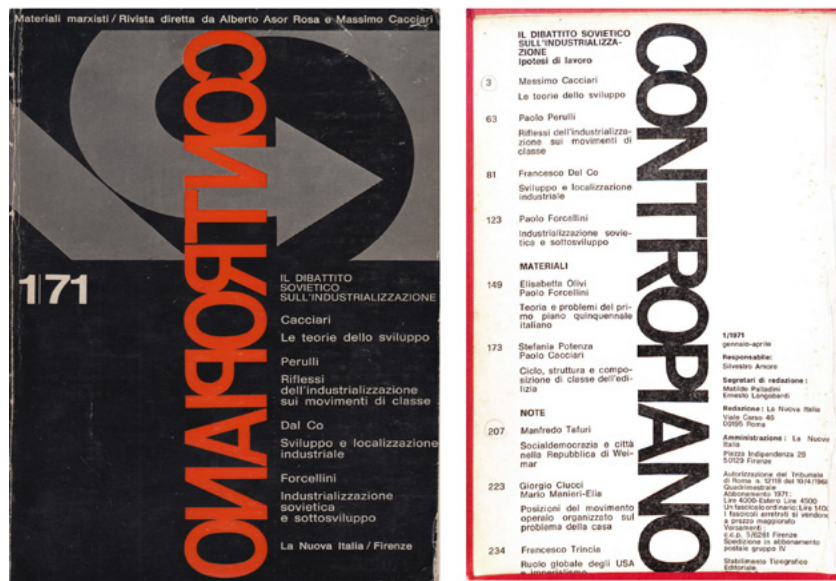


# Social Democracy and the City in the Weimar Republic

## *Manfredo Tafuri*



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Tracing the events of the urban projects promoted by social democracy and the trade unions at the time of the Weimar Republic has a topical implication. Through these events, the first appearance of a specific practice can be detected, which later became part of the objectives of the organized labor movement. Indeed, major themes in the period under consideration, such as the struggle against ground rent, the cooperative management of social housing and the technological renewal of the building cycle, appear as motifs that are immediately connected with the social-democratic management of the city. So much so that these motifs offer, with the greatest evidence, historically grounded and verifiable bases for a critique of the tradition of the claims advanced by the official class parties in the fields of housing policy and town planning administration.

It is no coincidence that, on the one hand, the “Germany of the Councils,” and, on the other, the Germany of the avant-garde urban experiments, are now the subject of renewed attention. Nor is it a coincidence that where the connections between the political level of intervention and disciplinary research in architecture or urbanism are critically set,<sup>01</sup> the primary meaning of that same connection is blurred or made largely equivocal. Indeed, today it is truly difficult to disregard—in the analysis of German social democracy in its “classical” aspect—the acute interpretations recently offered by Mario Tronti in his “Postscript of Problems” to the new edition of *Workers and Capital*:<sup>02</sup> “György Lukács brought to light,” he writes, “the essence of the ‘social-democratic tactic’: given that the revolution still remained distant and its true preconditions did not yet

01 See the essays by Enzo Collotti, Barbara Miller Lane or Carlo Aymonino.

02 Mario Tronti, *Workers and Capital*, trans. David Broder (London: Verso, 2019), 209

exist, the proletariat must make compromises with the bourgeoisie. [...] ‘The more the subjective and objective preconditions of social revolution are present, the more “purely” will the proletariat be able to fulfill its class aims. So the reverse of practical compromise is often great radicalism – absolute “purity” in principle in relation to the “ultimate goal”. This is the true, classical, historical social democracy [...]. It remains a fact that, from the very beginning, the contact between working-class struggle and the social-democratic party was so direct, the relation so close, as to deny even the mediation of the trade-union level. Trade unionism was altogether absent from the German working-class tradition’.<sup>03</sup>

But to understand the historical phenomena that followed the “November Revolution” and that saw the fall of that “organizational solution,” based on the welding of a “daily practice of Menshevik activities and an ideology of pure subversive principles,” one must consider the other side of the coin revealed by Tronti. That is, to put the emphasis on that “intellectual mediocrity, an approximative approach to science and a theoretical poverty, which could only produce failure: that scholastic treatment of Marxist truth, which, ever since Lenin, we have had to waste time combatting.”<sup>04</sup>

In the face of the renewal and growth of the science of capital, neither the social democracy subsequent to the “classical” moment of the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD),<sup>05</sup> which was by then fully immersed in the trade-unionist horizon, nor the rise of the Spartacist opposition, of the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (KPD)<sup>06</sup> or the *Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (USPD),<sup>07</sup> could and did respond with adequate tools to the organizational premises of “historical” social democracy. On the one hand, the new and ruthless capitalist science, the avalutativity of someone like Max Weber, and the counter-cyclical techniques of someone like John Maynard Keynes can be found; while, on the other, the constant appeal to optimistic visions of history and its gradual ascent toward a “workers’” horizon, or to “ethical” struggles, at best, unaware of their place in the overall economic cycle, also appear.

The already paradoxical phenomenon in this sense is the “social” policy of the social democratic municipalities from 1924 onward, which does nothing else but follow the example of the tactics of German large capital. The billions that flowed into Germany due to the Dawes Plan after 1924, certainly enhanced a technologically advanced industrial system with a high organic composition of capital, but caused, at the same time, a considerable tightening of industrial cartels, an artificial swelling of both prices and the domestic market, as well as a convulsive system of exports.<sup>08</sup> Thus, on the one hand, one finds a perfect customs policy, aimed at stabilizing domestic prices at the highest level; while on the other hand, one finds also a policy of public expenditures blatantly implemented to contain workers’ pressure on the labor market and to suppress the class clash, which was looming increasingly dangerously beyond the official policies of the workers’ parties.

To not closely tie the Social Democratic administration of Germany’s municipalities between 1924 and 1933 to such a two-pronged attack on working-class movements means to cut off any possibility of an effective understanding of the real structure of the operations of urban policy, extolled by bourgeois critics as models—even if imperfect in their disciplinary instrumentation—of a “heroic” moment of architecture and of the city of the modern movement.

03 Tronti. 290-291

04 Tronti. 291

05 Editor’s note: in English, “Social Democratic Party of Germany”.

06 Editor’s note: in English, “Communist Party of Germany”.

07 Editor’s note: in English, “Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany”.

08 In these regards, the vast German supplies to Soviet Russia and the international arrangements of the large cartels in steel, electronics, chemicals, automobiles, etc. should be considered.

The most complete policy failure the official workers' movements, suffered by the working class in 1919, after the Kapp Putsch and the dissolution of the governments of the councils of Saxony and Thuringia, in the first months of stabilization, is compensated for by a participation of the workers' organizations themselves in the mad rush to inflate public expenditure. And for that matter, the fearful fluctuation of the unemployment reserve army—700,000 unemployed workers in 1924, 195,000 in 1925, 650,000 in 1928—demonstrated the specific ineffectiveness of such measures.

What needs to be emphasized, however, is the inextricable connection between the precise capitalist desire to shift its rush towards profit maximization, from the benefits gained during the inflationary period, the more stringent customs and international cartel tactics, and the public spending policy pursued by the local authorities. The attack on the indiscriminate spending policy launched by Reichsbank President Hjalmar Schacht undoubtedly bore a blatantly right-wing slant, aimed at impeaching social-democratic municipalities. However, it is indisputable that the social expenditures made by those municipalities were within the framework of a pure and romantic anti-capitalism current, based on the claim that they could ignore—at the time in which they were a decisive part of it—the laws of capitalist accumulation. “After 1924,” wrote Arthur Rosenberg, “the [German] officials lost all sense of the value of money, and seemed to believe that money would always be available at any time and in the quantity that was needed for any particular purpose”;<sup>09</sup> while Chancellor Gustav Stresemann was expressing to Burgomaster Dr. Karl Jarres in 1927, on the same note, his concerns about the inconsistency between the disproportionate social spending of the municipalities of Berlin, Cologne and Frankfurt and their foreign policy consequences.

Against this backdrop it is worth it to evaluate the work carried out by the managers of social democratic policies in the field of urban planning. In this regard, the first principle that seems to emerge is an attempt to contrast the “criminal anarchy of production,” with the rationalization of the distribution, directly managed in its individual sectors by the working-class organizations, and, most importantly, an exemplification of the autonomous organization abilities of the unions within the field of production itself, in a par excellence mystified synthesis of capital and labor, that is, cooperative production.

The building cooperatives, founded in 1919 by Martin Wagner, and the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund* (ADGB), the trade union league operating alongside the Social Democracy, were in the forefront of translating all the *ethical* demands of the *Linkskommunismus*, as expressed by Karl Korsch and the council movement, into methods of intervention in the construction sector, as a brake against land speculation and as a calming effect against rent prices.

At the time of the new influx of U.S. capital from the Dawes Plan, the ADGB placed alongside the original production cooperatives the *Deutsche Wohnungsfürsorge-Aktiengesellschaft* (DEWOG), a full-fledged capitalist structure organized as a joint stock company promoted by workers' and white-collar unions, the union bank and the building cooperatives themselves.

Enzo Collotti rightly notes that, “inside the 1928 programmatic text of the ADGB is the formulation of an ‘economic democracy’ designed to provide an ideology for the SPD and the Weimar Republic itself.”<sup>10</sup>

Through its eleven subsidiary companies located in Frankfurt, Altona, Berlin, Augsburg, Leipzig, Munich, Königsberg, Rostock and Schwerin, the DEWOG intended to position itself as a “seed of a collective economy (Gemeinwirtschaft) in the construction and housing sector controlled by

09 Arthur Rosenberg, *A History of the German Republic*, trans. Ian F. D. Morrow and L. Marie Sieveking (London: Methuen, 1936). 237

10 Editor's translation. Enzo Collotti, “Il Bauhaus nell'esperienza politico-sociale della Repubblica di Weimar,” in *Controspazio* 4-5, (1970): 14.

the unions [...]. On the one hand [such economy] substitutes the building speculators and private capitalist homeowners as a collective economic organization which administrates construction and housing; on the other hand, the productive home-building companies, organized in the union of the socially oriented building companies, supplant the building contractors, intended as the owners of the means of production in the field of construction and the rulers of the productive apparatus.”<sup>11</sup>

Rather than “economic democracy,” we shall therefore speak, for the ADGB policy of DWOG and GEHAG,<sup>12</sup> of an already distorted and internally sectorized revival of the socialization plan, worked out by Karl Korsch and the workers’ council movement in the wake of the “November Revolution”. In essence, then, it was a utopia based on “democratic capitalism”: to Korsch, is added Eduard Bernstein.

The essence of the “industrial democracy” preconized by the *Links-kommunismus* is, moreover, clearly set forth by Korsch in 1919 in „Der Sozialist.“ “The *inevitable* consequence of every great mechanized industry,” he writes, “is subordination and lack of freedom; on this point, too, the proponents of modern socialism have made their ideas irrevocably clear in direct contrast to the ‘anti-authoritarian socialism’ of the ‘anarcho-syndicalists’. Every large, mechanized industry is in fact a form of organized labor, and organized labor means continuous subordination of all participants in the work of the unitary wishes of the management [...]. Even in the fully realized, ‘industrial democracy,’ of the socialist epoch, one principle must therefore still be applied, indeed, even more firmly: *during work*, the mass of workers must be passively subordinated to those who direct the process of production [...]. But who is to perform this function and for how long is to be decided by the sovereign workers’ democracy of the socialist society [...]. In this way, through the indispensable *liberation of the men involved in production*, one makes sure that no harm is done to the economic laws of the most modern and fruitful form of production.”<sup>13</sup>

Hence, Soviet ideology + plan: the German social democracy will inherit all its misunderstandings on the economic level, while carefully eliminating its specifically political substance.

All the difficulties encountered by Korsch and the Councils movement to reconcile, at the theoretical level, the demands of a self-managed capitalist production with a cycle of distribution and consumption that was also self-managed,—and in which surplus value, profit, accumulation and development had magically disappeared—, fall within the framework of the failing balance sheet of socialism as a social reappropriation of the “value of labor,” sharply analyzed by Massimo Cacciari in his historical tradition.<sup>14</sup> In the reduction of those technical misconceptions to extra-worker sectoral praxis, the historical “misery” of social democratic praxis is to be found; just like the responsibilities of the KPD, in this regard, cannot be overlooked, which controlled 80 municipalities and 60 ADGB cartels of local character up to 1923.<sup>15</sup>

The self-management of its own exploitation and the wholly anti-Marxist mystification of the capitalist economic cycle thus recur, in the trade union and cooperativist politics of German social democracy, at an untenable level of incoherence on the plane of pure capitalist competition, and at an objectively anti-worker political level on the plane of the much-vaunted “economic democracy.”

11 Editor’s translation. Fritz Naphtali, *Wirtschaftsdemokratie: Ihr Wesen, Weg und Ziel* (Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlag, [1928] 1966), 107.

12 Editor’s note: The union-owned company used in Berlin by Martin Wagner, for the realization of the building program concretised in the famous “rationalist” Siedlungen.

13 Editor’s translation: Karl Korsch, *Consigli di fabbrica e socializzazione* (Bari: Laterza, 1970), 60-61. Italics by Manfredo Tafuri.

14 See: Massimo Cacciari, “Utopia e Socialismo,” in *Contropiano* 3, (1970): 563-586.

15 O. K. Flechteim, *Il partito comunista tedesco (KDP) nel periodo della Repubblica di Weimar, con introduzione di Hermann Weber* (Milano: Jaca Book, [1948] 1970). 190

By shifting the competition from the plane of the struggle between capital and labor to that of the struggle between a sector directly managed by the ADGB and the SPD, and private capital, the impasse becomes inevitable. Housing as a “social good” and the management of the city based on a dualism of economic forces—on the one hand, the capitalist management of the land, on the other, the management of the residential sector alone by “social capital”—result in an inevitable overall economic dysfunction. The burden of which can, in turn, only fall on that working class diverted to objectives of struggle unrelated to its own direct interests, and responsible to increasingly anti-Republican public opinion, as shown by the crisis that mounted after 1930.

For the most part, in the centers of social-democratic majority, the cooperative and trade union initiative succeeded in acting as a dampener of land rent and rent levels. Leaving aside the case of Magdeburg, where Bruno Taut attempted an impossible urban translation of expressionist and Dada themes in the midst of economic inflation, the “exemplary” work of social housing, led by the radical architects of the Weimar Republic, begins from 1924 onward. One is faced, first and foremost, with the acceptance of a new role for intellectual work. Taut’s ethical utopianism, together with the technical-administrative work of architects such as Otto Haesler in Celle, Ernst May in Frankfurt, Fritz Schumacher in Hamburg, and Martin Wagner in Berlin, was replaced by a direct commitment to the concrete management of the building cycle: from the political level to the merely managerial level within the urban control bodies, to the productive level, to the architectural level.



Aerial view of the Hufeisensiedlung in Berlin, designed by Bruno Taut and Martin Wagner, built between 1925 and 1931.

The utopian role, common to the ideology of the modern movement, seems to have been superseded in favor of a real and total acceptance of the new role of the architect as the organizer of an economic cycle in which the dislocation of the formal theme has lost all its former values as an independent variable.

In place of the ideology of productive labor—in which the protagonists of the Soviet avant-gardes from 1917 to 1925 at least became mired—it seems to be possible to observe, in the Germany of Stresemann and the “relative stabilization”, the institutionalization of intellectual labor directly embedded within productivity. The very papers presented in 1929 and 1930 by German technicians at the two congresses of the *International Congresses of Modern Architecture* (CIAMs), seem purely

technical elaborations, in comparison with the all-utopian propositions<sup>16</sup> of Le Corbusier.

In fact, even the architect-administrators of social democratic municipalities were pursuing a utopia fully immersed in a densely ideological climate. Their studies on the standardization of residential units and on the definition of the most optimal relations between dwellings and services, their experiments in building industrialization, or some of its sectors, clash against the institutional deficiencies of the industry itself—one only needs to think of Ernst May's famous standardized Frankfurter Küche or Otto Haesler's iron-framed Siedlung Rothenberg in Kassel with pre-fabricated infill for a systematic transformation of the building cycle itself, for its direct insertion into the overall business cycle as an industry finally at the level of enterprises with a high organic capital composition, all such intense techno-economic rationalization work. The oscillation of the debate between scientific inquiry and polemic is an inevitable consequence.

The *Reichsforschungsgesellschaft* operated side by side with DEWOG and GEHAG in the Weimar Republic, was a body quite distinct from the Deutscher Werkbund, with tasks of coordination and experimentation in the field of construction at the national level.

Within it, Paul Frank argued that a “modern architectural firm necessarily becomes, in a certain way, a large enterprise”; however, the “Reichsforschungsgesellschaft” itself fails to transform into an organization explicitly engaged in the direct management of the structural renewal of the building cycle. The proposal, made in 1929 by Ludwig Hilberseimer, was to limit the *Reichsforschungsgesellschaft's* activities to a pure coordination of the areas of experimental research in the field of technology and residential standards: “not large complexes, such as those planned for Haselhorst-Spandau, but experimental complexes [such as the I. Weissenhof] in Stuttgart.”<sup>17</sup>

What is implied is a distinction of tasks between experimental design and mass production, with mutual and verifiable interactions. The *Reichsforschungsgesellschaft* did indeed finance some small residential complexes such as the one in Törten Dessau, built on several occasions by Walter Gropius and Hannes Meyer. But its action, limited and indecisive, did not respond to the more urgent goal posed by the needs for an integration of the building cycle into the overall economic cycle, which required a state-run and planned organization of the sector. This is precisely the need felt in 1928 by Walter Dexel, who, writing about the crisis of the Bauhaus in connection with Gropius's resignation as director, advocates, in the “Frankfurter Zeitung”<sup>18</sup> for a nationalization of construction-related industries and the planning of a series of *Bauhäuser* directly connected, as if they were laboratories of actually tangible experimentation, to such a planned and centralized renovation in the hands of State capital.

However, in the years 1928-33 the crisis of the Bauhaus and the emergence of the new demands for a nationalization of industry should be measured against the already amply verifiable results of cooperativist building management and social-democratic urban management.

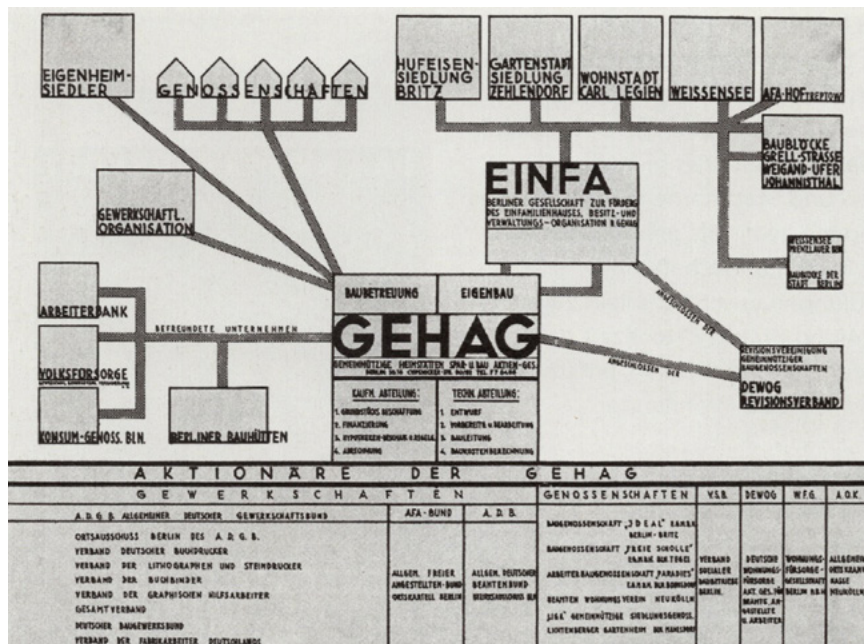
Indeed, the Siedlungen, built between 1924 and 1933 by Otto Haesler in Celle and Rathenow, those of Bruno Taut, Martin Wagner or Fred Forbat designed for GEHAG in Berlin, those of Rigpahne Grod in Cologne, those of Karl Schneider in Hamburg, those of Ernst May, Mart Stam and Schwagenscheidt in Frankfurt, are worth far more as “realized utopias” than as qualifying interventions of the new economic dimension of the evolving metropolitan cities and territories.

16 Editor's note: Here intended in the highest sense of the term in the context of the bourgeois attempt at a “revolutionary” control of the future.

17 Editor's translation: Ludwig Hilberseimer, „Städtebau und Wohnungsbau auf der technischen Tagung der Reichsforschungsgesellschaft,“ in *Die Form* 11, (1929): 144.

18 *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 17 March 1928, No. 209. Also in: Hans Maria Wingler, *Il Bauhaus: Weimar, Dessau, Berlino: 1919-1933* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1987). 136-137.





Organizational chart of the GEHAG Association, 1931.

The “rationalist” Siedlungen assume a pathetically ideological role, located according to a land acquisition technique largely conditioned by the heavy legacy of the speculative city of the nineteenth century: independent of the location of production centers already tending to choose their settlements according to criteria of spatial economy, independent even as production units in themselves from the overall industrial cycle.

The elementary organizations of cells, carefully studied from the point of view of the Existenz-minimum, admittedly constitute the extreme achievement of the radical and Elementarist artistic avant-gardes. The “empty form” of Taut, Haesler or May counts as a display of the pure ideological objectivity that characterizes the “worker city” as an *ethical city*, a city of physical and social hygiene. A city, primarily, of *social peace*...

The rationality they evoke is not that of laws intrinsic of the capitalist cycle that now invests productive territories in a new form, but that of *liberated labor*. The workers’ Siedlung, built and managed with union and “social” capital, thus becomes a demonstration of the gap that exists between such “islands of rationality,” and the capitalist territory. It must, and will, ensure its distance from large tertiary centers as well as from industrial settlements, maintaining its formal “purity” as an indictment against the urban “negative”: hence, of the Grosstadt and the productive territory; the Siedlung; working and cooperative as an image of the *city of labor*. It is this “ethical” dimension, still rooted in Engelsian and Bernsteinian mystifications, of the myth of the proletariat as the standard bearer of a “new world,” and of a socialism, based on a society of *conscious producers*, that conceals, precisely by ethical means, the resounding defeats that the German working class was going to suffer on the actual fronts of its struggles.

The socialization of land and building, for which Alexander Gel’fand (Parvus) and Martin Wagner had fought in the council movement in 1918 and 1919, had failed on the political level, but is thus realized as an “image” of a possible *alternative* to the capitalist city as a whole.

And it is precisely such ethical *utopianism* that must allow the experience of the “rationalist” Siedlungen to be read as far more connected with the libertarian populist movements of the expressionist avant-gardes. One thinks, a few among many examples, of the urban lyricism of Georg Heym, of the “activism” groups of Kurt Hiller or Ludwig Rubiner, of the Arbeitsrat für Kunst or the Dada groups of Berlin—but also of the contradictory “detachment” of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

If this is the ideological ground on which the architectural debate of radical German culture is based, it is necessary to go beyond its more conspicuous limits in order to verify its real economic content, at the level imposed by the concrete condition of capitalist development within the Weimar Republic.

It is truly incredible that even the most recent critics of German town planning have not identified the historical origin of the residential policy played out in Berlin and Frankfurt between the 1920s and 1930s. The subject of urban reform, in view of a humanitarian solution to the very serious problem of working-class housing in Berlin, was set up immediately after the unrest of 1847 by the conservative Huber in collaboration with the architect C. A. Hoffmann. It was exactly Huber and Hoffmann who founded Berlin's first public construction company, with the task of competing with the decayed building industry; it was Huber who fought, from the late 1940s onward, against speculation on Berlin's land; it was Huber himself who proposed a model of Siedlungen-type residential settlements, arranged around the large labor cities in radial patterns, whose distance from the centers of production could be covered "by modern means of locomotion within a quarter of an hour."<sup>19</sup> In a reformist sense, the response to workers' struggles would have come, in the mid-19th century, from "enlightened" conservatives. Their initiatives did not cause immediate reactions because of resistance from the short-sighted Prussian bureaucracy and the conservative party itself; but the very instruments they identified (such as the elimination of land rent, the cooperativist initiative of consumption and production in competition with private enterprises and based on public benefit associations with state and municipal incentives, an urban planning model based on the Siedlungen) will, not surprisingly, be found among the theoretical cornerstones of Social Democratic policy concerning the cities.

It may seem far-fetched to say that the tradition of ADGB urban policy is based on solutions developed during the 19th century by the vanguards of the conservative party. Yet, this is a fact that would be worth reflecting on, especially in view of the weight that such a tradition still exerts today within the working-class parties.

The fact remains, however, that, beyond the strong propaganda appeal exerted at the European level by the ascetic rigor of the neighborhoods of May, Taut, Gropius or Haesler, and beyond their specific architectural qualities, at the beginning of the 1930s the Social Democratic approach to the urban planning theme turns out to be highly deficient in the very eyes of the technicians and architects who had given form to it in the first place.

It is on these grounds that the Social Democratic intellectuals furthest removed from utopia identify, as the only way out of a failing situation, a comprehensive and inter-sectoral planning strategy, capable of engaging the entire national economic system. The failure of the SPD's municipal policy in Berlin is resoundingly denounced by Martin Wagner, until the 1931 Social Democratic Stadtbaurat [town surveyor] imposed by vanguard pressure groups at the top of Berlin's urban management.

It is Wagner himself who identifies the end of the nineteenth-century "labor city" in the processes of rationalization of the German financial industry, in the structure of the new organic composition of capital, in the reduction of workers' effort to pure abstract labor, in the tertiarization of cities, and the formation of decentralized production settlements sized at an extra-urban scale.<sup>20</sup> However, on such grounds, the entire management of Social Democratic cities is placed under indictment. It is no longer the theme of the dwelling for the *new man*—the *conscious producer* who "must" recognize themselves in the avant-garde architectural structures—

19 See Werner Hegemann, *Das steinerne Berlin: Geschichte der grössten Mietkasernenstadt der Welt* (Berlin: Kiepenheuer, 1930).

20 Martin Wagner, *Sterbende Städte? Oder Planwirtschaftlicher Städtebau?* In „Die Neue Stadt,“ July 1932, 50-59



that now assumes prevalence, but the economic calculation of the productivity of the tertiary city, the optimization of the transportation network in relation to the integration of the production centers and the commuting of the labor force, and lastly, the comprehensive and centralized planning strategy. The economic calculation of the city's productivity is the need uncovered by Wagner in close polemic against the SPD's policy of blind spending. Of utmost interest in this regard are the three articles Wagner himself wrote in 1931 to justify his exit from the Social Democratic Party.<sup>21</sup>

In these articles, hitherto ignored by all historians of German inter-war town planning, the indictment of the SPD is not political, but entirely based on its reckless economic management. In fact, Wagner goes so far as to verify within them, with figures in hand, how Berlin's municipality's own plan of land expropriation took place outside of any productive analysis of location and in complete anarchy.

The "free" arrangement of the *Siedlungen*, so extolled by some current critics as an example of the *city of parts*, is thus revealed to be the result of an absurd purchasing policy, from which all reasoning about the cost of transportation and the relationship to dwelling—tertiary city—productive decentralization is excluded. It is no coincidence that Ernst May and Hans Schmidt will write that the city of parts is the, "capitalist city," while the compact city is the, "socialist city," mystifying in turn the terms of the problem. "Where this attitude will necessarily land," Wagner writes, "which sees the most important party in the Berlin municipality tolerating a system of deception of the other decision-making bodies for the purchase of land, it can be illustrated with the example of the acquisition of the Asching land on the Alexanderplatz. That land, which has a taxable value of DM 2,725,000, was paid, with the help of regional deputy Heilmann, city councilors Loewey and Zangemeister, and with the agreement of councilors Hahr and Reiter, DM 13.5 million, or at a price of DM 6,000 per square meter. The purchase price, more than ten million DM higher than the taxable value of the land, resulted in a construction rental cost 92 times higher than pre-war."<sup>22</sup>

The examples cited by Wagner carry on in a continuous chain. A clear picture emerges of a conflict between the social policy placed at the heart of the ADGB's "economic democracy" programs and the concrete management of those programs: a significant gap between ideology and economic reality, which has significantly remained blanketed to this day.

"It should be borne in mind," Martin Wagner continues, "what it means not to be able to finance in the long term the purchase of land for DM 300 million and the construction of means of communication for DM 350 million, what it means to be constantly cornered by short-term debts of DM 650 million and to have to derive these sums not from the profitability of the capital invested but from means derived from taxes [...]. Such a municipal policy endangers not only the income of our productive power plants in itself, but also the budget of expenditures for vital public works."<sup>23</sup> The capital investment for the reorganization of the subway network, outside of an intersectoral investment plan, is thus linked by Wagner to the chaotic system of residential localization, and all responsibility is turned over to the SPD leadership: "when in the spring of '27 the Chapman group offered to the Berlin City Council to build on the entire southern part of the Schöneberg," he observes, "it could be shown to the world how urban planning can be done by economizing. The subway extension, especially if executed in trenches, would have created an increase in traffic to a new neighborhood of 50,000 inhabitants with little investment by the municipality. The traffic, the power grid and the costs of the municipal administration would have been much more profitable in a compact orga-

21 Martin Wagner, „Mein Austritt aus der SPD,“ In *Das Tagebuch* 15, (1931): 568-570; *Das Tagebuch* 16, 611-617

22 Editor's translation: Wagner, 613.

23 Editor's translation: Wagner, 615.

nization of the city.”<sup>24</sup> The 110,000 dwellings, built from 1918 to 1930 with municipal funding, are thus assessed as unproductive expenditures, under the banner of a wastefulness which is incapable of stimulating investment.

Significantly, Wagner never attacks the principles of, “economic democracy,” but always only the methods of its implementation. For him, the unproductivity of public spending is not inherent in the specific goals of social democracy, but in avoidable distortions and in subjective inefficiencies. Therefore, it becomes an almost obligatory step for him to skip, head-first, the actual analysis of the function of the city or of class conflicts themselves within the framework of capitalist development, in order to directly address, on the disciplinary level of urban analysis, the issue of the globality of planning.

Therefore, to speak, of the Berlin run by social democracy and built by radical architects between the 1920s and the 1930s as an “open city,” as Carlo Aymonino does, in which the fluidity of the unitary residential localizations constituted by the workers’ Siedlungen corresponds to a reunification of the general organism on the basis of a complex metropolitan transportation structure, is not only an ideological reading of a quite different economic and urban reality, but is also historiographically incorrect.

The localisation policy of the Siedlungen in Berlin, even more than in Frankfurt, is part of a deficient and economically untenable management of the city, both because of the objective inabilities of SPD officials to place themselves at a capitalistically correct level — at least in the limited area of their intervention — and because of the very sectorial nature within which the theme of dwelling is isolated from the theme of the city as a productive organism. In this sense, within social democratic urban policy, anti-capitalist instance paradoxically signifies a failed technique of economic management.

The urban management of German Social Democratic municipalities thus seems to dramatically verify, in reality, what Max Weber prophesied in 1907 when he spoke in the discussion, “on the constitution and organization of municipal administrations,” which took place in Magdeburg. While arguing for the impossibility of revolutionary socialism to administer power rationally (according to an overall capitalist logic), without ruining the administrations themselves or without changing their class connotations, Weber wrote: “nothing would backfire more heavily, even on us, than the attempt to want to build the future socialist policy on the basis of our present economic and social order; the first to abandon the Party [...] would be its own partisans, the workers.”<sup>25</sup> To the economic smokiness of the *Linkskommunismus* and the amateurism of social democratic praxis, Weber’s lucid sectarianism on the capitalist side seems to remind us of the specific tasks of class struggle *within* and *against* the development around relations of production.

There is thus an enormous distance between the urban planning practice of social democratic municipalities and the lucidity with which a theorist of urban models, such as Ludwig Hilberseimer, takes up Georg Simmel’s theses on the meaning of the modern metropolis, formulated in 1903. “Thus the metropolis”, Hilberseimer writes in his *Großstadtarchitektur* of 1927, “appears first and foremost as a creation of all-powerful capital; as a feature of its anonymity; as an urban form with its own economic, social, and collective psychic foundations that enable the simultaneous isolation and tightest amalgamation of its inhabitants. A rhythm of life amplified a thousand times displaces the local and the individual.”<sup>26</sup> It is difficult not to read, in such remarks by Hilberseimer, the Simmelian dialectic between the metropolitan “intensification of nervous stimulation”<sup>27</sup> (*Ner-*

24 Editor’s translation. Wagner, 616.

25 Editor’s translation: Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Soziologie und Sozialpolitik*, (Tübingen: 1924), 411.

26 Ludwig Hilberseimer et al., *Metropolisarchitecture and Selected Essays*, Columbia University GSAPP Sourcebooks 2 (New York: GSAPP Books, 2012), 86-87.

27 Hilbersmeier et al., 35-36.

*venleben*) and the higher level of “knowledge” caused by it (*Verstand*). The disorganization of the capitalist city is thus for Hilberseimer linked to an initial moment of formation, necessary only as a transitional phase, destined for a higher collective “knowing” that is, first and foremost, a *global plan* of urban and territorial productivity, integrated into a plan of national and international economy. Not only, then, “urban planning expands to become regional planning; [in the same way that] urban planning becomes national planning”<sup>28</sup>, but the double and integrated process of tertiary concentration and industrial decentralization will have to be subjected to laws—still enunciated within the framework of a pure abstract model—of intersectoral planning and general productivity. “But this is extremely dependent on national planning. The design of the nation of the future depends on the formation of great economic complexes. It will depend on the merger of nations and nationalities into economic units. Thus, for us in particular, the unification of the politically divided European continent into an economic unit is the precondition for a productive and exemplary politics of urban planning, which will bring a solution to the as yet unresolved problem of the metropolis.”<sup>29</sup>

The problem, detached from immediate practice and brought back into the realm of pure modelling, thus shifts the scale of priorities and dependencies between factors. The implicit but very clear criticism of the sectoral method of economic management of social democratic organizations is immediate for Hilberseimer. Only through the programming of supranational models of intersectoral economy can the “manifold,” the “capitalist chaos” of production, of which the *Grossstadt* is an image, be “shaped,” dominated. (It is no coincidence that on the last page of his volume Hilberseimer quotes Nietzsche, regarding the chaos that is “forced” to become *form*: much to the relief of those who are still unable to correctly read the links between “negative thought” and the avant-garde.<sup>30</sup>

What is important is that, between Hilberseimer’s all-theoretical, laboratory-like reading, and the conclusions drawn by Martin Wagner from his daily experience as a *Stadtbaurat*, a collimation of perspectives can be obtained. No longer a, “democratic capital,” but a planned capital is placed at the head of an *ideology of the plan* to which all the attributes of a struggle against capital are assigned tout-court.

Capital as the anarchy of production, then, and the *plan* as the law to be imposed by force on capital itself. We are still, despite everything, in the heavens of pure general ideology. The more conspicuous limits of Bernsteinian praxis, of the SPD, of the ADGB, are only partially overcome. In the face of the theoretical leaps made by counter-cyclical and Keynesian economic theories, the intellectuals of the Weimar Republic, subjectively transformed into technicians of urban economics, can only discover that the single country where their ideological views of a planned capitalism seem feasible is the Soviet Russia of the first Five-Year Plan.

The identification of socialism and the plan is thus fully advanced on the basis of the Engelsian tradition, the post-Lenin debate in the USSR, and the ideological debate of German intellectuals: after all, is not Berlin the center of a planned confluence, since the early 1920s, between Western radical thought and Soviet intelligentsia? (One should think of the role played in this regard by Adolf Behne, Ilya Ehrenburg, Lisickij, and journals such as *Vesc or Das neue Russland*.<sup>31</sup>

28 Hilberseimer et al., 132.

29 Hilberseimer et al., *Metropolisarchitecture and Selected Essays*, 134.

30 See Leonardo Benevolo, *Le Corbusier della parte degli uomini comuni*, In “Settegiorni” 203, 1971, 24-25.

31 See: Kurt Junghanns, *Beziehungen*, and John Elderfield, “Dissenting Ideologies and the German Revolution,” In *Studio International*, 180, No. 927 (November 1970), 180-187. Especially for the connections between the Berlin political climate and the agitated operations of the intellectual avant-garde.

“Irony of fate,” writes Martin Wagner,<sup>32</sup> “on the same day when more than a thousand urban planners, after witnessing for five days the autopsy of the corpse of the European urban organism, agree on their impotence to do anything in their final meeting, the municipal town planning councilor Ernst May gives his great report on Russian town planning, in a circle of enthusiastic young architects and interested builders [...]. The young people instinctively feel that a new vitality is emanating from Russia, that new possibilities are maturing and coming true there, that the creative joy of urbanism, freed from all the qualms of property and private profit, can fully expand.” And he concludes his “social-democratic hymn,” with the realized socialism, with a symptomatic and “humanistic” regression that puts the ethical principles of comprehensive planning at the forefront: in the Soviet city, “the greatest and noblest moments of a socialist *Zeitgeist* [...] must be contained as a cathedral of the people.”

Martin Wagner, like Ernst May and Hannes Meyer thus see in the USSR of the Five-Year Plan the only possible space for the verification of the hypotheses that had been enunciated in Germany from 1924 onward: the intellectuals of the Weimar Republic paradoxically believe that they can find that “exact” location of technical-operational labor denied to them by a capitalist situation in involution in the totality of the experience of planning. (And let us gloss over the result of such an all-ideological appeal to the “new world” of socialism under construction, repeatedly analyzed in the pages of “Contropiano” and in the recent collective volume *Socialismo, Città, Architettura*.<sup>33</sup>)

Thus, it is not by martyrologizing avant-garde German architecture “killed by Nazism,” or by extolling its political “commitment,” as it is typical in Miller Lane’s book,<sup>34</sup> that clarity can be shed on a fundamental moment of “social” city management, such as that experienced in the Weimar Republic.

Laying bare the substantial “theoretical misery” of that administration, parallel to the “theoretical misery and scholastic cure of Marxist truth,” deprecated by Tronti in the “classical” social democracy, may prove fruitful today, to avoid, at the very least, the repetition of mistakes that, before being “administrative,” are measured by the political impasse and the disastrous deviations of the class struggle they inevitably provoke.

*Manfredo Tafuri*

<sup>32</sup> Editor’s translation: *Tagebuch*, 25 July 1931, No. 30.

<sup>33</sup> Alberto Asor Rosa et al., *Socialismo, città, architettura URSS 1917-1937* (Rome: Officina Edizioni, 1971).

<sup>34</sup> Barbara Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918-1945* (Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 1968).

## AUTHORS

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