Housing Projects and Cityscape in Vienna: Apartment Buildings as Fortresses from Metaphor to Reality

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Housing Projects and Cityscape in Vienna: Apartment Buildings as Fortresses from Metaphor to Reality

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“But every metaphor that life shatters implies a loss of human freedom. For freedom can exist only so long as fictions and metaphors are stronger than crude reality, and thus uphold our dignity. In fact every shattered metaphor is nothing but the flag of human freedom trodden into the dust—in this case red and white.”1
The problem of whether public housing projects in Vienna were located and designed with military considerations in mind will not go away. The scorn of Ursula Prokop\(^2\) at the idea that the complex at Friedrich-Engels-Platz contained any military intent based on studying Rudolf Perco’s designs and notes, for example, can be found earlier in stronger language when the Hautmann brothers register “Homeric laughter” at similar thoughts.\(^3\)

Anson Rabinbach is suspicious when he looks at the military possibilities to be found in pools, gardens, playgrounds and the like, but later in the same work he expresses certainty without, however, providing any evidence, “There can be no doubt that the houses were built with a military purpose in mind, as structures to be defended with force…”\(^4\) Generally accepted views, though, seem to follow Kurt Peball with his cool and sober dismissal of the notion for lack of documentary evidence.\(^5\) It is hard to disagree with one part of Peball’s argument that at least some of the 370 or so projects found themselves of necessity at strategic locations near bridges, major intersections, army bases, railroad terminals and the like due to sheer numbers. The accidental nature of the locations reinforces the lack of evidence to become something approaching received wisdom. Contemporaries said simply that the plans were there for all to see when they were posted in City Hall and that it was impossible to include secret passages and the like because the buildings were mostly designed by private architects and firms.* On the other hand, Josef Schneider published a tract shortly after the brief civil war in 1934 on the “Fall of the Red Fortress,” as he called the Karl-Marx-Hof, the location where the city government has chosen to commemorate the uprising in a special way, and he listed the military characteristics of the housing projects in general terms easily dismissed for lack of details. Somehow, however, the history of contemporary accusations starting well before the Karl-Marx-Hof was built that the city was building “Kasernen” or military bases echoes today not just because they were voiced consistently in the press and the City Council by Christian Socials but because the buildings, Objekte in German, are still there and can be studied in relation to their surroundings and the cityscape as a whole, that is the Stadtbild of Vienna, which had long been of concern to city planners. In the process, the unique qualities of these projects, found in every part of town except the First District inside the Ring, often take on a military cast suggesting that the politics of confrontation between the federal government and the socialists were being expressed in architectural form, at first perhaps as metaphor and then as reality when the socialists felt pushed to the extreme of actual armed uprising that turned quickly and almost exclusively into defense of the housing projects against a counterattack by the government. In other words the metaphor of the fortress became the reality when confronted with the crude actuality of increas-

ing political confrontation that ended in armed revolt.* Not only were the Social Democrats aware of the accusations, they added to the rhetoric by conceding that the projects could be thought of as fortresses of the people. Otto Glöckel, head of the Vienna schools, said at the torchlight parade on the evening before the opening of the Karl Marx Hof, "Earlier, palaces and castles were built for the oppressors of the people, castles of the nobility and the knights; today castles of the people arise. This building is for us a symbol; on its forehead it bears the name of the immortal spirit of Karl Marx. In his name we have built a new fortress of rent protection..."6

Commentary on the housing program of the Social Democrats until now has come mostly from architectural historians using esthetic and sociological categories. On occasion it stretches logic, as for example in a biographical sketch of Karl Ehn, architect of the Karl-Marx-Hof. "Beyond that, the complex received sad notoriety through the bloody struggles of the civil war fought there in February, 1934, as at an array of other city housing projects, which showed through the rapid defeat of the workers’ uprising that the martial appearance of the housing complex was only metaphorical and in no way met real strategic requirements."† Similar thinking can be found in Ursula Prokop’s biography of Rudolf Perco, although she recognizes a problem with considering the massive complex at Friedrich-Engels-Platz merely as a metaphor.‡ Eve Blau concurs more or less.7 Franz Kaym, himself deeply involved in providing designs suitable for defense as shown in the settlement on Weissenböckstrasse, wrote, "some of these

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* Commentators over the years have addressed the question. Gerhard Kapner, for example, in “Der Wiener kommunale Wohnbau: Urteile der Zwischen- u. Nachkriegszeit” in Franz Kadrnoska, Aufbruch und Untergang: Ös. Kultur zw. 1918 u. 1938, (Wien, 1981), 149-159, cites Jörg Mauthe “Der phantastische Gemeindebau” in Alte u. moderne Kunst, Wien, 1961 #44 S 17 ff. (p. 149) who contends that the larger Gemeindebauten were not designed as functional fortresses but as symbols, an esthetic category of revolutionary architecture that did not serve a revolution at all but was merely a style. Kapner finds support from Rainer Bauböck and the art historians Peter Haiko and Mara Reissberger. All argue improperly backwards from failure in 1934 to the symbolic nature of the architecture instead of forward from the symbolic nature of the architecture to their transformation into actual fortresses as the political mistakes of the Social Democrats multiplied. Their argument makes the members of Magistrats Amt (MA) 22 more involved with the esthetics of what they were building than documentary evidence warrants despite the presence of many architects in an office of more than 70 employees. There is scarcely any concern for politics or ideology in their analysis. The argument must be made rather on the basis of the buildings themselves and the Stadtbild into which they were placed between the wars.

† “Darüber hinaus erlangte die Anlage traurige Berühmtheit durch die blutigen Bürgerkriegskämpfe, die im Februar 1934 dort, wie auch in einer Reihe von anderen Gemeindebauanlagen, ausgefochten wurden und durch die rasche Niederschlagung des Arbeiteraufstands erwies sich, dass das martialische Erscheinungsbild des Wohnblocks nur metaphorisch war und keineswegs realen strategischen Anforderungen entsprach.” Architektenlexikon 1880-1945 of the Architekturzentrum Wiens, entry on Karl Ehn. Online. Using the same logic Fort Ticonderoga could be considered a metaphorical fortress because it fell in a matter of minutes during the American Revolution.

‡ Prokop, 182-83 “Allerdings kamen die Kampfhandlungen, wie überall anders auch, sehr schnell zum Erliegen, was dem Vorwurf einer Konzeption der Anlage nach verteidigungstechnischen Gesichtspunkten Hohn spricht.”

"Bei aller Problematik und Vieldeutigkeit der Metaphorik der Anlage: nichts stand dem planenden Architekten ferner als reelle strategische Überlegungen, wie die im Skizzenbuch Percos erhaltenen vielfältigen Überlegungen zur Grundrißstrukturierung der Anlage beweisen.”
gigantic buildings can be compared to fortresses (Zwingburgen),” and
joins the chorus of opponents by adding, “The largest of these party bases
(Parteikasernen), with 2,400 apartments, went to Perco.”* The revolu-
cionary political conditions of the decade have been passed over by historians
of the housing program in favor of an approach that treats the politics of
the First Republic as though Austria at the time was a republic with consti-
tutional government acceptable to all, not unlike the United States. Rather,
the normal state of affairs during this time can be regarded as closer to
protracted revolutionary class struggle and counterrevolution than busi-
ness as usual. The politics of the housing program and the buildings them-
selves, in other words, have been treated apart from broader political con-
siderations and the impact of those conditions on the architecture of the
buildings as though the intentions of the socialists were restricted solely to
providing public housing and securing votes for doing so.

The purpose of this article is to raise the question again in a modest form
by pointing to three relatively small buildings built between 1925 and 1928
at the same time the mammoth Karl-Marx-Hof was being planned and
built and relating them to the Stadtbild, influenced by the politics of the
time. Many projects earlier and later were admitted even by socialists to
be “powerful,” “dominating” and “monumental.” The locations might have
been strategic by accident but the choices planners and architects made
for buildings on the sites were fully informed by concerns about the impact
they would have on the Stadtbild. Josef Bittner, clearly aware of compet-
ing with a bygone culture, defends the monumentality of one apartment
block because of its proximity to the Gloriette at Schönbrunn†, Peball’s
argument loses force when the sites he shrugs off as strategic by accident
received buildings that look like bunkers, with features useful in the event
of urban warfare. City officials who had in the past been greatly concerned
with the cityscape were not suddenly unaware that the buildings they were
erecting looked threatening. It must be stressed that they were as clear
as before about how their buildings fit into the Stadtbild with precedents
from imperial times and World War I in the recent past. I will present an
argument that the metaphors of power and domination became the real-
ity of fortresses by 1934, regarded as such by both the government and
the rebels and that many features of the buildings can be regarded by the
historian today as militarily useful at the time despite the lack of evidence
in surviving documents to corroborate observations. As examples prolifer-
ate the obvious suggestion emerges that planners had military purposes
in mind, intentions that they could not articulate under the circumstanc-
es. The buildings are all still there and invite viewing as they await further
study in relation to the year they were conceived, acquisition of the land,
designs for the sites and changes in approach by officials in the City Build-

* Franz Kaym, testimonial to Rudolf Perco in Stadt u. Landesarchiv, Nachlass Perco Karton 1-1 Biogra-
phisches Material, p. 19
† The architect was Eric Leischner of MA 22, so the design was entirely the responsibility of the
Stadtbauamt.
ing Office (the Stadtbauamt) over the decade, perhaps in response to political events, financial considerations or both. The “Gemeinde Wien type” of buildings described thoughtfully by Eve Blau should be expanded in the process to include *military characteristics* in keeping with their outward appearance, their place in the Stadtbild and the politics of the years they were built with the constant possibility of violent confrontation. Until now, military considerations have been largely rejected with strong rhetoric, but the unique qualities of the housing projects, seen nowhere else in Europe, and their place in the cityscape call attention to themselves despite a lack of documentary evidence in city files. A clear implication is that if martial intent existed and was not culled from the documents by interested parties it was buried in the hearts of city officials and communicated to participating architects by suggestion and implication following models presented by the city. Franz Kaym, testified to the devious nature of the rhetoric surrounding the building program when he wrote that the city concealed its need for architects of all “shades” with “lovely, propagandistic words.”* This possibility will be explored as part of a discussion about the way contracts were distributed.

One major reason to be mentioned immediately for keeping military intentions *sub rosa* was the dependence of Vienna on subventions from the federal government. That revenue would have been jeopardized immediately by clear evidence that the housing projects were intended as part of the class struggle, for it became clear in the course of the decade, no later than the riots of 1927, that the conservative federal government would be the likely opponent of Red Vienna in the event of a civil war. The famous housing tax (*Wohnbausteuer*) instituted by the city and proclaimed in large red letters on many of the projects ignored for the most part the debt owed to the federal government for aid.

**The Documents**

A large problem dealing with politics and the Gemeindebauten is the lack of documentation available to the researcher. City government was divided into administrative divisions, summarized well by Eve Blau. The division entrusted with the planning and execution of the building program was Magistrats-Abteilung (MA), 22, the department of the City Building Office or Stadtbauamt that did most of the technical work of acquiring sites, setting guidelines, choosing architects, and approving designs, but approval moved through other departments, MA 24 for example, led by Josef Bittner starting in 1926, which mediated between MA 22 and the politicians in the City Council where the head of the Housing Authority (*Wohnungswesen*)

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*Franz Kaym, ibid. He includes an interesting judgment of Rudolf Perco, the architect of Engelplatz. "He (Perco) experienced a brief, illusory period of prosperity (Scheinblüte) as an architect engaged in building when Social Democratic Vienna implemented its housing program and was forced to engage architects of every shade (in jeder Schattierung). Certainly the pressure was not acknowledged but was concealed through lovely, propagandistic forms of speaking (Redensarten)."
was the titanic Social Democratic politician Anton Weber.* A solid majority of Social Democrats in the City Council ensured that plans moving up the line in bureaucratic fashion would receive approval and needed funding without further delay.

One can say with confidence that there is no documentary evidence available in the archives of the Stadtbauamt to show that its officials expressed any interest in military matters or that they associated with members of the socialist paramilitary organization. Furthermore there is no evidence that accusations about the military features of the Gemeindebauten from outside the Stadtbauamt coming from the conservative press or voiced in sessions of the City Council for example, received internal responses or were included on the agenda for meetings of different departments. The absence of documentary evidence has blocked attempts to claim that any aspect of the program dealt with the possibility of using the buildings in the event of armed conflict between residents who might be members of the socialist paramilitary militia and opposing paramilitary groups, the police or the federal government. In other words, there is no clear evidence that the Stadtbauamt directly intended to include features in the buildings meant to store weapons, to deter opponents who might want to occupy them by force, to provide firing positions or avenues of communication and escape. One purpose of this article is to dissuade future researchers from trying to find a link in surviving documents. To that end extensive notes on the activities of the Stadtbauamt between 1919 and 1941 have been included in an internet link for use by researchers in whatever way they see fit.†

The documents, however, contain some circumstantial evidence to tie the program to political or military goals. Laws on eminent domain were weak, which forced the city to buy land on the open market. Some records in the files contain widely varying prices paid for pieces of property. The question of buying property at all when the city owned huge tracts of land should be

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* At the opening of the Karl Marx Hof on October 12, 1930 Mayor Karl Seitz singled out Anton Weber, to great applause, and Josef Bittner for the form of the building as well as mentioning the architect Karl Ehn. *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 13 Oktober, 1930. For insight into Anton Weber’s personality see the transcript of his trial after the civil war cited below (footnote 40) where he unapologetically and proudly, even defiantly, declared his dedication to the Social Democrats. It is harder to judge Josef Bittner, an engineer and architect who wrote a series of articles for the Arbeiter-Zeitung in 1926 when new apartment blocks were opening regularly but stopped abruptly when he was named head of MA 24 on May 31, 1926. He then rode herd over a diverse group of architects to maintain commendable order in the program. He stayed on through the Ständestaat until the Nazis arrived but was denounced anonymously soon after. Earnest letters of recommendation could not save his job and he was eventually dismissed. Cf. BD 1256/38 letter, April 4, 1938 from A. (Aufmuth?) writing for the Stadtbaudirektor to Palme, Director of Personnel. By this time Bittner had become a Senate Counselor (Senatsrat). He was still in office in March, 1939 but thereafter disappears from the records.

† The author is indebted to Fr. Dr. Brigitte Rigele of MA 8 for facilitating access to the depot, in the Kandlgasse at the time, and now to be found at Gasometer City. Notes on the documents can be found on Google at Documents of Baudirektion Wien 1919-1941: Notes of Michael J. Zeps, S.J. They are published and made available in e-Publications@Marquette.
raised eventually in connection with acquiring strategic sites. Unsuccessful efforts by the city to acquire land at the Stadtlau bridgehead, for example, require more research.* It is safe to say that some of the highest prices were paid for strategically important locations.†

Likewise, minutes of committee meetings of different divisions in the Stadtbauamt are not to be found, only the conclusions contained in letters addressed to other departments. Individual districts had committees on public housing as well, but no proceedings or minutes of meetings appear to have survived. Internal discussions about aspects of the program are consequently absent from the record as individuals who took one side or another on a point under discussion are shielded from view. The result is a certain impersonal, determinate and mechanical quality about activities as though human agents were missing from the process. Decisions are recorded without identifying those responsible. Until now few personal papers have come to light to reveal much of anything about the inner workings of the Stadtbauamt.

One of the features that the Gemeindebauten included were the small toilet windows that political opponents complained about when they called the buildings military barracks. This is a notable feature of many buildings such that it should be included in a general description of the Gemeinde Wien type from c. 1925 to 1930. They were not part of the published guidelines nor is there a record when they were introduced, but they affected the Stadtbild and generated apprehension as potential firing locations.

The Politics of the Housing Program

The politics of the Social Democratic public housing program treated in much of the literature ends at the doors of the City Council or Gemeinderat. The City Council with Anton Weber in charge of housing embarked on a program of building first 25,000 apartments, then quickly another 25,000, delegating the Stadtbauamt to implement the program. Discussion of the politics of the program is confined mostly to the mechanics of achieving the goal, that is through taxation policies, decisions made in the City Council regarding sites, architectural designs and money for projects as though party politics did not affect the internal workings of MA 22 or

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* The city owned 8790 hectares out of a total of 27,806 ha. in 1925. Cf. Ohne Zahl 1925 following Baudirektion Wien (BD) 3436/1925. It made repeated attempts to acquire property at the Stadtlau railroad bridge over the Danube starting in 1917. BD 1942/1924.

† There is an interesting case of property bought from Bernhard Kessler in 1929 at the junction of Linke Wienzeile, Gumpendorfergürtel and Margareten Gürtel before the extension of the Linke Wienzeile, that is at the end of the Linke Wienzeile. The city paid S46.5/m² for one portion and an astronomical S64.5/m² for another. A wasteland for a long time because Kessler sold it understanding that it would be used for recreation and somehow was able to block an apartment complex announced immediately for the site, it has now become an open but otherwise barren green space surrounded by heavily travelled arterials. Cf. BD 2499/29, BD 2691/29 and BD 2975/29. All the same, the Leuthnerhof dominates the junction.
the rest of the *Baudirektion*. There is evidence to indicate that communications between Anton Weber and the officials of the City Building Office were close, and without a doubt the Stadtbauamt was a politically reliable instrument to implement details of the ambitious program within the time frame set by the Gemeinderat.* Vienna had no planning commission led by an architect as in Berlin or Frankfurt, a situation that enhanced the place of politicians like Anton Weber, exposed the housing program to politics, and opened the program to designs that served political rather than purely social or aesthetic ends. While granting the importance of politics in the housing program of Vienna, however, Eve Blau and others are reluctant to extend politics to its proper limit which, as Clausewitz insists, is war. She writes, “In Vienna, politicians rather than design and planning professionals were in charge,” without considering that Social Democratic politicians were Marxists leading workers in a class struggle and were using the Stadtbauamt to implement broader socialist policies without acknowledging the goal of capturing the state by force if necessary following the model of the Russian Revolution.† At the point of approval and delegation to the Stadtbauamt complex relationships ensued between public and private sectors dealing with acquiring land and hiring private architects because the program was simply too large for the architects on the staff of the Stadtbauamt. This article will leave for another time discussing the relative costs of developing infrastructure for housing on the large tracts of city-owned land compared with buying property on the open market in neighborhoods already served by water and sewers to concentrate on the buildings and architects themselves. Certain buildings designed by city architects or firms known to be close to city bureaus became models to be imitated by architects who wanted to be included in the program. In other words, beyond the specific published guidelines for individual apartments—dimensions, plumbing, ventilation and the like—private architects could see examples to be imitated if they wanted to be included, get another contract or possibly a larger contract the next time around. The astonishing informality involved in choosing architects has been passed over lightly, or even facetiously, by commentators resigned to the lack of documentation, but it takes on great weight in assessing the politics of the housing program at the level of implementation as well as the shape of the buildings that resulted as the decade proceeded.†

Whatever the provenance of the Gemeindebauten, the results were widely seen by the conservative opposition as threatening. Private building had all but ceased by the mid-1920’s and landlords were resigned to losing tenants, but a new threat to the physical control of the federal government

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* In 1925, for example, Weber requested better telephone connections between City Hall and the Housing Office. BD 4155/1925. Accusations made in the Gemeinderat along with Weber’s denial of political intent can be found in Peball, 55. Gemeinderat Schiener explicitly objected to the toilet windows in the meeting on December 19, 1927 when Weber was also defending the choice of ground for the Karl-Marx-Hof as based on technical considerations.

† Controlling costs in the early and middle years of the program was less important than getting the buildings built and will be passed over in this article except for the case of Marinelligasse 1.
over the city appeared when hundreds of new buildings in configurations interpreted visually as threatening became filled with socialist sympathizers.* The buildings eventually became the repositories of weapons withheld from the victorious Allies after World War I by mutual agreement among the parties at the time but controlled within a few years by the Social Democratic party by virtue of controlling the Arsenal where they were stored. The Social Democrats, then, not the army or the police, had access to the weapons, which included thousands of rifles, machineguns and ammunition. The list did not include artillery, however.

It should be noted that the police were an arm of the federal government rather than a branch of city government.† The result at least as early as 1927 was that the Social Democrats and the police eyed each other suspiciously as a socialist paramilitary militia grew within the city for defense of the republic against a right wing coup. Big questions about relations between the two arose during and after the riots of 1927 until trust broke down completely by 1931. The Gemeindebauten became a focus of attention no later than that time when the police requested the designs of future housing projects saying they needed them for voting lists. The Stadtbaumamt rejected the request out of hand saying that there was a simple alternative for creating a register.‡

To ignore the possibility of civil war in Austria with Vienna as its center in dealing with the politics of the building program draws attention to the staid and unimaginative leadership of the Social Democrats during the First Republic. Without doubt they were loyal to the Republic, but the example of Bolshevik success in Russia destabilized an evolving orientation toward orderly parliamentary government among socialists to create tension between the doctrine of the revolutionary class struggle and the republican politics of Karl Renner, Karl Seitz and others who were trying to build on the democratic principles outlined in the constitution of 1920. Otto Bauer, the party theoretician, did not help to resolve the dilemma with his incongruous mixture of Marxist ideological purity, nationalism and support for unification with Germany, which he maintained even after Hitler marched in. Politicians tried to run city government democratically, using peaceful constitutional methods while ignoring the ferment of revolution welling up from below and the possibility of large scale violence. Ilona Duczynska has investigated this well in her biography of Theodor Körner noting his problems with Social Democratic leaders as he tried to organize the “technical” aspects of the socialist paramilitary Republikanischer Schutzbund, which meant weaponry more than anything else. Duczynska argues with Trotsky-

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* An example of the complaints can be found in the Protokoll of the Gemeinderat meeting of May 27, 1927 with Leopold Kunschak, head of the Christian trade unions speaking. P. 2360.

† A suggestion shortly after World War I was that Vienna become a capital city like Washington, D.C., but with nearly one-third of the entire population of the country the proposal went nowhere.

‡ BD 3266/31 letter of June 12, 1931 and response. The city answered that it could not comply and would instead send forms indicating approval to use the apartments (Benützungsbewilligung).
ite confidence in the revolutionary elan of the Viennese workers that they deserved better political leaders. Körner, a retired general and future President of the Second Republic, found himself increasingly isolated from the political leadership since the mid-1920’s. He resigned in spring, 1930, failing six months later in a last ditch effort to wrest operational leadership of the Schutzbund from the incompetent Julius Deutsch.* Matters wors-ened for the socialists between 1927 and 1934 when the federal police became militarized, the right wing paramilitary Heimwehr grew, the new Nazi movement added an unsettling element, and weapons were distrib-uted to socialist fighters in the Gemeindebauten apparently without much central control.† Rigorous training ensured that the army would be loyal to the government making socialist sympathies among soldiers as in 1918 a thing of the past.

The building program of Vienna was not immune to involvement in rev-olutionary politics. That is to say it did not appear in a political vacuum having nothing to do with the possibility of violence, a relation that needs to be studied using more tools than the documents of the Stadtbauamt. The architecture of Red Vienna evolved from deliberate, even impractical monumentality through militarily useful features and back to a more functional form of the monumental during the time.‡ Helmut Weihsmann in his excellent Das Rote Wien¹⁰ sees three periods in the program but does not admit that buildings built during the second stage contained overtly military features. Eventually the formidable and fortress-like qualities of the housing projects from all three periods led the workers to regard them as an extensive array of defensible military installations quite apart from any offensive military operations that would be needed to take control of the government in a civil war. A plan outlined by Alexander Eifler after The-odor Körner resigned included using them for defense even as he recog-nized the need to take the offensive. The plan was to attack and defeat the armed forces of the government and its auxiliaries in order to occupy the city and capture the state, whether or not the subsequent form of gov-ernment would be a republic or a dictatorship of the proletariat. Without much surviving documentation, one can point all the same to a succession of buildings put up between 1924 and 1928 that have military attributes, located at sites where those features could be put to optimum use in the event of an armed confrontation.

* Letter of Körner to Bauer, September 26, 1930 found in AVA 1934 Karton 1 quoted in Ilona Duczynska, Der demokratische Bolschewik: Zur Theorie und Praxis der Gewalt, (München, 1975), 338-339. Manfred Tafuri has also explored this line of thinking.

† Doderer in his novel seems to waffle on the time when the police became militarized. Cf. p. 987 and 1261 where he makes the riots of 1927 the turning point but already has the police marching in step with rifles and firing salvos. The trials of 1934 failed to uncover clear leads on the origins, numbers and responsibility for weapons prior to the uprising. While the defense understandably pleaded ignorance and the prosecution was half-hearted, it is hard to ignore an impression of confusion and indecision among socialist political and military personnel.

‡ The postwar predilection for settlements was reduced to insignificance by 1926 and will not be a consideration although one of the housing complexes discussed here was attached to a settlement.
I also argue that a reaction in favor of more functional forms of monumen-
tal architecture, Weihsmann’s third stage, began before the Karl-Marx-Hof
was completed, perhaps even begun, for there is evidence that this icon of
Red Vienna took on a life of its own as early as 1924. The military features
of the second period together with continued monumentality of the third
period reached gargantuan proportions at Friedrich-Engels-Platz near the
Floridsdorf Bridge and became a temptation to rely on the defensive capa-
bilities of masonry and steel proven in World War I and being reaffirmed
at the moment in France with the Maginot Line starting in 1930. The se-
duction was complete in 1932 with the opening of Friedrich-Engels-Platz,
involving even the Arbeiter-Zeitung. (Figure 1) Sixty thousand apartments
spread throughout the city and filled with socialist supporters were enough
to defeat even heavily armed military units, it seemed. This hope was
based on the probability that the government was incapable of reducing
350 installations containing arms and fighters with the small forces avail-
able to it under the Treaty of St. Germain. It remained to link the buildings
together to secure the city, the point at which the rebellion failed.

From Metaphor to Reality

The atmosphere of impending violence in Vienna is described in The De-
mons, a Proustian novel by Heimito von Doderer that culminates in the
events of July, 1927 when rioters burned the Palace of Justice and 89 peo-
ple lost their lives with around 1000 wounded, mostly at the hands of the
federal police. In fairness, he notes the transition from metaphor to reality
in the passage quoted at the beginning apparently without being aware
that the idea might be applied to the public housing projects.*

The Gemeindebauten were described as “monumental” and as “power-
ful” from early in the program. Without doubt the term “monumental” is
metaphorical, a building presented to the eye for admiration, standing for
Social Democratic concern for the welfare of the workers as part of the
Social Democratic agenda for Vienna. The image is literary and poetic, for
the real purpose of the buildings was to provide housing, of course. An-
other word used almost as often is “powerful,” stretching the metaphor in
the direction of military usefulness. Applied to these buildings it describes
a type of building characteristic of Vienna and almost nowhere else during
the interwar period.† Housing projects are not usually seen as “powerful,”

* The Hungarian diplomat Giza von Orkay, says in disgust, “Here the ground is hot underfoot,” as
he condemns both the perpetrators of the shooting at Schattendorf—the inciting incident-- and
those who seek to exploit the acquittals to further the class struggle. (pp. 975-976). The novel, not
published until 1956, is cited here to illustrate the undercurrent of violence rather than to suggest
that Doderer saw the Gemeindebauten as part of a grand scheme to take over the government. A
few pages earlier he has the narrator Geyrenhoff noting how “antiquated and grubby quarters” were
being abandoned for the Gemeindebauten in an “incessant and imperceptible migration” (p. 965).
I am indebted to the military historian Gordon A. Craig for the reference to Doderer as well as the
observation that the Gemeindebauten were “provocative.”

† Bruno Taut and Walter Gropius used some similar features in Karl-Legien-Stadt and Siemensstadt
respectively.
but those in Vienna were and continue to be described as such in the literature. The metaphor is an attractive literary figure to describe the artistic qualities of the buildings, but during the time they were built the metaphor confronted the reality of social division with the possibility of armed conflict between approximately equal armed groups that put the outcome of a civil war in doubt. The metaphor of power became the reality of the fortress. The term these days is used by commentators exclusively in the
metaphorical sense when they refuse to see the apartments as part of the political confrontation developing between left and right that led to the civil war.* I will extend use of the word here even to smaller buildings to show how the type of “powerful” building in Vienna between 1924 and 1929 was consistent across a range extending from large to small.

The “power” of the buildings became a threat to officials charged with maintaining political control of the city when the government came to regard the Gemeindebauten as real fortresses (*Festungen*), extending the metaphor of “barracks” or “military bases” (*Kasernen*) used by critics on the right. The style of the “Gemeinde Wien type” changed over time, but the impressions made by emergency housing built to last for 200 years, as the Brookings Institution described it, remained up to and through the civil war.† The outward appearances of existing buildings along with the socialist sentiments of the inhabitants that led to charges of being military installations remained even as a more functional form of monumental qualities replaced military features. All the same, to ominous earlier buildings like the Bebelhof and the Matteottihof were added not only thousands of additional apartments in locations that were strategic, deliberately chosen or not, but weapons as well after 1927. Should plans to take over the city by attacking fail, the buildings could be used as three hundred or more strongpoints to fall back upon, gaining time and spreading the armed forces available to the government exceedingly thin. Piecemeal raids that uncovered caches of weapons, however, were evidence that the government felt threatened enough to take the initiative against a possible uprising and led to fears among the socialists that the government might systematically confiscate enough arms stored in the buildings to ruin their function as bases for offensive operations or fall back positions. In the end, the perception of the buildings as “powerful” and defensible on one side and a threat to public order on the other indicate that they occupied a prominent place in the political thinking of both the government and the socialists as the civil war approached.‡

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* So, for example, the Reumannhof is called “powerful” and “dominating the Gürtel,” “mächtig” and “beherrschend die Gürtelstrasse.” BD 1925 Ohne Zahl.following BD 3436/1925 in carton A1-43.

† Charles O. Hardy, *The Housing Program of the City of Vienna*, (Brookings Institution, 1934), 108. “With the funds available the housing shortage could have been relieved more quickly...than by the erection of structures which if permitted will stand for two centuries.”

‡ AVA Bundespolizeidirektion Wien, 27 Februar 1934. Report of Dr. Seydel. He lists an arc of buildings from the Karl-Marx-Hof reaching across the Danube through the XXI District terminating at the Stadlau railroad bridge, although in fact no building stood at the Stadlau bridgehead,“wobei den Aufständischen in erster Linie der festungsartige Charakter der Wohnhausbauten der Gemeinde Wien im hohen Grade zugute kam.” The city had tried to acquire the land at the Stadlau bridge first from the Army, which referred the matter to the Finance Ministry. In 1924 it tried to get the land from the Federal Railway as it had with more success with the Hagenwiese where the Karl-Marx-Hof stands. Cf. Report of May 27, 1924. BD 1942/1924 from MA 45 found in BD 1942/1924, an unsigned carbon copy. Seydel’s report benefits from hindsight, but the interval between the events of 1934 and his analysis was a short two weeks. He writes about the projects, as part of a 24 page report, “wie dies der Bundespolizeidirektion seit langem bekannt gewesen war, im strategischen Plan der SD Friedensbrecher eine bedeutsame Rolle spielten und ursprünglich offenbar als Operationsbasis f.d. Eroberung der einzelnen Bezirke u.f.d. Beherrschung der nach Wien führenden Bahmlinien
The Stadtbild

Otto Wagner, who taught many of the architects involved in the housing program, insisted that buildings can be regarded in quite contrasting ways, with a static point of view from afar that lends itself to interpreting a building as a single whole or monumental unit, and from up close with an active, ever-changing approach to details as an observer moves from different distances and angles toward it, alongside, and into it. The result is a “kinesthetic” impression of the building in terms of point and counterpoint.* The perception is more variegated and dynamic the more the façade and different parts of the building are articulated and differentiated. The monumental qualities of the large blocks as well as many smaller ones inspire admiration and respect, even awe for the accomplishments of the Social Democrats sociologically and architecturally, but they should be complemented by a closer investigation in kinesthetic terms of the features that could be useful tactically in an armed confrontation with adversaries approaching along open streets and exposed places to suppress resistance.† In other words, the constantly changing shape of many buildings seen from different distances and angles, approaching them, moving into courtyards and into interiors can generate unease and anxiety, a feeling of vulnerability, at the thought that many characteristics resemble those of military installations and might easily be used to house armed men intent on repelling an attack. The long streets of Biedermeier buildings built to the zoning limit at the sidewalk and no farther were gone as city officials departed from the building lines (Baulinien) that had become rigid to the point of boredom in the nineteenth century. In their place came streets along which buildings were far from flat, protruding onto and over sidewalks or being set back from the building lines when the city granted itself variances to the Baulinien. The new blocks, either filling in vacant lots (Baulückenverbauung) or standing alone (Randverbauung), became articulated with projecting bays, masonry balconies cantilevered toward the street, towers that encroached onto and spanned the sidewalk sometimes forming tunnels along extended facades, and set back corners that allowed observers to see down the street from five or more floors up, to name a few features that could be considered intimidating or threatening to someone imagining, or knowing, that the buildings held men with military weapons. The small toilet ventilation windows were especially prominent. Buildings like the Matteottihof and Rabenhof included arches that spanned gedacht—schliesslich, als sich die hochfliegenden Pläne nicht verwirklichen liessen, als Stützpunkte f.d. Verteidigung der Aufständischen dienten."

* Eve Blau deals with this in The Architecture of Red Vienna (MIT, 1999) pp. 238-248 attributing Wagner’s view to a combination of the essentially optical aesthetics of Adolf Hildebrand and the broader ideas of August Schmarsow which involved the whole body.

† Examples would be the Metzleinsthalerhof and especially the Reumannhof with its grand central tract, overly tall for an apartment building before elevators were built in, as seen from the open space of the Haydnpark across the Gürtel. Franz Kaym was likely referring to the Reumannhof when he wrote later that the city was interested in elections rather than the Stadtbild when it built buildings up to 8 stories (7 Stockwerke) high without elevators. Testimonial to Rudolf Perco, p. 19.
entire streets to create glacis-like fields of fire along their length within easy range of rifles and machineguns. Extensive use of reinforced concrete that made cantilevers possible, solid brick walls (Massivmauerwerk) rather than hollow tile, concrete-encased entries to stairwells, basement windows covering entrances to courtyards, and windows that enfiladed other building fronts can be found everywhere.* Stairwells opened onto interior courtyards rather than the street as before which meant that access to upper floors was possible only from inside the courtyard.

As a consequence, an ever-changing and moving approach to many Gemeindebauten generates a different “feel” about them, one unique to Vienna and unsettling to a point where it should be included as part of a general typology relative to the Stadtbild as a whole. Opponents and commentators were not paranoid in imagining weapons being fired from many apertures in the blocks, eventually regarding them as a kind of urban Maginot Line more important to assault and retake than even the municipal electricity and gas works occupied by the rebels at the start of the civil war. The outward “power” suggested by the architecture seduced the workers into thinking that the projects could withstand attacks by opposing armed forces, the Karl-Marx-Hof being just one of a type that started with the Fuchsenfeldhof, the Hanuschhof and the Lassallehof.

Many other buildings were part of the picture, not just large ones with hundreds of apartments but smaller ones as well. In this article I will point out the characteristics of three smaller buildings with around 50 apartments each easily overlooked because of their size but located in areas of strategic interest for the overall pattern of socialist control. The sites are significant without stretching the imagination, but the unusual forms and military features of the three appear unnecessary in the Stadtbild due to their small size unless political intentions were at work.† Regarding other buildings, work has been started to point out in detail how the observations of Josef Schneider can be corroborated to relieve him of the charge that his work was merely political rhetoric.‡ The problem of saying these characteristics were intentional appears immediately when intent cannot

* A notable example is the Matteottihof at the Margareten Spitz, set back from the Gürtel and bridging Fendigasse. Set back from the Reumannhof, the Herweghof, the Metzleinstalerhof and the Julius Ofner-Hof, it represents defense in depth in a modern reversal of the bastion concept. See photo in Blau, p. 263. She notes that Fendigasse was an important gateway to the Margareten district inside the Gürtel. (261-262) Except for the Julius-Ofner-Hof the architects were the trusted firms of Hubert Gessner and Schmid and Aichinger. The Matteottihof was chosen as the site for a massive socialist youth rally on August 30, 1932. Cf. article and pictures in Arbeiter-Zeitung, Aug.30, 1932 p. 6.

† To be sure, the importance of the locations could be considered accidental as Peball might argue.

‡ The Hautmann brothers discuss as well a tract by the anonymous “Sozius” making the same general charges. Over the years this author has visited and photographed from different angles almost all of the 377 buildings and settlements listed in Engelbert Mang’s catalogue. Unusual angles not seen in the photographs contained in the work of the Hautmann brothers and others provide a sense of what Otto Wagner meant by the kinesthetic quality of a building, in this case to emphasize the military potential.
be traced in documentary form. On one level, as Otto Wagner observed, all the effects of a building cannot be foreseen by the architect; indeed the architect can himself discover like a classical composer effects in his building that he did not know were there. In addition, there is no problem with granting that within the guidelines set by the City Building Office, there was enough leeway for effects to multiply relative to the site and the architect’s imagination whether or not he intended them as useful defensive features.* Indeed, private architects presented many difficulties to the Stadtbauamt, evidently taking enough liberties that Josef Bittner of MA 24, who had the final say in approving plans submitted by MA 22, at one point was commended for his resolve to control and restrain the unruly bunch.† On the other hand the inclusion of militarily useful features could easily have been encouraged or even demanded implicitly based on the way contracts were distributed. If an architect conformed to a model he would be well-regarded and a candidate for another contract.

**Awarding Contracts**

More than 180 architects were included in the program, which from the outset shows remarkable inclusiveness across different ideological lines, but there were large projects and small ones. The politics of the housing program involves the uncomfortable question of distributing contracts for designing the buildings. Conformity to a certain type of design, I am arguing, did not rest on published guidelines alone but on examples presented by architects and decision makers in the Stadtbauamt that can be regarded as normative according to what might be called the politics of the next contract.‡ To think otherwise would be to regard the hundreds of architects in the city as equals on a level playing field, which was not the case. To begin with, many projects were designed by architects in MA 22 itself and it took a headstrong individual to ignore these models. Private architects favored by the city like Hubert Gessner, Robert Oerley or the firm of Schmid and Aichinger furnished additional examples.§

An inner circle of city officials controlled the distribution of contracts to the extent that they were responsible to no one but a few socialist politicians above them, notably Anton Weber who insisted that decisions on sites and designs were always made on the basis of technical considerations.

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* The process by which this happened is convincingly studied by Blau without mentioning military features. Regarding the architects, few were women, and Margarete Lihotzsky along with Adolf Loos became alienated fairly soon for reasons convincingly explored by Blau.

† BD 1574/1924

‡ An example is the Holy-Hof of Rudolf Perco done in the same style as the Bebel-Hof and the Svo-boda-Hof of Karl Ehn treated below. Perco then got the contract for the immense complex at Friedrich Engels Platz.

§ On Gessner, see Blau, p. 223.
alone without any admixture of politics.* To deviate from a certain type would be poorly regarded within the inner circle and could mean professional suicide. Although there is no hint of corruption, bribery or favoritism to be found in the documents, the process of deciding who would design buildings large or small was shrouded in mystery so that decisions could not avoid becoming personal.† Commentary on the fairness of the system relies more on the lack of evidence to the contrary and the reputation of the Austrian bureaucracy for integrity than on records of procedures or evidence of real accountability. At one level the mystery lends itself to an interpretation of the process as random, impersonal and mechanical as though human agency was scarcely involved. Critical observations and reflections at the time are minimal to the point that Grete Lihotsky, being squeezed out of the program for advocating settlements over apartment blocks, repeated an opinion that the contracts might even be passed out in alphabetical order:‡ This was certainly not the case, and if she intended no cynicism the comment was far too kind. Clearly there were no published procedures to ensure fairness in choosing architects. The comment has been used since then as an excuse to avoid hard questions or even to suggest that the obscure nature of distributing contracts indicated even-handedness. The offices of city government involved have left no minutes of meetings to provide insight into how decisions were made. It is easily forgotten, therefore, that decisions were made by persons, with the high likelihood that they were made according to personal preferences, professional, well-informed and technical though they might have been, subject to pressures and personal motives. The opaque quality of the process ineluctably had an effect on an architect seeking a city contract. This might have been avoided if they had been isolated from one another, but there was a body of public opinion among architects in Vienna, confirmed by Ursula Prokop when she says that Rudolf Perco started his estrangement from other architects when he submitted an idiosyncratic design for re-

* At his trial Weber deflected responsibility for the Gemeindebauten onto the Baudirektion saying he inspected them occasionally but always with a Referent from the Stadtbauamt and never made any changes in the plans. AVA Polizeidirektion Wien, Akten Feb. 1934 Karton 1 Zl Pr. IV 2606/1934. As head of Verwaltungsgruppe IV, however, Weber was ultimately in charge of designs and would have remained so even after a proposed redistribution of responsibilities in 1927. Cf. BD 4309/1927 and 4310/1927. VG IV included Adalbert Millik in its ranking committee who was vocal in claiming that the city was building military bases. Pebb, 55.

† A vignette shows an incident of nepotism, it would seem, when a nephew of Theodor Körner got an entry level job without going through the usual hiring process. Shortly thereafter a warning was issued not to short circuit the hiring process. BD1847/1924

‡ The city wanted 10,000 apartments in 1925 of which 9500 were to be in blocks. BD 73/1924. Curiously, Lihotsky seems to ignore possible political motives in the process. Attributing the opinion to other architects implies remarkable resignation on their part as well. Blau’s repetition without question is surprising and she faults the architectural profession, which is hardly fair. Cf. Blau, 351-352. On one hand she grants that the politics of the program largely determined decision making but on the other hand she, and others, suggest that the politicians deferred to the architects on matters of design because they were incompetent in such matters. Another critic, Leopold Bauer, was known for right-wing sympathies and after 1926 got contracts only for a settlement on the edge of town and one block as part of a team of architects. Ursula Prokop is aware of the problem but suspends judgment. p.114
building the Palace of Justice after 1927.* The results of the above can be deduced. With choices of architects essentially made in secret and many opportunities to work for the city, any combination of reluctance to alienate officials in the Stadtbauamt and ambition to receive a contract had at least three effects: first, there was no room for criticism among architects regarding the decision making process itself; second, negative comment about designs chosen by the Stadtbauamt had to be muted;† third, the unofficial “look” of a building could not deviate too much from the type of building favored by the Stadtbauamt once a contract was secured. Conformity therefore extended beyond official guidelines to reading the minds of officials or architects favored by the city shown in models presented for imitation. The larger and more prominent the example the more normative it became. With high probability the anonymity of the persons making decisions generated fear rather than reassurance. In the broader politics of the decade this can be interpreted as part of revolutionary times when the program was an integral part of Social Democratic partisan politics using the integrity of Austrian officialdom as a screen to hide favoritism and erect the kind of building called for in dangerous times. The author is aware that this is a serious allegation that relies on the logic of the situation rather than documentary evidence. But other commentary is speculative as well. The thinking behind it is unwelcome to architectural historians who have dominated the field until now and tend to view the program through rose-colored glasses, but it should be proposed in line with reasons and the examples that follow. The Karl-Marx-Hof then becomes only one of many examples.

**Lassallestrasse**

The housing program of Vienna was bureaucratic in the extreme. Guidelines for the size of apartments, windows, water, gas, toilets, and the like were carefully set, and subsequent control by representatives of the Housing Authority led to complaints about over-regulation and social experimentation. The largest number of apartments were between 38 and 48m², that is between 409 and 516 square feet, sizes chosen early in 1924 and kept late into the program.‡ The outward configuration of the blocks was another matter since there seemed to be no prescription or guidelines about their place in the cityscape as a whole. A type could become accepted to the point of becoming normative apart from written guidelines as was shown in a rare competition run by the Stadtbauamt during the summer of 1923 for a block named the Lassallehof. At the time the result

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* Prokop, p. 229, "...ist auch ein Symbol sieiner beginnenden Eigenbrötelei, die ihn allmählich in eine Isolierung führt."

† A comment by Heinrich Schmid in 1928 that “criticism is progress” becomes hypocritical because his firm had been favored by the city from the early days of the Republic. Cf. Blau, 350.

‡ BD 380/1924. Letter dated February 1, 1924. The choice between a larger number of apartments or larger individual apartments came down on the side of larger numbers. Helmut Weihsmann covers this well. pp. 41-54.
passed as a fair outcome, and there seem to have been no objections, but at second glance today the process generates questions. Architects were invited to compete for a large building of 294 apartments along Lassallestrasse near the right bank of the Danube on the approach to the Reichs Bridge. Ninety-one architects submitted designs to a jury of eight, three members of the Stadtbauamt and five private architects. Two of the private architects on the jury, Robert Oerley and Franz Kaym, were close to the Stadtbauamt in their thinking. Oerley had already done the Hanuschhof in 1922 of a size equal to the Lassallehof and would collaborate with Karl Krist of the Stadtbauamt on a massive complex of 1084 apartments in 1927 eventually named after George Washington. Franz Kaym had written earlier in favor of settlements but was wasting no time in adjusting to the new emphasis on blocks. Along with his partner Alfons Hetmanek he soon designed several large projects.* It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the jury was stacked in favor of official opinion. To compound a charge of cronyism, the winner of the competition was Karl Krist, a city architect employed in MA 22, while second place went to a team of relative unknowns assembled by Hubert Gessner, an architect known as a favorite of the Stadtbauamt. The assignment did not go to Krist and the Stadtbauamt in the end, but to Gessner.† There is no documentary evidence that there were any cynical complaints about the fairness of the process with the Stadtbauamt in effect winning its own competition, or the contract going to Gessner, but the 88 losers could hardly mistake the message. As the city was announcing a goal of building 25,000 apartments in the next five years and distributing contracts liberally, an architect who got a contract and designed a building the way the Stadtbauamt wanted it stood a good chance of getting another assignment. A complaint or a major deviation from the example set by the Lassallehof at the start of the program would result in a contract for a small building to fill a vacant lot between existing buildings or jeopardize further work entirely. Later competitions were limited such that they scarcely deserved the name.

The resulting design contained a tower projecting onto the sidewalk past the building line as well as balconies and setbacks that appear regularly in subsequent designs and can be considered militarily useful features of the Gemeinde Wien type. The dominant feature of this location in the Stadtbild is its relation to the Reichs Bridge. (Figure 2)

* They designed the second part of the Weissenböckstrasse settlement to be treated later in this article.

† Blau Ch. 8 p. 471, Footnote 78 on relations between Gessner and the city. On announcing the competition cf. BD [ohne Zahl] 1924 after BD 146/1924 located in Karton BD A1-35. Blau goes so far as to suggest that the jury itself was assembled by Gessner rather than the Stadtbauamt without further comment on the fairness of the competition. The semblance of a team effort with younger architects apparently was dropped for the neighboring Heizmannhof which Gessner designed the following year.
The contrast with nearby buildings relative to the building lines is unmistakable, demonstrating that the city was willing to grant itself extensive variances for future Gemeindebauten. By the same token a sense that the features could be used for military purposes in an emergency might easily occur to someone with political/military responsibilities; the observations can be considered part of a kinesthetic interpretation of the building. The Lassallehof “covers” the Reichs Bridge in a military sense. It was joined...
the next year by the Heizmannhof across Lassallestrasse, also designed by Gessner—this time alone—to dominate the approach to one side of the Danube. The features found in the Lassallehof would be seen in several examples built in the following three years. The building in itself, therefore, with the liberties the city allowed itself in suspending the building lines to have the tower protrude onto the sidewalk as well as its place within the Stadtbild at the Reichs Bridge, supports a contention that it contained political warnings both to architects wishing to win contracts and to military observers aware of the history of military bases within the city. These contentions have no documentary proof as yet but are in no way irresponsible. The building(s) are there and look threatening, while the way the contract was allocated as well as the timing at the start of the largest portion of the program support suspicions of favoritism and setting norms for future submissions by private architects.

**Military Presence in Vienna**

An analogy with earlier examples of military installations in Vienna is in order here. There were several precedents for placing bases in residential areas of the city. The Imperial government built three of special interest in the aftermath of the revolution in 1848 to intimidate the populace and function as defensible fortresses in the event of another uprising. Two of them were placed along the Danube Canal on either side of the inner city, the Rossauer Kaserne and the Franz-Josef-Kaserne. Designed in the heyday of Romanticism, the red-brick Rossauer Kaserne with its crenelated castle architecture contained military features restricted mostly to fortified entries, towers and a few setbacks that could enfilade the walls in the event of an attack. The results look today more like a Disneyland castle than an urban garrison meant to deter revolutionaries. The Franz-Joseph-Kaserne on the other side of the inner city along the Danube Canal in the area of the present Urania was a barracks that had few fortress-like characteristics. It became superfluous within a few decades under changed political conditions and was torn down to extend the Ring to the Danube Canal. Without much stretch of the imagination the Lassallehof at the Reichs Bridge can be considered analogous to the Franz-Joseph-Kaserne while the huge housing complex on Friedrich-Engels-Platz at the Floridsdorf Bridge occupies a location not unlike the Rossauer Kaserne with similarly monumental features. Other Kaserne built before World War I like the Wilhelms- and Albrechts- Kaserne in the Second District near the main course of the Danube and the base in Breitensee on the western edge of the city near two reservoirs had outward appearances that blended into their neighborhoods more like Biedermaier apartment buildings than fortresses. The Arsenal was a special case, much larger than any of the others and overtly defensible but of less interest in this discussion.

In addition, military needs had changed by World War I after the threat of urban revolution disappeared so that the government relocated several bases to the edge of town and sold the land to the city, notably the Krimsky Kaserne in the Third District, but all the same ten active bases
still remained after World War I with skeleton garrisons. Actually more important than the Army bases at the time were the headquarters of the Federal Police in the Third District known as the Marokkaner Kaserne. The installation and its garrison grew significantly after 1927 along with police stations throughout the city while the army itself remained small under the Treaty of St. Germain.

**Parity among Armed Groups**

The Austrian Army was reduced to 30,000 under the Treaty of St. Germain, a number probably inadequate to maintain order within the country in case of a revolution even if kept up to full strength, but according to Kurt Peball in 1934 the number was closer to 25,000.\(^\text{11}\) It was equipped mostly with small arms that included light and some heavy machineguns together with two sizes of relatively small field artillery and some mortars. Peball puts the number of troops engaged in Vienna in 1934 at around 4250 with 16 artillery pieces and 15 mortars, a number that seems remarkably low for maintaining security in a large metropolis threatened once again by an uprising not unlike that of 1848.*

The socialist paramilitary group, the Republikanischer Schutzbund had grown slowly from 1924 when Theodor Körner was identified as a likely person to lead what was essentially a protective association. His main competition was Julius Deutsch who was more a politician than a soldier. Mostly unarmed Schutzbund members cared for the wounded and evacuated them during the riots of 1927, but the humanitarian activities during the crisis betrayed a lack of focus for a paramilitary organization. Thereafter the party began to reorganize it along military lines and began to distribute weapons clandestinely among the Gemeindebauten, entrusting them to local members of the Schutzbund. By 1932 these *Vertrauensmänner* could call on large numbers of men from among the mostly socialist residents of the projects, but lack of training hampered their ability to handle weapons or maneuver in groups. Efforts to remedy the situation were made in public view in 1932 when the Schutzbund conducted large scale war games in Purkersdorf just west of Vienna. The *Arbeiter-Zeitung* reported that a total of 10,000 men divided into two armies “fought” each other in the woods south of the Vienna River Valley while another 3000 men were present as observers.\(^\text{†}\) Peball puts the number of *Schutzbündler* in Vienna at around 17,550 in 1934.\(^\text{‡}\)

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* Peball, 47-49. Peball was given access to a few documents not available to this researcher. Cf. Anhang IV.

\(^\text{‡}\) p. 42. State Secretary Emil Fey concurred in the cabinet meeting of October 18, 1933 with Dollfuss presiding (AVA Ministerratsprotokoll Nr. 830) putting the number at 18,000 effective among 30,000 members of the Schutzbund.
Meanwhile, the right wing *Heimwehr* held exercises elsewhere in Austria. It conducted an exercise in Innsbruck in June, 1932, openly carrying rifles with machineguns mounted on motorcycles and carried by animals.\(^\text{12}\) Peball does not venture a guess on their numbers although each District in Vienna claimed a “company.”* The Army and Federal Police conducted their own training. Though the Federal Police were prepared to work closely with the Army in 1934 the two could not be considered integrated into a single unit. None of these groups except the Army had weapons heavier than machineguns. The Nazis with their Austrian Legion were not strong enough at the time to complicate the picture significantly while a rural gendarmerie stayed out of Viennese politics for the most part. Some in the Social Democratic camp hoped for defections from the Executive, as the government forces were called, in the event of a civil war, recalling the spirit of the left wing Soldiers Councils of 1918, but by 1934 the likelihood was remote given the elite nature of the Executive and the political polarization. Plans to capture the army installations within the city were sketchy in the famous Efler Plan for Schutzbund operations, perhaps due to the small garrisons; surprisingly the bases seemed so unimportant that they hardly drew mention in the plan as though capturing them was a foregone conclusion. At any rate the Schutzbund appeared not at all intimidated by them.\(^\text{†}\)

Complicating the situation in Vienna were thousands of weapons kept from the Allies by common consent after World War I. They were stored since 1922 by an agreement among the parties in the Arsenal, a vast complex of fortified buildings in the XI. District where arms had been manufactured and stored after 1848. The Arsenal was more formidable than either the Rossauer or the Franz-Josef Kasernen, though scarcely as dominating as the fortress built on the heights above Budapest at the same time for the same reasons. It was under the control of the Social Democrats in the immediate aftermath of WWI rather than the Army in a compromise agreeable to all parties at the mercy of the vindictive Allies and newly formed countries surrounding Austria, but the presence of so many weapons in the city under socialist control inevitably drew attention when political tensions increased. On February 3, 1927, five months before the riots of July following the Schattendorf acquittals, the government conducted a raid and confiscated 665 machineguns along with 21,465 rifles. The storm of criticism that followed died down quickly in a curious way, possibly because the number of weapons hidden there might have been as high as 600,000,

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\(^*\) Peball, 46. See Otto Naderer on the strengths and weaknesses of the Schutzbund without much comparison with the numbers and strength of the Army, Federal Police, Heimwehr or Nazi formations. Otto Naderer, *Der Bewaffnete Aufstand: der Republikanische Schutzbund der Österreichischen Sozialdemokratie und die Militärische Vorbereitung auf den Bürgerkrieg 1923-1934*. Found online at Österreichs Bundesheer.

\(^†\) Peball, 47-49. The Efler Plan lists the ten with an amateurish directive that at the start of hostilities they should be stormed or cut off. He adds neighborhood police stations almost as an afterthought. Quoted in Duczynska, 356.
according to Otto Naderer.* Still, without a threat to oppose force with force there was nothing to stop the federal government from gradually disarming the socialists. The trend became clear during the summer of 1927 when the riots caught the city government unprepared. The Schutzbund proved incapable of putting itself between the demonstrators and the police armed with rifles and drawn up in military formation. The city hastily formed a Gemeindewache or City Watch meant as an auxiliary force in the absence of its own police force but it never amounted to much as the City Council argued about what to do with yet another executive force.

The foregoing has been covered more extensively by others, but for our purposes the effects can be described roughly as parity among armed groups in the city: the federal government had better organization and training, adequate though not overwhelming infantry weapons, and a few pieces of field artillery while the socialists had considerably larger numbers of men armed with rifles, machine guns and adequate ammunition.† Good relations between the Social Democrats and the Czechs together with rail communications controlled by sympathetic railway unions provided hope for additional arms and ammunition. The Gemeindebauten entered the picture as military bases with men and weapons distributed after the raid on the Arsenal and the disturbances of 1927. One conclusion is that neither side felt itself at a particular disadvantage should the unsettled political situation lead to civil war. The outcome of a conflict was not a foregone conclusion. Riots between socialists and the emergent Nazis led to a ban on public demonstrations portending further complications, but events confirmed the radical and violent direction of politics in the city even without much involvement by Hitler for the time being.‡

**Two Small Examples of Political/Military Interest**

Two buildings separated by the entire city are of interest here to point out a range of partisan politics and possible military intent connected with the housing program. One is a small block of 22 apartments, later called the Josef Rautmann Hof, strategically placed at the Hadersdorf-Weidlingau Spitz in the XIV. District, an unusually constricted location where a major highway, the Hadersdorf-Weidlingau Hauptstrasse crosses the Vienna River at the edge of the city to enter Lower Austria and proceed westward through the Vienna Woods along the valley of the Vienna River. The Westbahn railroad uses the same narrow corridor so that the highway, railroad and river find themselves crowded together at the western boundary of the

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* Otto Naderer, op. cit.

† A short essay comparing the Schutzbund and the Heimwehr that emphasizes the fluctuations and internal divisions of both groups as the decade progressed can be found in Barry McLoughlin, "Heimwehr and Schutzbund" in *Kampf um die Stadt: Exhibition catalogue of Wien Museum*, Hg. v. Wolfgang Kos pp. 46-54.

‡ Though the Federal Police were prepared to work closely with the Army in 1934 the forces of the Executive should not be considered a monolith.
city. The strategic importance of the bridge over the Vienna River is obvious. The building is a long distance from others in the program and provided the socialists with an outpost at the edge of town for use as needed.

At the far side of town in the XXI. District lies a remote and incongruous block of 51 apartments located among truck gardens at Josef Baumann Gasse 65-67. Also close to the border with Lower Austria which wraps around the city, it was built in 1929 at the doorstep of a cooperative settlement sponsored by the city early in the program at a time when the bourgeois attitudes of private homeowners were not as yet clear. The modest apartment block has few military features, but the project with its reliable socialist residents was clearly a political counterweight to its bourgeois neighbors. Interest in the project among city officials was sufficient to buy the land at about three times the price of undeveloped land elsewhere which required the approval of Anton Weber.* The architect was Karl Krist of the Stadtbaubamt who had designed the original settlement and had won the competition for the Lassallehof. The political nature of the project is unmistakable given the year it was erected and the number of inhabitants, which was about equal to the number in the settlement.

Three Examples of Military Architecture

The three examples I have chosen are relatively small buildings. One in the XIX. District of Döbling separated from the Karl-Marx-Hof by a street and a green space now used largely for parking. Another is in the II. District of Leopoldstadt, across from the freight terminals of the Northwest Railway and near a street node known as Am Tabor. The third, in the XI. District of Simmering, lies along Simmeringer Hauptstrasse, an arterial leading out of town beyond the Arsenal toward the airport relatively far removed from the center of town. They are chosen for their distinctive features relative to the Stadtbild to show that militarily useful features can be found in smaller blocks easily ignored in the attention paid to the Karl-Marx-Hof. (Figure 3)

The Svoboda-Hof

During World War I, the federal railway planned to build a union station for all three northern railways on the Hagenwiese under the escarpment of Hohe Warte, but the changed circumstances after 1918 led it to give the land to the city. The railroad was known as a socialist stronghold so the transition went smoothly, unlike negotiations over the land around the

* BD 626/1929. The document contradicts Weber’s claim on Dec. 19, 1927 that sites were chosen on technical grounds alone. Peball, 55. Prices varied widely with the average for undeveloped land around S5/m2 and the lowest being S 1.21/m2 for land from the bankrupt Bodenkredit Anstalt in 1930 (with a claim that some of it was really worth only 30 Groschen per m2). BD 3320/30. The city even compensated Aegidius Loidolt, the owner, for the spinach crop he had planted. The plan was disingenuous in being billed an expansion of the settlement when the city intended to build an apartment block.
Stadtlau railroad bridge with more complicated ownership.* The property was long and narrow, extending westward from Krailplatz nearly to Gunoldstrasse, an important thoroughfare that approached the area from under three railroad bridges immediately to the south before it curved to

* The Army controlled the land in 1917 and referred the request to the Finance Ministry which had not relinquished the land by 1924. Cf. BD 1942/1924 in Baudirektion Wien notes of Michael Zeps.
the left and climbed the heights of Döbling.* An existing building blocked immediate access to Gunoldstrasse where it emerged from the third underpass, and weak laws on eminent domain prevented the city from acquiring it. Heiligenstädterstrasse was a major east-west highway at the base of the heights that bordered the Hagenwiese to the north. With the exception of the Svoboda-Hof this land became the site of the Karl-Marx-Hof, a single building one kilometer in length bounded on the south by the railroad embankment of the Franz Josef Bahn. Boschstrasse now separates the building and the embankment.

The entire parcel was included in projections when the city announced the program to build 25,000 apartments beginning in 1924.† The site plan, or Lageplan, called for several buildings stretched out along Heiligenstädterstrasse separated from each other by short streets rather than a single building or the two that eventually appeared. The westernmost building projected in the site plan was separated from Gunoldstrasse by the existing building and a street 20 meters wide. (Figure 4) If realized, the result would have been a building scarcely visible from Gunoldstrasse as it passed under the three sets of railroad tracks.

The plan outlined in 1924 was to develop the site with 6 buildings starting in 1925, but for reasons not clear from the documents the proposal was suspended and the matter reopened for suggestions.

A prominent architect, Clemens Holzmeister, proposed a series of low row houses, but the suggestion was rejected by the Stadtbauamt which chose a design that became two projects, the Svoboda-Hof of 1926-27 and the Karl-Marx-Hof of 1927-1930.‡ If the Karl-Marx-Hof had approached the existing building on Gunoldstrasse but not abutted it, with a street 20 meters wide between them, an approach from the south along Gunoldstrasse would have been concealed from view. In military terms, the Karl-Marx-Hof could have been outflanked easily following Gunoldstrasse under the three railroad bridges protected by the embankments. Instead, the Stadtbauamt decided that the westernmost portion of the property would become a separate building of 62 apartments, but would abut the existing building directly without any street between them thereby moving it 20 meters closer to Gunoldstrasse where the street emerged from under the bridges

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* Doderer’s alter ego Geyrenhoff remembers twenty years later a premonition of the battle that would take place below him as he stood on the escarpment in 1926. P. 1054.
† BD 1930-1924
‡ The Svobodahof was begun Oct. 18, 1926 and taken over by the city Oct. 21, 1927. The Karl-Marx-Hof was begun July 2, 1927, a second part on Sept 16, 1927 and taken over in several stages between Nov. 26, 1928 and Sept. 1, 1930. Schlöss Catalogue, Nachlass Heinrich Schlöss. For Holzmeister’s design see Blau p. 322
and turned to the left. What became the Svoboda-Hof thus occupied the site from Boschstrasse to Heiligenstädterstrasse. The area was treated separately from the other lots in the original Lageplan and remained so when the other five were unified to become the Karl-Marx-Hof. The architect assigned to both buildings, small and large, was Karl Ehn of MA 22, a student of Otto Wagner, so both were designed by the Stadtbauamt itself rather than given to private architects, and the plans were drawn up by

Figure 4. General Lageplan of the Hagenwiese and detail of the western part that became the Svoboda-Hof. Original plan for what became the Svoboda-Hof. The land and building along Gunoldstrasse itself remained in private hands.
Ehn in quick succession if not at the same time.* The outward appearances share much in common.

The following analysis uses as its rationale the observation that buildings can be regarded kinesthetically from different distances and angles of approach as well as from one vantage point in contributing to the Stadt-

* Ehn remained in the Stadtbauamt during the authoritarian regime and applied to join the Nazi Party in 1938. Evidently he was not accepted because he could claim after the war that he was never a member. He remained a city employee during the war, however, writing later that it was the period of his greatest humiliation when his duties were reduced to those of a functionary. Cf. Questionnaire signed on Oct. 8, 1938 where he wrote “angemeldet” in response to the question whether he was a member of the NSDAP, and letters of January 1, 1949 and February 12, 1949, found in Biographische Sammlung of the Stadt u. Landesarchiv. His Familienasyl, designed in 1938, is interesting for its reprise of the small toilet ventilation windows found in many earlier Gemeindebauten.

Figure 5. Svoboda-Hof, is the buff-colored building to the right, from afar along Gunoldstrasse and from close in (below).
bild of the district and the city as a whole. The Svoboda-Hof is relatively unobtrusive, tucked against the railroad embankment in the shadow of the Karl-Marx-Hof and is not especially impressive as a monument. On the other hand, the result of Ehn’s effort is a building that faces the length of Gunoldstrasse to the south in such a way that no one can approach under the three railroad bridges without being seen. (Figure 5)

An attacker cannot use the bridges or railroad embankment as concealment as one might if a street separated the two buildings. The usual set of small toilet windows punctuate the façade in the design. Up close, a stairwell, not encased in masonry, extends beyond the Baulinien onto the sidewalk. Masonry balconies project out and extend around the building with views in various directions including part of Boschstrasse between the Karl-Marx-Hof and the railroad. Geistingergasse, a short street connecting Boschstrasse to Heiligenstädterstrasse runs the length of the Svoboda-Hof on the side facing the Karl-Marx-Hof. The building occupies the entire space between the two streets. (Figures 6 and 7)

Because the Karl-Marx-Hof is set back somewhat along Heiligenstädterstrasse the Svoboda-Hof enfilades the length of the Karl-Marx-Hof with some of its balconies and small windows. In addition, the façade of the Svoboda-Hof along Heiligenstädterstrasse is a short distance from the important intersection of Gunoldstrasse and Heiligenstädterstrasse. The overall result, in military terms, is that the Svoboda-Hof occupies a position protecting the narrow end of the Karl-Marx-Hof on three sides to pre
vent its flank from being turned by units approaching from either direction along Gunoldstrasse or, in a worst-case scenario, from Geistingergasse. The side along Geistingergasse that enfilades the side of the Karl-Marx-Hof facing Heiligenstädterstrasse provides protection in the event of a frontal assault on the larger structure from that direction, that is from the slopes of the Hohe Warte above it. The result can be described as a kind of demilune in the classical style of Vauban, detached from the main body of the Karl-Marx-Hof to add strength to the whole. Is this preposterous? In response, one can simply point to the building, the Objekt, and say it is there, occupying a place in the Stadtbild, located and designed together with the Karl-Marx-Hof by the city and the same architect during revolutionary rather than peaceful times in keeping with a tradition of military architecture in Vienna and recent experience with the strength of the defensive in World War I. When the city chose to design the Karl-Marx-Hof as a fortress-like building over less overtly threatening alternatives like that of Holzmeister it could hardly have done better than design the Svoroda-Hof as it did to protect the flank of the Karl-Marx-Hof in

Figure 7. Svoboda-Hof from different distances along Heiligenstädterstrasse. Karl-Marx-Hof is to the left.
the event of a conflict.

*Marinelligasse 1/Taborstrasse*

The second relatively small building of interest here was built in the II. District along Taborstrasse, a major arterial in front of the Northwest Freight Terminal, on a corner facing Am Tabor, an important intersection, and running along Marinelligasse toward the embankment of the Northern Railway (Nordbahn). It was designed by Leopold Schulz, a Jewish private architect in the heavily Jewish Leopoldstadt but by no means the only Jewish architect who worked for the city.* The building was relatively small at 52 apartments, approved in May, 1926 and finished in May, 1927. Curiously, Schulz got only one other contract, in the following year for a building of about the same size.† The land was bought for an undisclosed price from two owners who kept an adjacent building on Taborstrasse.‡ The Railroad owned the neighboring building on Marinelligasse so the Stadtbauamt anticipated no objection to the design arising from that quarter although one window of the older building facing the new project would open only on a light shaft.§

A more important exception to the guidelines involved a projection—Risalit in German—beyond the building lines along Taborstrasse to allow a row of balconies with doors and masonry balustrades that provided a view down the length of Taborstrasse. The variance, which added 3 meters to the façade facing Am Tabor and 1.25 meters to the side of the building along Taborstrasse, attracted attention and concern from the Baupolizei or Building Police of MA 37. The Gemeinderat had approved building on the site on May, 7, 1926, but in an unusual directive dated July 24, 1926 the Baupolizei wrote that several other departments should be notified including MA 23b, MA 36, MA 17 and MA 47. Furthermore the Baupolizei insisted that before building started written (emphasis theirs) permission was to be sought, suggesting that problems with the variance might arise and that the Baupolizei had something of a veto right in the matter.¶ As usual no reasons are given for the changes to the building lines although one plausible reason might have been that it added 10% to the space of a relatively small building. On the other hand the courtyard could have been smaller. There is no evidence otherwise to indicate pressing needs relative to the site that might have led the Stadtbauamt or Leopold Schulz to submit the unusual design. The number of apartments in buildings was flexible in

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* Schulz died in Mauthausen a few weeks before the Allies liberated the camp.
† Brßlgasse 45-47 in the XVI District.
‡ They are identified as Margaret Zechl and siblings Dietrich and Marie Streicher.
§ Information taken from file on Marinelligasse 1 in files of MA 37, Baupolizei.
¶ Data taken from Baupolizei (MA 37) on Marinelligasse 1. “Vor Beginn des Baues ist um die Aussteckung der Baulinie und des Niveaus schriftlich anzusuchen.” Underlined in the original.
general and there was no obvious reason to increase the number on this particular lot. Six other projects in the II. District had fewer apartments with one containing only eight. An unusual result recorded for no other buildings in the entire program was the cost overruns encountered by the time the building was finished in 1927. The Magistrats-Direktion requested an accounting in July, but the Stadtbauamt put off the matter until the higher office added “urgency” to its request in October, 1927.* MA 22 was especially interested in this design and evidently embarrassed by the added expense.

Marinelligasse 1 was one of twenty-one projects built in the II. District and the first to be built in the district after the Lassalle-Hof and Heizmann-Hof discussed earlier.† It was relatively isolated from the others with the nearest being a large project of 217 apartments at Obere Augartenstrasse 12-14 begun in 1931. A set of buildings near the Danube along Engerthstrasse and Wehlistrasse were far from Am Tabor and the Nordwestbahnhof. This left Marinelligasse 1 as the only project of any importance in the central part of the district. Its relative isolation makes it more important as an expression of socialist architectural intent. It stands out, facing Am Tabor and the adjoining streets as an admonition in the Stadtbild that city

† Eight of them filled gaps between existing buildings. Cf. Die Gemeindebauten des Roten Wiens, 261-271.
authorities intended something different for the new epoch of building in Vienna. The location is strategic, lying at one corner of a built-up equilateral triangle formed by Taborstrasse, Marinelligasse and Nordbahnstrasse at the foot of the raised embankment of the Nordbahn. The freight terminal of the Nordwestbahn, really more a collection of loading docks since the railway lacked passenger service, lies across Taborstrasse. The more important street of the two at the site was undoubtedly Taborstrasse with its streetcar line, capacity for vehicles and traffic node at Am Tabor. The extra 1.25 meters that projected onto the sidewalk along Taborstrasse gave an unimpeded view down the street all the way to Nordbahn-strasse beneath the embankment, a distance of 300 to 400 meters. This meant that any approach to Am Tabor from the Nordbahn embankment along Taborstrasse was easily within the range of rifles or machine-guns stationed on the balconies of Marinelligasse 1. The blunt façade facing Am Tabor a short distance away covers that intersection with four sets of balconies, two facing Taborstrasse and two facing Marinelligasse, along with the windows of the building. Basement windows that appear to be more than air shafts could also be used for defensive purposes. The side

Figure 9. Marinelligasse 1 from along Taborstrasse
along Marinelligasse is less striking but has balconies covering the length of the street toward Nordbahnstrasse made possible by the 6 meter extension beyond the building line facing Am Tabor. (Figures 8-10)

The kinesthetic response to approaching the building from all three directions, from Am Tabor, along the length of Taborstrasse from the Nordbahn, and along Marinelligasse and even from underneath the balconies themselves, is disturbing if one considers the possibility that armed fighters might be occupying the building. It is unlike any others in the neighborhood, projecting itself in three directions at once with metaphorical “assertiveness.”

Military interpretations of Marinelligasse 1 or of the Svoboda-Hof as potential threats to the surrounding area were left to the imagination of the viewer. It was one of many such metaphors of power and control that marked the type of the Gemeindebau in Vienna between the wars which call for inclusion in the interpretation of the program, both of individual buildings and the cityscape as a whole. When Josef Bittner announced a new building epoch he was fully conscious of the impact each housing project would make on the Stadtbild, an image for all to see and interpret according to the impression it made on them. The impression was provoc-
ative and aggressive from the start, growing stronger in the years 1925-1928 for individual buildings culminating in the Karl-Marx-Hof and for the program as a whole in Friedrich-Engels-Platz even after the more overtly military features had been downplayed starting in 1928. When rifles and machineguns appeared in the projects in 1934 no one was surprised, for machineguns appeared in the projects in 1934 no one was surprised, for the metaphor of domination had become the reality of defending a rebellion. Engels Platz signified the triumph of the program in placing 60,000 apartments in 370 projects throughout the city; it also meant that the workers had the means to defend themselves against threats from the right should their own plans for the class struggle be frustrated. The inclusion of expensive fortress-like features in smaller buildings like the Svoboda-Hof and Marinelligasse 1 indicates that there was intent across a wide spectrum of projects to impress opponents with military potential rather than merely to provide additional air, light or decoration for a housing program.

**Wiessenböckstrasse II. Teil**

The third project of interest is a small complex of apartment buildings separated from each other by a mall rather than surrounding a courtyard. It is attached to an earlier settlement of rowhouses and gardens on Weissenböckstrasse in the XI. District at the junction with Simmeringer Hauptstrasse on the way to considerable distance from the center of town. A large complex on the same arterial at Fickey Strasse a few blocks closer in on Simmeringer Hauptstrasse was not erected until 1931 while a series of buildings at Herder Platz in the same vicinity containing more than 1100 apartments was started earlier but two blocks distant from the important Simmeringer Hauptstrasse. This last was the scene of considerable fighting in 1934, notably at the Karl-Höger-Hof.

The settlement at Weissenböckstrasse/Simmeringer Hauptstrasse is something of an oddity. As a whole the project was one of a few settlements (*Gemeinde Siedlungen*) which were a grudging continuation of the popular settlement movement but owned and controlled by the city rather than by a cooperative of private homeowners susceptible to the blandishments of private property with its rejection of socialist values. The additional costs of extending an infrastructure of water, sewers and roads toward the outskirts of town made the option of large blocks closer to the center of town more attractive to the city, but the amount of available land was not a problem. The cheaper construction of settlement houses, however, made the costs per unit somewhat comparable, making the socialist values of the city administration the determining factor, it seems. It is easy to argue at this point that the possibility of a civil war also made higher concentrations of potential fighters in reinforced concrete projects more attractive.

The first part of the settlement follows the pattern of others from the early 1920’s, that is a series of row houses with large gardens behind them. The
second part along Simmeringer Hauptstrasse is a unique hybrid of a settlement and a block. The whole tract would have been row houses, but the owners of the stretch along Simmeringer Hauptstrasse between Weissenböckstrasse and Reischekgasse were “causing trouble” when the project began, so the city could not acquire the land when the rest of the settlement was built.* That left the area open for a different kind of development in 1926-27 when the city bought the land and hired the private firm of Franz Kaym and Alfons Hetmanek as architects. The same team had designed the first part of the settlement in 1923 so it was an easy choice to complete the project. Kaym, as mentioned earlier, had favored the settlement concept in the early 1920’s but abandoned it after the movement met opposition and fizzled by 1926. In the meantime he had ingratiated himself with the Stadtbauamt so that he was chosen as one of the members of the jury for the Lassallehof. The firm had recently designed the Friedrich-Engels-Hof at Herderplatz and the nearby Karl-Höger-Hof in the XI. District.†

With politically reliable residents in the adjacent settlement owned by the city Kaym and Hetmanek had an easier job than Karl Krist with his apartment block at the entrance to the cooperative settlement at Josef Baumann-Gasse 65-67. The size of the second part did not have to be especially large since Kaym and Hetmanek had only to complement the political sentiments found in the existing settlement rather than gerrymander an entire area. The location was significant, for the importance of the junction

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* This document, following BD73/1924 is without a number and out of order in the carton. Check [ ] 1924 dated January 23. The phrase is found in the document.

† Interestingly, the name of Hetmanek alone is to be found on a proposal for the new Palace of Justice after it burned in 1927. The design, accessible through the Architektur Zentrum Wien, is historicist to the point where it could have been taken from Palladio’s *Four Books of Architecture*. 

Figure 11. Weissenböckstrasse II. Teil. taken from Simmeringer Hauptstrasse.
of Weissenböckstrasse and Simmeringer Hauptstrasse had been apparent for some time.

The raid on the Arsenal in 1927 that prompted the distribution of arms to the Gemeindebauten apparently did not affect the plans for the addition to the settlement judging from dates on the drawings, for there were no
changes in the design of 1926.* In other words the junction of Simmeringer Hauptstrasse and Weissenböckstrasse was important enough in itself to warrant the structure that appeared. All the same, it stands out as one of the most provocative of the smaller buildings in the program. The basement walls were of solid concrete (Massivmauerwerk) 51cm thick (1.67 feet) for a building only two stories in height for the most part while the walls above ground were 38cm. thick (15 inches).† The walls are enough

Figure 13. Weissenböckstrasse II. Teil. taken from Simmeringer Hauptstrasse.

* Plans were approved by the Gemeinderat on Sept 24, 1926 and work started on October 29, 1926. Information found at Bezirksamt Simmering 11.Bezirk Wien, Enkplatz. MA 37 Baupolizei. Folder Nur:E.Z. 2320-2321. Signed by Abteilungsvorstand of MA 15 but signature unreadable. Nr. 40/21461/1926 signed by Abteilungsvorstand on 27 January, 1927. Put into the Stadtplan Blatt IX/8, 1928 Mag Abt. 54. It was finished on June 27, 1928. Schlöss Catalogue p.12. This project involved cooperation between MA 15 and MA 40 but for some reason MA 22 is not mentioned in the plans on file with the Baupolizei.

† Once the Depression hit the importance of reducing costs arose. One proposal was to reduce the strength of the walls (Verringerung der Mauerstärken) as well as to eliminate the attic windows known as Kämpferfenster. It should be noted immediately, however, that the word Kämpferfenster was an old term that referred originally to the support for a lintel or doorway arch where a window might be placed and did not refer to a feature specific to the Gemeindebauten. The term "Kämpfer" has more to do with the abacus of a classical column in architecture (Abakus in German) than with the word for "fighter." Cf. BD 1232/31 from January, 1931 and especially BD 1293/31 recording a high level meeting of April 20, 1931. Regarding the strength of the walls, the committee admitted they were expensive and decided to set up a subcommittee.
to stop a bullet, but more striking are the corner windows on every floor ventila\-tating the toilet cubicles that cut off the corners together with a similar window in the courtyard facing the entrance on Reischekgasse. Among the toilet ventilation windows that generated such opposition since 1926 these stand out. They are outlined in solid masonry that appears to be cast stone or concrete surrounded by brick and look like casemated portals for firing weapons similar to bunkers in WW I. The corners of the windows taper down changing the 45 degree angle back to the 90 degree angle of the corner. The appearance is all-important for the impression they make from the outside regardless of how accessible the apertures were from the inside. The pictures are especially dramatic. (Figures 11-14)

![Figure 14. Weissenböckstrasse II. Teil. taken from Simmeringer Hauptstrasse.](image)

After 1928 such windows began to disappear, most likely because of the expense but possibly because of the opposition they generated among observers. The task of ventilating the cubicles was gradually assumed by larger windows in the apartments, a point mentioned in answering a complaint about the small windows in 1938 well after the socialist program had ended.* In the meantime they made a significant contribution to the Stadtbild and to this day remain to characterize the Gemeindebauten of the mid-1920’s.

The location and design of Weissenböckstrasse II.Teil attracted the attention of the Schutzbund and the government alike. The socialists began concealing weapons there, possibly with the help of Franz Rzehak, a member of the City Council from Simmering and chairman of the District Housing Commission, who was arrested in February, 1934.* The martial aspect of the building with the ventilation windows looking strikingly like machinegun apertures made it an obvious candidate for a raid when the government began its systematic search for weapons. On May 14, 1933, the police raided the apartments of three streetcar drivers in the complex confiscating a large number of rifles, machineguns and ammunition. In one apartment an unspecified number of rifles, seven carbines, ammunition and paraphernalia turned up, in another two machineguns, thirty rifles, eleven boxes of machinegun ammunition and around a thousand rounds of rifle ammunition were found. The police found three machinegun “bolts” in the third along with belts and ammunition as well as fifty rifles and ammunition. The residents were given jail terms of seven, fourteen and ten days respectively, a slap on the wrist not unusual at the time because of the delicate relations between the government and the Schutzbund.† A similar raid in distant Linz became the spark that ignited the uprising in Vienna after the government started arresting neighborhood leaders, the Vertrauensmänner of various housing projects, who presumably knew where weapons were stored and would lead the local Schutzbund units in the event of an uprising.

**Conclusion**

Well after Anton Weber and the Stadtbauamt backed away from including overtly military features in municipal housing projects the effects had not yet played out. The monument of the Reumannhof became the fortress of 1934 along with many others when a general strike was called, the electricity and gas works were occupied and firing erupted from the windows of the projects. The metaphor of power became the reality of the bunker under the pressure of circumstances despite second thoughts among politicians and building designers chosen by the city. Massive concrete and brick structures, with or without military features, dotted the city, giving confidence to socialist military leaders that they could defeat the government with the limited forces at its disposal. By that time enough Social Democratic effort had gone into preparing for a civil war that there was no turning back. The gradual nature of the buildup to civil war in the years between 1924 and 1934, marked by the riots of 1927 and the fighting around the projects at the end of the decade, should alert a historian of the housing program to the connection between the architecture of the Ge-

* Lexikon der Wiener Sozialdemokratie. No records can be found regarding meetings of the District Housing Commission.

† AVA Polizeidirektion Wien, Akten Feb. 1934 Karton 5. Report dated 19 May, 1934 but listing the date of the search as 14.IV.33. The arrested were Josef Niedermayer, Leopold Schweitzer and Karl Haindl.
meindebauten and the atmosphere of violence, easily forgotten after the failure in 1934 and the overwhelming distraction of the Nazi years, amid admiration for the social accomplishments of Red Vienna. Between 1924 and roughly 1929 the city constructed buildings that were provocative in the extreme, and as their number mounted into the hundreds, the confidence of the socialists in their reinforced masonry grew until the buildings became identified with resistance and defiance when the number of apartments passed 60,000.* The seduction of the workers was complete by 1934. A combination of Marxist propaganda, weapons, strongholds, precedents ranging from the Paris Commune to the Bolshevik victory in Russia, and Schutzbund plans to attack, however pathetic the Eifler Plan seems in retrospect, weaken the common argument that the uprising of 1934 was an act of despair with inevitable consequences when artillery was used against it. The prominence of the hard-line politician Anton Weber leading the housing program balanced the irresolution of other Social Democratic leaders who were retreating from the revolutionary aspects of the class struggle, Marxist though they claimed to be, and took physical form in the Gemeindebauten to transform the Stadtbild of Vienna into a city of workers’ Kasernen. The place of the projects in the whole picture is important enough to make them an integral part of the tragic politics of Red Vienna and should be acknowledged when describing a type of the Gemeinde Wien apartment houses between the wars. To ignore the military qualities, apparent by simply looking at the buildings and how they fit into the cityscape, would be unfaithful to the past. The Stadtbauamt was not simply an office populated by technocrats, it was fully engaged designing buildings in close cooperation with political leaders and a vision of the new socialist city, buying the property needed and choosing architects who would carry out the mission. The activities of its own architects and firms trusted to follow their example, the awarding of contracts, and the buildings that resulted when private architects were engaged, point to a high degree of control by the Stadtbauamt while the political and social program of the Social Democratic Party exercised ultimate power to direct activities in the end. Anton Weber and the Stadtbauamt got the results they wanted, fully aware of the individual projects and their place in the Stadtbild, not somehow surprised and able to accuse critics of partisan politics for seeing something that was not there or unintended. It is easy to explain the lack of a paper trail. Built to last for two centuries, the buildings are still there to see. They have been renovated with many apartments enlarged to accommodate higher standards of living but can still be seen in their context and understood as a contribution to the political turmoil that characterized Red Vienna.

* Actually 64,000 by 1934.
Endnotes


12. *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, June 8, 1932, p. 3.
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