in paragraph three above). A chronological list of the relevant resolutions, decrees, memoranda, and minutes would have been most helpful.

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Stories of House and Home: Soviet Apartment Life during the Khrushchev Years. By Christine Varga-Harris. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015. xx, 289 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. $49.95, hard bound.
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Khrushchev's program of providing individual apartments for millions of Soviet families form the late 1950s onwards has held a certain fascination for scholars and the public for several years. The ubiquitous four-storey *Khrushchevki* are a familiar sight to inhabitants of and visitors to most towns and cities across the former Soviet Union. They still serve as homes to millions of post-Soviet families. While parallels in terms of mass housing programs can be seen across Europe, nothing on this scale was attempted elsewhere. The housing program represented some things about the Khrushchev era that were absent from late Stalinism: a concern for the well-being of Soviet citizens, the application of new technologies to improve the lives of citizens, optimism and hope for the future, evidence of the Soviet Union's efforts to catch up with the west, and an earthbound reflection of the superpower's achievements in space.

In the latest of at least four recent large-scale studies of the program, this optimism and idealism shines through. Christine Varga-Harris concentrates on Leningrad, which allows for a focused depiction of the achievements, setbacks, and reception of the program. There is something refreshing in Varga-Harris' approach, which accepts the values and aims of the program at face value, refrains from cynicism about its utopian basis, and does not gloat over the setbacks in construction and completion (that are described in full), which in other hands are forefronted as evidence of the failings of the planned economy and, therefore, of the whole program. While there were many complaints—about waiting lists, construction delays, and poor workmanship in the apartments themselves—the predominant mood was one of enthusiasm, which this book captures well.

Of particular interest is Varga-Harris' focus on what happened around the new apartment blocks—the commitment to "Green Spaces" as part of the planning, and the active cooperation of new residents in kitting out these shared areas by planting trees and flowers, providing or making outside furniture and playground equipment, and often correcting or completing the shoddy work of building workers. The commitment to a rounded and healthy life that the green spaces reflect, and the continuation of at least part of the tradition of collective living for a group of residents, is seen as characteristic of the ideological basis for the program. Housing was a gift of the collective effort going into it.

It is always tempting to see something as extraordinary as the Khrushchev housing programs as linked to the promotion of a mentality and way of life that is peculiar to communist societies. Certainly, Khrushchev saw this as a central plank of his goal to prove the superiority of communism over capitalism (which, he was disturbed to observe on his visit to the US, provided not just separate apartments but separate houses for many working class families). But the idea of green spaces linked to apartment living had originated in central Europe much earlier, and was well advanced in the social-democratic countries of the European north long before Khrushchev's program was launched.

While housing was an integral part of the new post-war welfare state order across Europe, Varga-Harris shows how, in practice as well as rhetoric, Khrushchev's housing program went further, providing "the foundation of byt" (214). Building on Mark Smith's demonstration of how the housing program tuned into a notion of individual rights which had emerged from the suffering of the Great Patriotic War, Varga-Harris shows how citizens engaged in the housing program as an expected benefit of communism.

Dwelling less on the quantitative data which shows the scale of the project, Varga-Harris concentrates on individual stories of a range of house movers—from those who were ecstatic about the results, those who were disappointed with their new housing, to those who failed to get a new apartment allocated. What all of these categories shared was an understanding that a new apartment was a right they had earned as workers and a sign of the achievements of socialism. The communist context is never far away, informing the plans and methods of construction, furnishings and decoration, and the way that new apartment complexes were sites of collective living and endeavor as well as of individual fulfilment. These stories are illustrated through memoirs, petitions, letters to newspapers, backed up by references to popular culture in the form of the satirical magazine Krokodil, cinema, and literature.

This book neither idealizes nor ridicules Khrushchev's housing program. By examining it in a detached way through the eyes of those who were affected by the program, Varga-Harris provides a keen insight into how post-Stalinism represented a real departure from Stalinism, not just in rhetoric, but in its aims for a better society which, for all its shortcomings, had genuine impact on daily lives.

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Russia's Far East: New Dynamics in Asia Pacific and Beyond. By Rensselaer Lee and Artyom Lukin. Boulder, CO: Lynner Rienner Publishers, 2015. xi, 276 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Figures. Tables. Maps. $68.00, hard bound.
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The late 1990s saw a number of books and edited collections published about political and economic developments in the Russian Far East. This work was part of a wider canon that emerged during the 1990s around the role of Russia's regions and Russian federalism in what was then hoped to be a transition to a western-style democracy and a market-economy. This focus on the regions reflected the fact that President Boris El′tsin had lost authority over the then eighty-nine federal subjects. While few thought that the Russia would disintegrate, there was the sense that it could become a functioning federal state with a major role for regional governance. This was particularly true of the Russian Far East, which, as is documented in this volume, had a history of greater independence and which, even under the Soviet regime, had been allowed to develop trade relationships with neighboring states. Hopes for a more regional Russia were dashed when President Vladimir Putin came to power and reasserted what he called the "power vertical." The authority of Moscow was reimposed via tight control of the budgetary process, Presidential Districts were created as a new layer of vigilance, and Governors were no longer elected, but appointed—and fired—by the Kremlin.

One consequence of Putin's recentralization, as part of a wider authoritarian stance—was a loss of academic interest in the role of the regions. It is in this context of relative neglect that this new book on the Russian Far East is particularly welcome. The book is a joint venture between an American scholar based in Washington DC