

# BOLSHEVISM IN BRICK AND CONCRETE: THE PAST AND PRESENT OF SOVIET CONSTRUCTIVISM

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## THE 4<sup>TH</sup> CIAM CONGRESS IN MOSCOW. PREPARATION AND FAILURE (1928–1933)\* \*\*

**Thomas Flierl**

Independent Researcher,  
Berlin, Germany

At the first meeting in Zurich  
I said right away that I could not imagine  
a Congress without the participation  
of the Russians.

*Letter by Sigfried Giedion to El Lissitzky.  
21 May 1928. GTA archive. Zurich*

The paper deals with the dramatic story of the preparation for (and subsequent failure of) the 4<sup>th</sup> Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne (CIAM) conference in Moscow. The offer to host the congress in Moscow was made in 1929, with the planned topic 'Urban Organisation, Urban Construction, and Regional Planning'. Had it taken place in 1930 or 1931, the planned congress would have had an enormous impact. It probably would have been able to counteract the split of the modern urban construction movement into two factions, with those in favour of reconstructing existing cities on the one hand and proponents of building brand new cities on the other. It is widely believed that the congress was moved from Moscow to Athens due to CIAM's protest against the results of the competition for the Palace of Soviets. Indeed, the controversy over this contest certainly delayed the congress. However, the study of the archival sources shows that the postponement was a result of a drastic change in the USSR's domestic policies, which took place before CIAM challenged the results of the competition. The character of the preparation for the congress on the Soviet side in 1929–33 was quite complex. Therefore, the

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\* In this paper, I follow the outline of my book, which will be published in 2016 by DOM publishers, Berlin. In this publication, more than 150 documents concerning the history of CIAM in Moscow will be presented. The book will be available in German, Russian, and English editions.

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paper pays special attention to the positions and policies of the Soviet officials in charge of the congress: Jurij Larin, Jakov Vajnsenker, Avel Enukidze, and others. The analysis of previously unknown letters and documents shows that, despite the fact that agreements between CIAM and the Soviet side were concluded in December 1932, the congress was postponed (indeed, cancelled) once again in March 1933, this time by Stalin personally, even though Karo Alabjan, the party secretary of USSR Association of Architects, argued against postponement.

*Keywords:* history of 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture; constructivism; modernism; Stalinism; 4<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Modern Architecture.

Статья посвящена драматичной истории подготовки и последовавшего затем провала IV съезда CIAM (Международного конгресса по современной архитектуре) в Москве в 1929 г., главная тема которого была заявлена следующим образом: «Городская организация, городское строительство и региональное планирование». Конгресс в Москве, будь он проведен в 1930 или 1931 г., мог бы оказаться крайне влиятельным. Автор высказывает мысль о том, что участники конгресса могли бы сгладить наметившийся в тот период в среде архитекторов раскол между сторонниками реконструкции существующих городов, с одной стороны, и сторонников вновь возводимых городов – с другой, и, соответственно, раскол между традиционным и современным градостроением. Считается, что конгресс был перенесен из Москвы в Афины из-за протеста CIAM по поводу результатов конкурса проектов Дворца Советов. Изучение архивных источников показывает, что перенос конгресса был результатом резких перемен во внутренней политике СССР, которые произошли еще до того, как его участники подвергли критике конкурс проектов Дворца Советов. Характер подготовки к конгрессу со стороны СССР в 1929–1933 гг. был весьма сложным. В статье уделяется особое внимание позициям и действиям ответственных за конгресс советских чиновников Юрия Ларина и Якова Вайншенкера, Авеля Енукидзе и других. Анализ ранее не известных писем и документов показывает, что, невзирая на соглашения между CIAM и советской стороной, достигнутые в декабре 1932 – марте 1933 г., конгресс был вновь отложен (по сути, отменен), на сей раз лично Сталиным, несмотря даже на протест со стороны партийного секретаря Союза советских архитекторов Каро Алабяна.

*Ключевые слова:* история архитектуры XX в.; конструктивизм; модернизм; сталинизм; Международный конгресс по современной архитектуре.

At a certain historical moment, there was a strategic convergence between two unequal partners: the international movement Neues Bauen, as represented by the Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne (CIAM), on the one hand, and the Soviet policy of modernisation and industrialisation within the framework of the first Five-Year Plan on the other. We can

observe two areas of cooperation in particular. Firstly, urban planners and architects from abroad were working in the Soviet Union, and, secondly, there was the idea of organising a CIAM congress in Moscow.

In the autumn of 1930, Ernst May, a prominent member of CIAM, had become head of planning for the newly built cities under the authority of the People's Commissariat for Heavy Industry. Two other members of CIAM, Hans Schmidt from Switzerland and Mart Stam from the Netherlands, along with several hundred foreign specialists, most of them Germans, followed May to the Soviet Union [Flierl]. After a first attempt in Frankfurt am Main in 1929, CIAM, during its third congress in Brussels in November 1930, resolved to hold their next congress, themed 'The Functional City', in Moscow. However, the congress in Moscow never took place. Until now, the lengthy preparations for, and the eventual failure of, the CIAM congress in Moscow have only been investigated using the archives of CIAM in Zürich, Paris, and Rotterdam. Firstly, we have to mention Martin Steinmann's meritorious documentation from 1979. Steinmann shows a certain understanding of the Soviet position; he interprets the cancellation of the congress as a 'consequence of the experiences with urban construction in the period between 1929 and 1932. These experiences led to the realisation that urban planning had no value whatsoever if it was not based on ideological values: the city had to become the very image of life under Socialism. The functional city had little to contribute to the creation of this city' [CIAM: Dokumente 1928–1939, p. 128].

In his book *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism* [Mumford, 2000] and his essay 'CIAM and the Communist Block' [Mumford, 2009], Eric Mumford reconstructs the debates within CIAM. He mentions in passing that, during the congress in Athens, an invitation to hold the next congress (1934) in Moscow arrived from the Soviet Union. What he does not mention is that, during the CIAM meeting in London in 1934, there was a new offer to hold the subsequent congress in Moscow, initiated by Josep Lluís Sert and directed towards the Association of Soviet Architects. However, other than discussion of the fact that the parties involved were hoping to resume contact with the Soviet Union as late as 1937, research on CIAM completely ignores the Soviet Union after 1933.

The publication *The CIAM and Cornelis Van Eesteren* (2007) by Kees Somer proves very instructive and reliable. Regarding the cancellation from Moscow in 1933, he reaches a tentative conclusion based on the source material then available: 'It is difficult to provide an unambiguous explanation for this postponement. It looks as though the local preparatory committee did not receive enough support for its activities from the authorities, due to the economic and ideological developments...' [Somer, p. 122].

The most well-informed work dealing with the interaction between architectural developments in the Western world and the Soviet Union has been provided by Jean-Louis Cohen. However, his brilliant book, *Le Corbusier et la Mystique de l'URSS* (1987), focuses chiefly on Corbusier's work and his projects in Moscow. In Cohen's work, the CIAM congress in Mos-

cow remains obscure for the most part. Accordingly, in a text published as late as 2011 [Cohen, p. 12–21], he states that it was CIAM who cancelled their fourth congress as a result of the Soviet Union's hostile stance towards modern architecture. In this, he possibly refers to a draft resolution by Le Corbusier for the Barcelona congress in March 1932, which, however, was never sent in this form. It is absolutely astonishing that this course of events has never been investigated in its entirety. What was the cause of CIAM's protest against the results of the contest to build the Palace of the Soviets? What were the origins of the protest letters and on which discursive situation inside the Soviet Union did they have an impact? Cohen also does not research these questions within their context.

The story of the failed 4<sup>th</sup> CIAM congress cannot be told without the systematic inclusion of sources from Russian archives that are accessible today. Because of these materials, many documents in Western archives can now be properly understood for the first time. I would like to mention just one aspect of my findings beforehand: between 1929 and 1933, the Politburo of the All-Russian Communist Party alone spent five sessions dealing with the CIAM congress. On 20 March 1933, they decided to postpone it, which essentially meant cancellation. This decision was part of the internal Soviet debate about the right way to industrialise and modernise the country. The planned congress coincided with a period of reorganisation in governmental institutions at the turn of 1931–32, the result of which constituted the final victory of Stalin's violent faction over a Soviet version of Fordism. Architecture and urban construction were both subjects and preminent instruments of this change in socio-political hegemony. The effects of the Stalinist historical narrative, as well as those of the Cold War, can still be felt today in that the individuals who were in favour of extensive cooperation with the Neues Bauen and a different combination of socialism and modernism are, by and large, forgotten, due to the fact that many of them were killed in the course of the 'Great Terror' that began in 1936. Today, the debates, power struggles, and hierarchical shifts on the Soviet side can be illuminated using the Russian archives. At the same time, the drafts of agendas and the abstracts of presentations allow us to discern the outlines of the planned Moscow congress.

A 'Moscow Charter' probably would have been able to counteract the split of the modern urban construction movement into two factions, with supporters for the reconstruction of existing cities on the one side and those in favour of building brand new cities on the other. After the 1933 Moscow congress was cancelled, this split became highly charged, both politically and ideologically, especially when the European dictatorships turned towards Neo-Historicism and during the Cold War.

We have to start by reconstructing the international context of CIAM's foundation, dealing in particular with the close connection between Sigfried Giedion, El Lissitzky, and Hans Schmidt, as well as the contacts between Anatolij Lunacharskij and Le Corbusier from the beginning of the 1920s. Giedion invited El Lissitzky to the foundation of CIAM in 1928, while

Le Corbusier notified Moisej Ginzburg, Nikolaj Ladovskij, and Vladimir Vladimirov from Paris. In letters to El Lissitzky, Giedion confided that 'the supervision lies, in fact, with Moser, Corbusier, Schmidt, and me' (21 May 1928); in the following letter, he wrote: 'The way things have been developing, the true avant-garde will be the defining force of this congress, and this will yield the opportunity to give the movement the direction it will need in the future.' (20 June 1928). Despite this, the foundation of CIAM took place without the Russians: Lissitzky was sick and Ginzburg received the invitation too late. He travelled to Berlin, but did not continue on to Switzerland because he would only have arrived in La Sarraz on the last day of the meeting. The founding assembly of CIAM made Lissitzky the representative for the Soviet Union. He was charged with creating a group to represent his country and was asked to participate in preparatory meetings in the West.

However, Giedion had no concept of the conditions in the Soviet Union. Lissitzky replied: 'I would love to do my best to further the idea of the congress... The problem is that, insofar as travel abroad is concerned, it has to be in accordance with government institutions. In general, to travel to a congress for a few days is a luxury for us. Personally, I'd rather get a construction contract from the state than act as its representative. But I assume that Vesnin or someone else might participate' (2 July 1929).

In preparation for the 2<sup>nd</sup> CIAM congress in Frankfurt am Main (1929), Giedion contacted the Soviet embassy in Berlin, with Gropius acting as his intermediary. Again, the objective was to invite Soviet representatives (Ginzburg and Lissitzky) and, for the first time, to organise a congress in the Soviet Union. Giedion announced that there would be a proposal in Frankfurt to hold the next congress in Moscow. The topic would be 'Urban Organisation, Urban Construction and Regional Planning'.

This time around, the Soviet side made all the decisions required. The National Institute for Buildings (GIS), where Ginzburg and the Vesnin brothers were members of the housing commission, and the All-Union Council of the Housing Cooperative were designated as contacts of CIAM. On 25 October 1929, following the initiative of the head of government Aleksej Rykov, the Politburo resolved to convoke a 'Congress for the Construction of New Housing' in Moscow in 1930. The invitation was to be issued by the two institutions in charge. As early as 19 October, Gropius telegraphed Giedion that the chance of receiving an invitation in the form of a telegraph from the embassy was '99 per cent'. However, the telegraph arrived a day late. Thus, the CIAM delegates accepted the invitation to Brussels.

At that time, Nikolaj Krestinskij was the Soviet ambassador in Berlin. Later, he would promote the idea of a congress in Moscow as deputy people's commissar of foreign affairs. In 1938, together with Nikolaj Bucharin and the aforementioned Rykov, he was indicted, sentenced to death, and executed.

Although neither Ginzburg nor Lissitzky were present in Frankfurt, a Soviet delegation made a surprise appearance. It was under the guidance of the engineer German Krasin, director of the Institute for Buildings (GIS).

Because of the complicated approval procedure for journeys abroad, Moscow unceremoniously sent the Soviet delegation to Frankfurt straight after attending the 12<sup>th</sup> congress of the International Federation for Housing and Town Planning in Rome. In Frankfurt, Krasin was an enthusiastic participant; three years later, however, he passed a more negative verdict, which played a fairly significant role in the decision to cancel the Moscow congress.

It was only in 1930, on the occasion of the Brussels congress, that the diplomatic efforts finally proved successful. The telegraph arrived on time, and the delegates resolved to hold their 4<sup>th</sup> congress in Moscow (Fig. 1).



1. Telegram of the presidium of the Central Council of the Housing Cooperative from 27 November 1931, with an invitation to hold the congress for the construction of new housing in Moscow. GTA. Zurich

Now we must focus upon the state of affairs in Moscow in 1931. It is especially important to give an impression of the work of Margrit Wyss-Vögtlin, the niece of Karl Moser, the honorary president of CIAM, who acted as CIAM's local representative in Moscow. She had a lively correspondence with Giedion, as well as being in touch with the CIAM members working in Moscow (May, Schmidt, and Stam) and the relevant Soviet agencies, especially the All-Union Council of Housing Cooperatives and, later, the newly created Council of Municipal Economy. Her letters paint a vivid picture of the atmosphere in the Soviet capital.

On the Soviet side, the All-Union Council of the Housing Cooperative (Centrozhilsojuz) and the persons linked to it have not been sufficiently acknowledged in the annals of architecture and urban plan-

ning. Jakov L. Vajnsenker had worked there since 1926: he handled most of the correspondence with CIAM. Jurij Larin was the chairman of the All-Russian Housing Cooperative from its inception in 1925 until his death. He had spent years of exile in Germany and Sweden; only in August 1917, through the Menshevik internationalists, did he join the Bolsheviks.

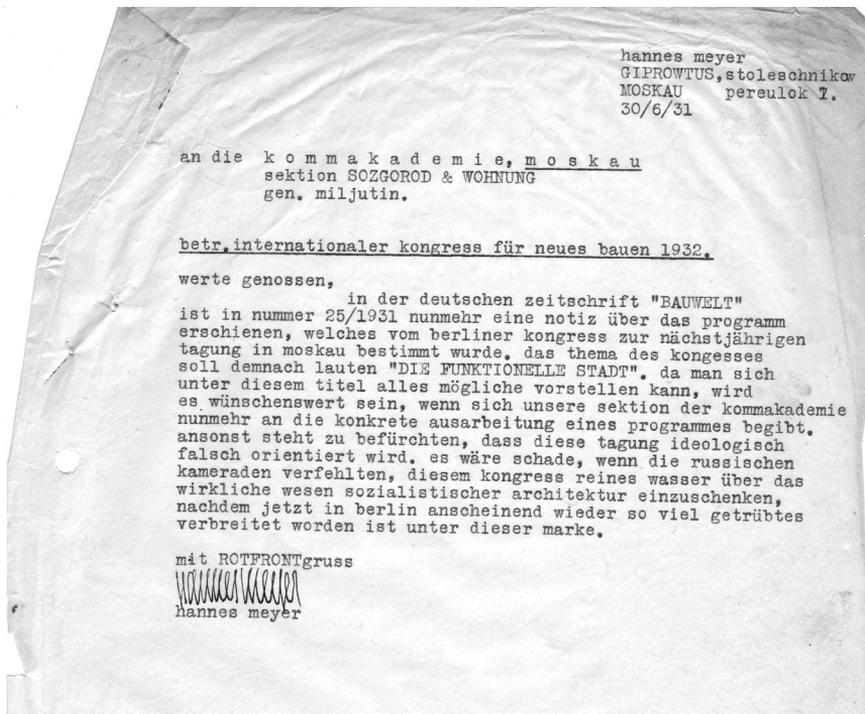
Larin was one of the creators of the national planning board Gosplan. On the occasion of the fifth anniversary of *Centrozhiłsojuz* in 1930, a collection of essays entitled *For a New Way of Living* was published. Larin's text, 'The Development Perspective of the Housing Cooperative' (1928), was placed first. In this essay, he developed a strictly anti-statist concept of the common good: 'The Soviet state is just a temporary means for the victory over the bourgeoisie, in order to ensure the complete development of our social and economic system. Or, to put it another way: the housing cooperative will still be there after the Soviet state has ceased to exist' [Ларин, с. 7]. A draft schematic of a collective house, finished in 1931, presented a housing complex consisting of several buildings with 400 residential units and communal facilities in Ivanovo, close to Moscow: this was designed by Il'ja A. Golosov. The conceptual relation to Bruno Taut's *Carl-Legien-Siedlung* in Berlin is evident.

The *Centrosojuz* Building, designed by Le Corbusier, was commissioned by Isidor Ljubimov, chairman of the Central Association of the Trade, Agriculture, and Housing Cooperatives between 1926 and 1930. In 1930–31, Ljubimov was the director of the Soviet trade mission in Berlin and, in 1932, the people's commissar for light industry in the completed *Centrosojuz* Building. In 1937, he was executed for allegedly being a spy. Between 1930 and 1933, the people's commissar for labour in charge of building cooperatives was Anton Cichon, head of the construction workers' union. He was arrested in 1937 and executed in 1939.

But let's get back to 1931. This year was marked by the enormous contradiction between the great success of the extraordinary CIAM congress in Berlin in June 1931 and the changes that were taking place in the Soviet Union. Because the congress in Moscow was still up in the air in 1931, CIAM held its extraordinary congress in Berlin at the same time as the German Building Exhibition, using the meeting as a preparatory run for the congress in Moscow. Again, it was not possible for Soviet representatives to be present, so Ernst May was the sole lecturer on urban construction in the Soviet Union. He filled the role perfectly, giving a famous talk at the *Preußisches Herrenhaus* in front of a large audience that, for the most part, applauded his efforts. Since the Soviet side had declared Nikolaj Miljutin's book *Sotsgorod* to be the programmatic guideline for the Moscow congress, CIAM was pleased with May's efforts. Boastfully, May told CIAM that he would assume all responsibility for keeping in touch with the Russians. However, he had so many other obligations that he could not really take care of this task. Later, it was apparent that he had misplaced the notorious CIAM questionnaires, the whereabouts

of which was the subject of a lengthy correspondence between Zurich and Moscow: they turned up inside May's desk only months later (they had slipped behind a drawer). Furthermore, the Russians had not designated May's contacts as the ones in charge of the CIAM congress: they had selected the Building Cooperative, whereas May was in correspondence with the People's Commissariat for Heavy Industry, a different institution.

In hindsight, the stagnation of congress preparations in Moscow – and the desperate letters that Giedion wrote to Wyss – can be explained with the strong insecurity felt by those in charge on the Soviet side following the June plenum in 1931. Lazar Kaganovich's speech marked a departure from the idea of the immediate communisation of life in newly constructed cities in favour of an orientation towards the problems of municipal economy in existing cities. Before now, it was unknown that the Politburo, on 23 June 1931, had initially refused the Building Cooperative's plea to convene the congress at the beginning of 1932 (*see colored illustration*). It is possible that Hannes Meyer's intervention played a role in this, too. In a letter addressed to the Communist Academy from 30 June 1931, Meyer had polemicised against the Berlin congress and May's talk. He demanded that they 'come clean with CIAM about the true nature of Socialist architecture' [Letter by Hannes Meyer] (Fig. 2). Despite this, the Politburo reversed its resolution on 15 October 1931.



2. Letter of H. Meyer to the Communist Academy, 30 June, 1931.  
Personal archive of Ekaterina Milyutina

This indecisiveness is an indicator of the instability of the situation in the Soviet Union. An internal power struggle was taking place between the aforementioned cooperative movement, the protagonists of the construction of large, new industrial cities (both of which were in favour of *Neues Bauen*), and the Central Administration of Municipal Economy, then part of the People's Commissariat for Interior Affairs (NKVD) and later an independent commissariat. The debate was fuelled by those who desired a 'proletarian architecture': they were backed by certain factions within the Communist Academy and gathered in the All-Union Council of Proletarian Architects (VOPRA). Among them was Hannes Meyer.

In the summer and autumn of 1931, tensions eased a little at first because two measures had been taken as a result of the plenum in June. Firstly, councils of Municipal Economy were created in every Soviet republic, and, secondly, the All-Union Council of Municipal Economy was created as part of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR in order to bridge the divide between different interests and powers.

Backed by the Politburo's resolution from October 1931 concerning the realisation of the 1932 congress, Jurij Larin and Jakov Vajnsenker took the initiative. They formed a 'Commission for the Advancement of the 4<sup>th</sup> CIAM Congress' within the All-Union Council of the Housing Cooperative. The commission held its first meeting on 12 November 1931, chaired by Jurij Larin. There was even a plan to invite Moisej Ginzburg and Ernst May to the following meeting. It seemed as if a committee with the ability to take action was finally forming on the Soviet side. Wyss, too, wrote a favourable letter to Giedion about the resumption of preparations for the congress. However, Jurij Larin's initiative from 14 December 1931, with the goal of bringing about a resolution from the Council of People's Commissaries that would create a joint commission for the preparation of the congress consisting of both CIAM and Soviet institutions, remained unsuccessful.

On 9 January 1932, Georgij Pjatakov (then a deputy chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the National Economy and later of the People's Commissariat for Heavy Industry) made an attempt to create a purely Soviet committee under the direction of the newly created All-Union Council of Municipal Economy. If nothing else, his efforts meant that the All-Union Council officially assumed responsibility for the preparation of the congress. It assigned Vajnsenker the task of inviting CIAM to the congress in September 1932, which he did on 16 March 1932.

At the same time, a preparatory group consisting of foreign architects working in the Soviet Union formed around Hans Schmidt, Hans Blumenfeld, Fred Forbat, Eugen Kauffmann, Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, Margrit Wyss, and others. This group made efforts to develop suggestions for the congress in collaboration with their Russian colleagues. In his letter to Giedion from 12 March 1932, Blumenfeld passed on proposals for revising the criteria for the country reports and urban analyses discussed in Barcelona

at the CIRPAC<sup>1</sup> conference. Because of the necessary follow-up work, the congress was postponed until spring 1933, with the mutual agreement of CIAM and the Soviets. There was even a resolution of the Politburo concerning this postponement.

In March 1932, Vajnsenker again convoked the council for the preparation of the International Congress for Urban Construction, and commissions were formed on the subjects of organisation, finance, architecture, and planning, as well as exhibitions. However, this preparatory committee of the All-Union Council of the Housing Cooperative had not been legitimised by either the party or the government.

Did the protest of the CIRPAC conference in Barcelona against the result of the contest for the Palace of the Soviets have an influence upon the failure to realise the 4<sup>th</sup> CIAM Congress in Moscow? So far, my research in Russian archives has not yielded any proof that the two protest notes – a famous photomontage was attached to the second one (Fig. 3) – ever reached Stalin himself. However, in addition to their meeting in Geneva on 5 March, Le Corbusier's 13 March 1932 letter to Anatolij Lunacharskij, the people's commissar of education, was translated by the latter and sent to Vasilij Mikhailov, the head of administration of the Palace of Soviets.



3. Photomontage (attachment to a letter from 28 April, 1932 sent to Stalin by Giedion and van Eesteren). Inscription: 'Proposed plan for the Palace of the Soviets compared to the pseudo-modernist architecture of supermarkets and churches'. Van Eesteren Foundation. Rotterdam. EEST\_4.33-1

<sup>1</sup> The International Committee for the Resolution of Problems in Contemporary Architecture (CIRPAC) was the elected executive body of CIAM.

Mikhailov gave the letter to Vyacheslav Molotov, the chairman of the palace building committee. Molotov, in turn, distributed the letter among the members of the committee, who were all linked directly to Stalin. In this letter, Le Corbusier uttered the famous sentences about the ‘mystique’ of the USSR and the ‘disenchantment’ that was likely to occur as a result of the decision to build the Palace of the Soviets in a style reminiscent of the Italian Renaissance. Indubitably, the concerned authorities in Moscow also noted the publication of an excerpt of the records from the CIRPAC conference in Barcelona in *Die Neue Stadt*: this violated the agreement not to publish any of it. The excerpt contained CIAM’s suggestion to cancel the congress should the result of the contest for the Palace of the Soviets not be reversed. The question over whether CIAM’s protest note ever reached Stalin himself may only ever be resolved through research in the archives of the Russian president or the Russian Federal Security Agency.

Irrespective of this, the decision to use the designs by Ivan Zholtovskij, Boris Iofan, and Hector Hamilton was, of course, trend-setting. Neither Le Corbusier nor the delegates of CIAM in Barcelona had any precise knowledge of the state of the debate surrounding the contest. In my opinion, the attempt to gain influence through Lunacharskij was naive as well, because Lunacharskij was playing a game of his own with Le Corbusier. Lunacharskij was trying to counterbalance Zoltovskij’s reactionary, neo-historicist design with the avant-garde extreme submitted by Le Corbusier in order to grant Iofan victory. In the end, however, Lunacharskij’s strategy failed. The previously unknown Hector Hamilton took Le Corbusier’s place as the winner of the award. This was probably due to a strategic orientation towards the USA and the plans to establish diplomatic relations with them. Albert Kahn’s influence may have also played a role.

In the summer and autumn of 1932, the preparations for the congress stagnated again within the All-Union Council of Municipal Economy. It took a drastic intervention by Nikolaj Krestinskij, the deputy people’s commissar of foreign affairs, against Aleksandr Smirnov, the chairman of the All-Union Council of Municipal Economy, and, afterwards, Lazar Kaganovich for the secretariat of the Central Committee to finally pass a resolution regarding the personnel of the organisation committee in August 1932. Avel Enukidze, secretary of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR, took over the position of chairman.

From the records of the first session under Enukidze on 14 October 1932 and the fact sheet sent to the Council of the People’s Commissars in the same month, we can gather that Enukidze was pursuing a double strategy, which was probably a wise move given the circumstances. On the one hand, he wanted to lessen the status of the 4<sup>th</sup> CIAM Congress in Moscow by delegating it to Centrozhilsojuz; on the other, he wanted to use the committee under his chairmanship to organise the ‘First International Congress of Urban Construction in the USSR’, a project that was promoted energetically by the People’s Commissariat of Municipal Economy. Enukidze’s idea was backed by a report from German Krasin, who, looking back on his

visits to the conferences in Rome and Frankfurt in 1929, described CIAM as a 'private organisation' which was 'strictly isolated because of an arbitrary set of ideological criteria'. Because of this, the CIAM congress would be unable to accomplish what was expected of a Soviet congress. Krestinskij heard of the idea to unceremoniously turn the 4<sup>th</sup> CIAM Congress into the 'First International Congress of Urban Construction in the USSR'. On 17 October 1932, he intervened energetically with Enukidze and criticised the fact that 'the creators of the plan to organise the congress do not have a clear concept of the role played by the Soviet organisers in this matter, and that we are pushing our boundaries beyond their limit. We have to understand very clearly that this is the congress of an international institution which has chosen the territory of the USSR for their annual gathering and not the Soviet all-union congress with foreign organisations as its guests' [ГАРФ. Оп. 3316. Д. 2-3].

In December 1932, van Eesteren and Giedion visited the USSR. Extensive records allow for a detailed reconstruction of their stay, the result of which was the well-known agreement to have the congress take place in June 1933. Furthermore, it is possible to imagine what the programme for the 4<sup>th</sup> CIAM congress in Moscow might have looked like. There are various notes concerning agendas, assembly statutes, central statements for position papers, the choice of Soviet participants, exhibitions, publications, and planned excursions. After the congress had been announced in early 1933, all obstacles seemed to have finally been moved out of the way. What followed instead was the drama of the postponement, and therefore cancellation, of the 4<sup>th</sup> CIAM congress by Kaganovich and Stalin.

In January and February 1933, the All-Union Council of the Housing Cooperative wrote to Enukidze and the Central Committee in an effort to get their approval for the project. Now, it was money that was the issue: they needed 239 436 rubles. At the same time, the preparatory committee on the Soviet side, which had been supported since autumn 1932 by Centrozhilsojuz, the Association of Architects, and the All-Union Organisation for Foreign Cultural Exchange, was busy making preparations of their own. Although Vajnsenker had learned from a member of Kaganovich's staff that approval for the financial planning was Enukidze's domain, the Orgburo of the Central Committee dealt with this question on 2 March 1933; three days later, it passed a recommendation to the secretariat of the Central Committee that the congress be postponed for financial reasons. Apparently, word of this decision circulated, and this is how, on 8 March 1933, the communist faction of the Association of Architects wrote a remarkable and still completely unstudied letter to Kaganovich. Karo Alabjan, chairman of the Association, pointed to 'a whole number of negative effects'. The repeated postponement by another year and to an uncertain date after the completion of a written agreement and extensive preparations was sure to lead to incomprehension among the directors of CIAM and the congress' foreign participants. So that money was not an issue, Alabjan proposed cancelling the planned exhibition. However, money was not the problem. Just as in

the case with the contest for the Palace of the Soviets in February 1932, the decision regarding the CIAM congress became the medium and manifestation of Stalin's growing dominance over his rivals. Stalin, fully aware that the letter of the Association of Architects painted a realistic picture of the consequences and despite the objection of Krestinskij, whom he hated, sent a letter to the members of the Politburo on 10 March 1933, proposing to postpone the congress. Finally, on 22 March, Vajnshtenker wrote a cancellation letter to Giedion, citing insufficient Soviet preparations as the reason.

There is not enough space here to elaborate fully on CIAM's activities after the Soviet Union's cancellation or on the Soviet Union's stance towards the congress in Athens. During that congress, the USSR conveyed an invitation to CIAM to hold its 5<sup>th</sup> Congress in Moscow, but it remained unanswered. In 1934, CIAM took the initiative and tried to revive the idea, but to no avail. Conversely, the Soviet 'First International Congress of Urban Construction in the USSR' planned for 1934 did not take place either. The idea for a purely Soviet congress was passed from the People's Commissariat for Municipal Economy to the Association of Soviet Architects. In contrast to the other artists' associations, the constructivists, as well as the institutions for urban construction linked to them, were not inclined to throw in the towel. The First Congress of Soviet Architects took place in 1937; even there, traces of the controversy surrounding modern architecture can be found. Le Corbusier was again invited to Moscow for this meeting. He excused himself, though, citing the fact that the CIAM congress in Paris would take place at the same time.

Had it taken place in 1930 or 1931, the CIAM congress in Moscow would have had an enormous impact. Ernst May's plans for new cities and the paradigm of Sotsgorod as advocated by Nikolaj Miljutin were a good match. In Berlin, May had already discussed the idea of combining different types of housing and changing buildings as needed. The problem of urban centres was also part and parcel of May's plans. This meant that the social evolution of cities, and their representation as a whole, would still have been debated under the dominant influence of Neues Bauen from both theoretical and practical perspectives. Such a congress would have promoted the large-scale implementation of CIAM's guiding principles in the Soviet Union, and would have strengthened the position of the Soviet Modernist faction too. Given the international debate between the backers of the communal economy of existing cities and the supporters of newly constructed cities (two groups which had been split among rival institutions in the Soviet Union with disastrous consequences), a congress in 1932 might have been more interesting than one held in the preceding two years.

During the Soviet preparations for the congress, there was still a balance between the representatives of both sides of these debates. However, the question of a 'new style of architecture' and 'proletarian architecture' was already an issue, one that was prematurely decided when the decision regarding the Palace of the Soviets was made: this inevitably caused a split within the international Modernist community.

The congress in Moscow failed because of the power politics of Stalin and his circle, who were using architecture and urban construction as a means to bring about a change in the political hegemony that would culminate in unlimited dictatorship. In cancelling the congress, not only did the Politburo rebuff supporters of the Neues Bauen outside the Soviet Union, but also, and most importantly, put all friends of CIAM in the Soviet Union on the defensive. I will refrain from enumerating all the functionaries in charge of the CIAM congress who, a few years later, were no longer alive.

None the less, the leadership of CIAM was also at fault for the failure of the Moscow congress. This was made evident by Sigfried Giedion himself. In 1934, albeit without any reference to the Moscow congress, he wrote: 'Today, as there is no longer an inner turmoil [within the Neues Bauen movement], the involvement of the past, of the aesthetics that one had feared for so much, yes, even the task of national representation, have come to life again. All these things have a right to live and they may not be neglected by an architecture that is anchored in life as a whole. However, it is hardly necessary to stress that our relationship with these things follows a new sensibility which, in comparison to former times, has changed radically. But a movement can only deal with all of these questions after the laws of its actions have been established and there is no longer any danger of producing inadequate or clichéd (dishonest) solutions by tackling complicated tasks too early' [Giedion].

The inner logic of CIAM as a movement did not keep up with Soviet developments. Giedion's realisation came too late for Soviet engagement in CIAM. Why Giedion never returned to his attempts to involve the Soviets remains to be explained.

Even Le Corbusier made concessions to the paradigm shift within Soviet architectural politics when he wrote in 1934 that: '1931 – the Palace of the Soviets, the crowning glory of the five-year plan. For reasons whose legitimacy I have to acknowledge given the circumstances, the jury determines that this palace is to be built in the style of the Italian Renaissance.' Corbusier called the decision the result of a 'probably very well thought out psychology. I acknowledge the reasons and I defer to them – not without regret, all the same' [Cohen, 1992]. In 1934, he finally realised that his own project had not been accepted. He still confused Zoltovskij's design with that by Iofan, the latter of which had been chosen for realisation.

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