

Berlin's Siemensstadt district (1921)

Abstract

This segment from a 1921 weekly newsreel showcased the collection of factories, offices, and workers' housing on the western edge of Berlin known as "Siemensstadt," an entire urban district created by and for the massive Siemens electrical concern. The segment lauded Siemens as an economic engine of the city and a company whose forward-looking architectural sensibilities reflected its long-term viability. Footage focused, in particular, on the majestic eighty-meter-high "Siemensturm," the "largest electric tower clock in the world," as one intertitle emphasized. The clock's sophisticated design illustrated the company's technological prowess, and its imposing visibility suggested the importance that Siemens's management placed on timekeeping and punctuality. The company did not manufacture clocks commercially, however, and instead focused since its founding in 1847 on an ever-expanding array of lighting, electrical appliances, and telecommunications systems, from telegraphs to radio. As Siemens expanded in the late nineteenth century, it purchased a large piece of property near Spandau, on the northwestern outskirts of Berlin, as the new epicenter of the firm's plants and factories. It also hired architects to design attractive housing for its employees, which featured private bathrooms, central heating, and abundant green space, all of which stood in stark contrast to the grim and overcrowded working-class tenements in most other factory districts. In 1920, just one year prior to the making of this newsreel, the German state of Prussia officially incorporated Siemensstadt into the city of Berlin proper, as part of its much larger expansion of the city's boundaries to create "Groß-Berlin" [Greater Berlin]. Siemensstadt continued to maintain its own character, though, even as it grew with the city. By 1930, the district had over five hundred housing units, as well as its own schools, police and fire departments, post offices, churches, theaters, and recreation centers.

Source

Intertitle: The capital of the Reich as a metropolis of labor: the huge factory premises of the Siemens works, after which an entire district is named.

Intertitle: The 80-meter-high Siemens Tower, a masterpiece of chimney construction, dominates the area.

Intertitle: The largest electric tower clock in the world (diameter of the clock face: 7 meters)

Intertitle: The small pendulum clock brings the giant clockwork to life and regulates it (note the rotating contact cam).

Intertitle: The clock room in its huge dimensions with the clock mechanism. (The counterweight of the large hand lifts a person effortlessly)

Source: *Messter-Woche* (clip), Messter-Film, 1921. Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv, Filmwerk ID: 22787.

<https://digitaler-lesesaal.bundesarchiv.de/video/22787/630637>

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