Hitler and Urban Planning in Berlin: Minutes of the Meeting in the Reich Chancellery (March 29, 1934)

Abstract

One of the foremost proponents of the role of architecture in building a National Socialist Germany was none other than the Führer himself. Hitler was obsessed with the power of architecture to embody the will and spirit of the national "racial community," and, as a result, he took keen interest in contemporary plans to rebuild German cities, particularly Berlin. Hitler's fixation on architecture often led him to interfere with the planning work of his subordinates. The following minutes from a 1934 meeting about the reconstruction of Berlin show that Hitler had a litany of criticisms regarding the proposed plans. Hitler's ideas and critiques offer a window into his fascination with architecture and its role in the Third Reich. Yet this document also demonstrates Hitler's impulsive, obsessive tendency to micromanage those projects that were of particular interest to him. At times, his interference led to delays in construction.

Source

Minutes of the Meeting in the Reich Chancellery on March 29, 1934.

At the beginning, the Führer criticizes the model of Horst Wessel-Platz in detail, disagrees with the configuration in front of the Volksbühne [People's Theater], and criticizes the fact that the central axis of the theater building and the staircase behind it are obstructed. The triangular forecourt should remain free, he says, the guard houses could be moved a little to the right and to the left. When asked where the Liebknecht House would be located, he decides that the Horst Wessel Memorial should be placed in the eastern grove of honor, while the memorial to the police officers could be placed in the western grove of honor and the monument to the Hitler Youth could be erected elsewhere.

After a brief presentation by the city head of planning, with the help of the posted plans, about questions related to the North-South axis and the East-West break, the Führer declared that the axis was in the right place. He agrees with its expansiveness and the very large scale. He likewise agrees with the location of the south train station and its connection to the expanded airport, which he finds satisfactory. Immediately north of the south train station on the large axis, the Führer envisages an enormous triumphal arch for the undefeated army of the World War. The Ministry of the Reichswehr, the Ministry of Aviation, and the Naval Ministry are to be located at the former Königsplatz, across from and to the side of the Reichstag, that is, on the western and southern side of the square. The Victory Column is to be moved a little further to the north, as the northern completion of the square the Führer suggests 2 memorial halls to the air and sea battles. He wants the central Reich agencies and the monumental buildings needed for the mid-level staff of the party located along the newly breached street leading south from Skagerrak Square. With respect to the east-west connection, he expressed doubts whether a breach through the ministerial gardens provides a right solution. In the process he expressed the intention of leaving the Reich Chancery in the Wilhelmstraße, while the central agencies are to be otherwise removed from the Wilhelmstraße; for that reason, the Führer has certain concerns about the breakthrough road planned by the city, since it would adversely affect the building of the Reich Chancery and of the garden behind it. The lord mayor points out that precisely out of consideration for the Führer's remarks, the large, undivided building complex situated north of the street would be considered for his residence, that is, the current palace of the Reich President, the former Reich Ministry of the Interior and the Foreign Office. In response, the question is to be examined again.

After this first group—administrative buildings—the Führer laid out his views about a second important group of buildings, which are to serve museum purposes. The museum island with the eastern and western banks of the Spree and the Kupfergraben is to be reserved solely for museum purposes. What is needed is the construction of a Germanic Museum, a Museum of Decorative Arts; the collections of decorative arts must be taken out of the Stadtschloss [City Palace], the collections from the old Museum of Decorative Arts in the Prinz Albrecht Street must be moved to the new buildings of the museum island, likewise a new building is necessary for the Egyptian Department and for Asian Art.

Passing on to a third group of buildings, the Führer calls for the new construction of a winter stadium and the erection of a very large assembly hall that can hold 250,000 people.

As the fourth important group, the Führer designates the buildings of the university and of science, it not being entirely clear yet whether the buildings and institutes are properly located in the center of the city, or whether the idea of moving them outside should be given preference. This question is not urgent and should be set aside for now.

During the further course of the discussion, the Führer approves the plans concerning the Molkenmarkt, the uncovering of Ludwig Hoffmann's townhouse and of the choir section of St. Nikolai, and the intention to newly construct another urban administrative building, including a city library and archive. He openly comes out against high-rises and is happy to concede that he intends to forthrightly acknowledge three building projects of the previous regime: rebuilding of the State Opera, opening up the Franz Joseph Square, and placing the warriors' memorial in the Schinkelwache.

In further discussion, which returned once again to the breach through the ministerial gardens, the Führer suggested the extension of Leipzig Street westward. The Lord Mayor promises to work on the question. The idea of tunneling under the ministerial gardens is also discussed.

In addition, the Führer wants an alteration to the grounds in the Lustgarten. The monument to Friedrich Wilhelm III, which is located completely wrong on the central axis of the Old Museum, must disappear. The suggestion by the city head of planning that this monument would be favorably placed at the corner of the Lustgarten by the Apothekenflügel, precisely on the axis of the Linden—he said that such a project had already been worked out—seems congenial to the Führer.

In response to a statement by the State Commissar regarding the rehabilitation of the Old City, the Führer promises his active assistance. In response to a brief presentation by the Director General of the Reichsbahn Corporation about the location of the South Train Station, the continuation of the main lines in the tunnel northward to the Stadtkreuz Train Station—Lehrter Train Station—and onward to Gesundbrunnen, the Führer expresses his agreement with this plan.

Source: Niederschrift der Stadt Berlin (Abschrift) über eine Besprechung mit Hitler am 29. März 1934 zur Gestaltung der Berliner Achsen, BA R 43 II/1181a; reprinted in Jost Dülffer, Jochen Thies, and Josef Henke, *Hitlers Städte: Baupolitik im Dritten Reich. Eine Dokumentation*. Cologne and Vienna: Böhlau, 1978, pp. 97–100.

Translation: Thomas Dunlap

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