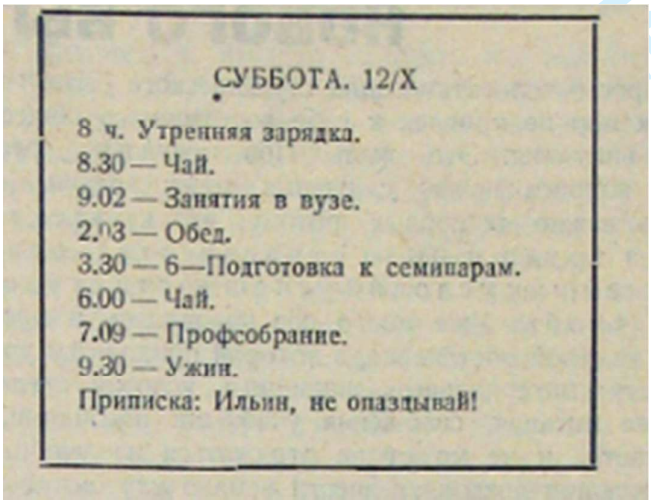


FIG. 7. A Komsomol household commune. A member of the internal 'sanitary commission' inspects the beds of the communards.
Source: 'Kommuna v puti, *Smena*, no. 30 (1931): 12.


СУББОТА. 12/X

8 ч. Утренняя зарядка.
8.30 — Чай.
9.02 — Занятия в вузе.
2.03 — Обед.
3.30 — 6—Подготовка к семинарам.
6.00 — Чай.
7.09 — Профсобрание.
9.30 — Ужин.
Приписка: Ильин, не опаздывай!

FIG. 8. Extract from a student commune timetable:
Saturday, 12/10
8.00 – Morning exercise
8.30 – Tea
9.02 –Classes in the institute of higher education
2.03 – Lunch
3.30 – 6.00 – Preparation for seminars

6.00 – Tea
7.09 – Trade union meeting
9.30 – Dinner
Note: Il'in, don't be late!
Source: *Krasnoe studenchestvo*, no. 6 (1930): 11.

FIG. 1 Youth commune (Moscow, 6 Mokrinskii)
Source: 'Za fabrichnymi vorotami. Zaglianem v kommuny i obshchezhitiia rabochei molodezhi', Komsomol'skaia pravda, 16 April 1927, 4.

91x64mm (180 x 180 DPI)

FIG. 2. An urban commune comes together in their allocated 'study zone'/'red corner'
Source: 'Zhizn' desiati', Smena, no. 19 (1929): 5.

92x62mm (180 x 180 DPI)

FIG. 3. Student noticeboard (with youth literature attached).
Source: 'Za bytovoi pokhod!', Kranoe studenchestvo, no. 14 (1928): 28.

116x149mm (200 x 200 DPI)

FIG. 4. Collective library and shared work in a student commune (Moscow State University).
Source: 'Fabriki novogo chelovek', Smena, no. 19 (1929): 7

92x63mm (180 x 180 DPI)

FIG. 5. Leningrad-based household commune in their 'study and quiet zone'.
Source: 'Kommuna – ne mechta', Smena, no. 10 (1930): 10-11.

153x106mm (180 x 180 DPI)

FIG. 6. Moscow-based household commune experiments with their 'ham' radio set in their 'leisure area'. Source: 'Kommuna – ne mechta', Smena, no. 10 (1930): 10-11.

158x115mm (180 x 180 DPI)

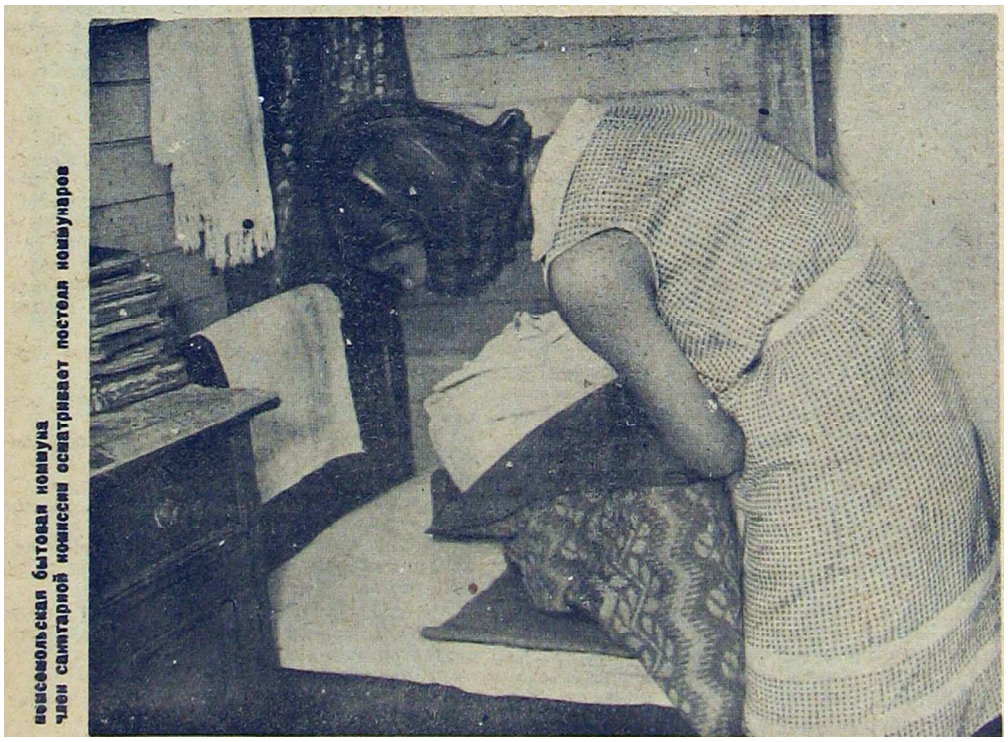
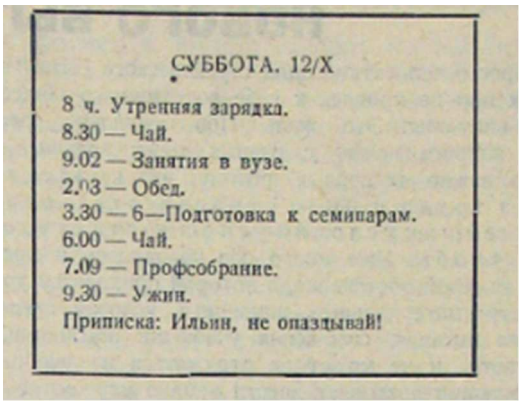


FIG. 7. A Komsomol household commune. A member of the internal 'sanitary commission' inspects the beds of the communards.
Source: 'Kommuna v puti, Smena, no. 30 (1931): 12.

164x119mm (180 x 180 DPI)


СУББОТА. 12/X

8 ч. Утренняя зарядка.
8.30 — Чай.
9.02 — Занятия в вузе.
2.03 — Обед.
3.30 — 6—Подготовка к семинарам.
6.00 — Чай.
7.09 — Профсобрание.
9.30 — Ужин.
Приписка: Ильин, не опаздывай!

FIG. 8. Extract from a student commune timetable:
Saturday, 12/10
8.00 – Morning exercise
8.30 – Tea
9.02 –Classes in the institute of higher education
2.03 – Lunch
3.30 – 6.00 – Preparation for seminars
6.00 – Tea
7.09 – Trade union meeting
9.30 – Dinner
Note: Il'in, don't be late!
Source: Krasnoe studenchestvo, no. 6 (1930): 11.