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# **Frank Lloyd Wright versus America**

## **The 1930s**

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not care to accept his dream or his philosophy, was in the repeated insistence on the relationship between the city and the society that produced it. The contemporary city, for Wright, was a product of industrial civilization. One could not understand all of its institutions: the political system, social stratification and the economic order, religion and education. Wright might be excused for his authoritarianism, for his failure to consider the motivations of individuals, for his brash structuring of existing social relationships into something he wanted. For he did grasp something of the underlying complexity that sustained the city as a social environment. That he refused to consider what others wanted, or what others thought, was due to his conviction that he was absolutely right. Can the prophet, after all, have any doubts?<sup>2</sup>

**Notes**

1. Excerpts require the following acknowledgment: "Reprint with the permission of the Free Press, a division of Macmillan, Inc. from THE URBAN PROCESS: Cities in Industrial Societies by Leonard Reissman. Copyright © 1964, 1970 by the Free Press." The relevant pages are 42–43.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 57–62. Does the sociologist see the city as people who have physical things and the architect see the city as a physical phenomenon fulfilling people's needs?

**Appendix E "Wright, American Architect, Gives His Impressions of Moscow and of Soviet People"<sup>1</sup>**

As my visit to Moscow extends one impression grows concerning the foreign newspaper correspondents: either most of them are blind or vipers. The best of them seem busy drinking the tub of dye to find out what color it is. The notable exceptions are perhaps the "Manchester Guardian" and the "New York Times," whatever their political creed may be. Can any man with a heart and a head see the liberation of a whole people actually working out a new life, without rejoicing with them?

The great nations should gladly stand by, "hands off," to protect the growth of this struggling democracy instead of standing by to see the great effort compelled to waste, on getting ready to fight, resources needed to make better living conditions.

But the human fiber of the ultimate Russia will only be stronger because of this needless difficulty added to inevitable ones.

Yesterday at the Moscow building exhibit [in the House of Unions] I saw a splendid exposition of plans and models for the buildings, towns and cities in the Soviet Union. That exhibit could not be equalled in the world today.

I do not say that all the buildings were what they should be—many were infected by the

old grandomania, many were yearning for luxury of the old pastry cook elegance—but I say enough were better than good to show how much better all will be soon. The exhibit stands far above the level of anything America could show, America, the country toward which these lovable people look with such pathetic appeal. So much in the architecture of our own country is bad for the Soviet Union at this critical time.

These are the impressions of a sentimentalist, you may say. But first impressions are usually best impressions and it has never been necessary for me to drink a tub of dye to know its color. The other day I spoke at the All-Union Congress of Architects in the hall of the former Nobles Club [sic] the great room filled with Soviet architects. Although my remarks were critical, the amazing honor they heaped upon me until they broke me down showed that it is not praise they value most.

I believe the Russian people to be naturally sensitive to beauty, kind at heart, generous by nature—strong and, in the long run, hardest of all people to fool by superficial pretense.

When we remember the birth of the Soviet Union, we must realize not only how young the nation is but how many unfortunate inheritances entered into its composition and even now course in its blood stream.

If they worship heroes—well, the heroes now belong to them—to the people.

If they are proud of their achievements, those achievements are the work of their own heads and hands. Achievements, too, belong to the people.

If they are suspicious of the world surrounding them, seeing sinister shadows moving within and without their gates, who can blame them?

The sinister is there.

Like some pregnant mother going carefully, unfortunately this one must go fearful, too.

Yes—the world has at least two great hopes for a better life struggling forward—the USSR and the USA. Two different roads to the same place—a free life for a free people. The breaking of the new polar route between the two countries by Russian enterprise will place both nations in a central position among the nations of this Northern Hemisphere. A trade and passenger route 35 hours long from the center of the USSR to the center of the USA!

Prejudices will fade to show the world changed in its center of power.

I might almost say its political center of gravity—changed.

So here's to Russia's America and to America's Russia.

May both live long and grow together.

[signed] Frank Lloyd Wright

**Note**

1. As published in the *Moscow Daily News*, 28 June 1937, p. 4; reprint as "An American Architect's Impression of USSR," *Moscow News*, Sunday, 7 July 1937, p. 4. In the adjacent column was the following, which was condensed from "Eminent Foreign Architects . . .," *Moscow Daily News*, 30 June 1937, p. 3.

**Architects Vote Congress Huge Success**

**The First All-Union Congress of Architects, which ended in Moscow last week, was voted a huge success not only by the Soviet architects but by the many distinguished foreigners who had been invited to attend the sessions.**

**"I had assumed that it would be the sort of narrowly professional gathering that we are accustomed to in the West," the British architect C. Williams Ellis said. "I was therefore astonished at the alert interest displayed apparently by the entire public in the congress and even in its long and often highly technical debates. If an architect in my country were to speak not merely as a specialist, but also as a severe critic, mentioning the names of colleagues whom he considered had made grave mistakes—well, I really don't know what would happen!"**

**Mr. Ellis felt that the congress should be repeated on an international scale, similar to an olympiad, with architects of all democratic countries participating. He expressed his admiration for the advances made since his last visit to the Soviet Union, five years ago, evidences of which he found on every hand. A similar statement was made by F. Jourdain, French architect, who last visited Moscow 10 years ago.**

**"The first thing that strikes one on arriving in Moscow," he said, "are the new buildings, wide streets, cleanliness, new appearance of people who do not seem to experience need; and large shops filled with goods and buyers, bookstores which cannot keep pace with the tremendous demand for literature. The love for books and thirst for knowledge seem to me most characteristic of the Moscovites and apparently of the Soviet people in general. This great cultural rise is naturally reflected also in architecture."**

**Appendix F Education of the Architect: A Letter from Frank Lloyd Wright to Jens Jensen<sup>1</sup>**

It is never possible to bring out the meaning of any subjective matter without being rehearsed in the language—in being sure that all are speaking the same language. The only difference between Olgivanna and myself is that she believes that the creative instinct is the original birthright of mankind and in most of them it lies dead—in any case paralysed and that by proper treatment it may be revived. I too believe that creative-faculty is the birthright of Man—the quality which enabled him to distinguish himself from the brute, but that owing to his betrayal of himself, the tricks which he has played upon himself with his brain, what he calls his intellect—and by means of his arrogant assumptions, abstractions, all turned into a system of so called education, he has sterilized himself. And I believe that now not only is this creative-instinct dead in most, but it has ceased to exist at