

Socialist Architects in the Norwegian Labor Movement

- 1 The first three in particular made their mark in architectural history: Erik Rolfsen became the city planning director in Oslo after the Second World War, Frode Rinnan established an architectural firm that grew to become one of the largest in the country in the postwar period, and Carsten Boysen played a key role in the development of the housing cooperative movement in Norway and in housing research.
- 2 Jon Guttu, *Carsten Boysen* (Oslo: Kolofon forlag, 2019), 79.
- 3 This essay builds on my PhD dissertation: Anne-Kristine Kronborg, "Å reise noe nytt og bedre... Om arkitektur og politikk 1935–1940" (PhD-diss., Oslo School of Architecture and Design, 2022), and portions of the text have been previously published (in Norwegian) in Anne-Kristine Kronborg, "Arkitektene som kom inn fra kulda: Sosialistiske Arkitekters Forening fra Mot Dag til Arbeiderpartiet," ed. Erlend Hanssen Sjøvik and Kim Pløhn, *Ny boligplan: tidsskrift for boligpolitikk*, no. 1 (2024): 115–27.

In 1935, Arbeiderpartiet (the Norwegian Labor Party) formed its first government. This is considered the beginning of a new era in the country's political and social history—the prelude to the welfare state. Shortly after, a group of young architects joined Arbeiderpartiet. Among them were Erik Rolfsen, Frode Rinnan, Carsten Boysen, Gunnar Øvergaard Jørgen, Eyvind Alnæs, and Gunvor Eliassen.¹ They were all educated at NTH (Norges tekniske høgskole, the Norwegian University of Technology) in Trondheim around 1930 and belonged to a generation of architects who experienced significant professional changes during their studies. The professional reorientation went hand-in-hand with a political awakening.² The students believed that the education was outdated. Inspired by Bauhaus, they wanted to focus on housing conditions, urban planning, psychology, and sociology. Ultimately, this was a question about the architect's role in society. The students rejected the traditional role of the architect as an artist and believed that architects had to see themselves as planners and builders of society instead.

After their studies, the architects joined the organization Mot Dag (Toward Day), which was a gathering place for socialist intellectuals. The members organized themselves into different professional groups: the Socialist Doctors' Association, the Socialist Philologists and Scientists' Association, the Socialist Technicians and Engineers' Association, and the Socialist Lawyers and Economists' Association. The architects followed the same pattern and founded the Sosialistiske Arkitekters Forening (SAF, the Association of Socialist Architects) in 1932. SAF published the magazine *PLAN*, which was published in four issues in the period 1933–36. In the magazine, the architects formulated a harsh critique of social conditions in general, and especially of the current housing policy. In the summer of 1936, Mot Dag was dissolved, and most of its members joined Arbeiderpartiet. Several of the professional groups from Mot Dag were incorporated into the party organization, including SAF. This means that a group of professionally and politically engaged architects joined the party exactly at a time when it was consolidating itself as the country's center of political power. The architects' involvement in the Mot Dag movement is well documented in architectural history. The same applies to their significance in postwar housing construction and urban planning. However, the architects' professional and political engagement in the Arbeiderpartiet and the broader labor movement between 1935 and 1940 was crucial for the postwar developments, and there is a rich source material from these years, in the form of texts produced by socialist architects, which include newspaper and journal articles, reports, and other study materials.³ The source material includes two booklets titled "Bo bedre" (Better living) and "Boligbygging i Norge" (Housing construction in Norway), thirty articles

- 4 H. C. Sandbeck, "Teknikk og socialisme" [Technology and socialism], *Det 20de århundre* 10 (1934): 317.
- 5 Rolv Petter Amdam, "Teknologi og planøkonomi" [Technology and the planned economy], *Arbeiderhistorie* (1988): 107–23.
- 6 Amdam. "Teknologi og planøkonomi," 107–23.
- 7 Original quote in Norwegian: "Han må ha hatt ein brinnande trong til å forme partiet sin politikk, og han valde til dels ukonvensjonelle, men effektive middel for å vinne fram. ... Og gjennom Teknisk Forening tok han initiativ til å få sett i gang konkret planarbeid før dette blei tatt opp av partiet elles. ... Engasjementet til Colbjørnsen uttrykte dermed vilje til å omsette politikk til handling." Rolv Petter Amdam, "Teknologi og planøkonomi," 112.

in the journal *Bygningsarbeideren* (The construction worker), and a collection of articles titled "Vi snakker om hus" (Talking about houses). The architects also gave lectures and campaigned. The source material clearly shows that the new political situation represented a new space for action for the architects, and that they assumed the role of experts in their field.

THE TECHNICAL ASSOCIATION OF THE NORWEGIAN LABOR PARTY

When the architects joined Arbeiderpartiet, SAF became a part of the party's Teknisk Forening (Technical Association), its own association for engineers and other technical professionals. The Technical Association became an important arena for professional and political work for the socialist architects.

The Technical Association was founded in 1934, and among the initiators was one of the party's most important strategists in the 1930s, journalist Ole Colbjørnsen. One of the other leaders of the association, engineer H. C. Sandbeck, presented the association in the party's journal *Det 20de Århundre* (The twentieth century) shortly after it was founded in 1934. He explained that the purpose of the association was to contribute to analyzing the conditions for the production industry and to design a planned economy; it was also supposed to function as a sort of interest group for technical professionals, and would educate both the technical profession and the general public. Sandbeck concluded: "What can and should be done will be decided by the working people themselves. Technical professionals with fresh intellectual abilities can greatly contribute to clarifying how it best can be done."⁴

In an academic article about the Technical Association in the journal *Arbeiderhistorie* (Labor history), the historian Rolv Petter Amdam describes the Technical Association as a planning apparatus for Arbeiderpartiet, which developed plans and studies, thus contributing to shaping the party's policies.⁵ Significant knowledge production took place within the association, and according to Amdam, it was the members' ability to integrate technology and planned economy that allowed them to have their key issues included in the party's program.⁶ Amdam points out that many issues were discussed and explored within the Technical Association *before* they were presented to the party's governing bodies and incorporated into the party's programs. This means that the members of the Technical Association had significant power in defining the party's agenda. According to Rolv Petter Amdam, the reason that the Technical Association gained such importance in shaping politics during the second half of the 1930s lay in its founder, Ole Colbjørnsen, being one of the party's chief ideologists. Amdam describes Colbjørnsen's characteristic way of shaping political agendas:

He must have had a burning desire to shape the party's policy, and he chose partly unconventional but effective means to succeed. ... And through the Technical Association, he took the initiative to start concrete planning before it was addressed by the party otherwise. ... Colbjørnsen's commitment thus expressed a willingness to translate politics into action.⁷

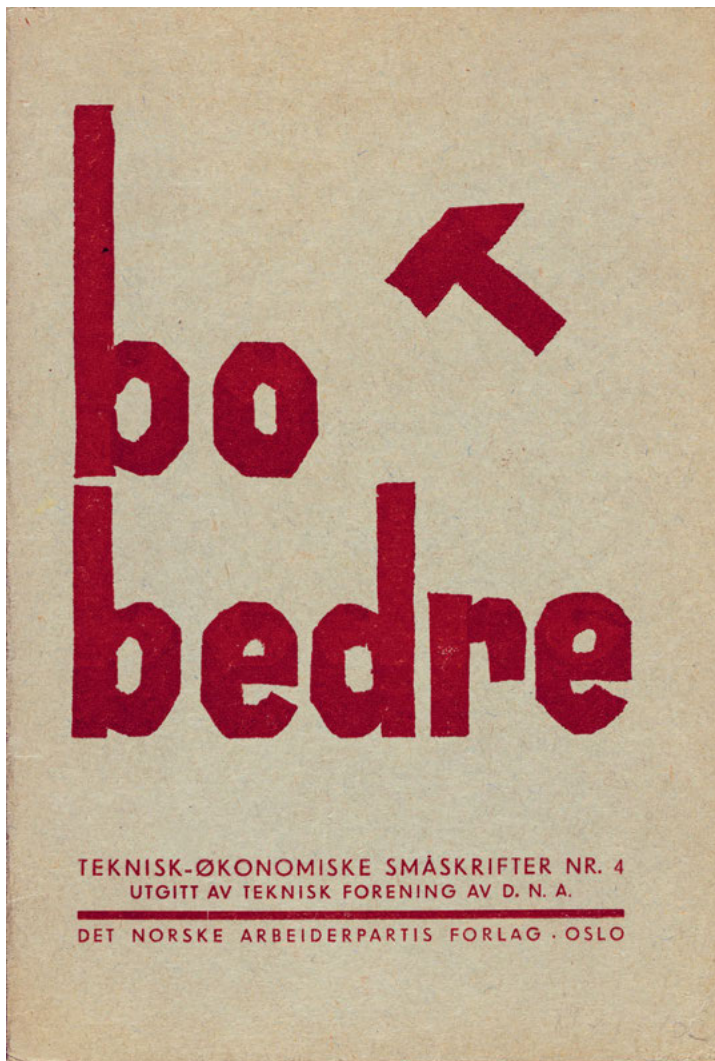
- 8 Gunnar Øvergaard Jørgen, "Bo bedre: bolignøden og boligbehovet, bygger vi for mange boliger, retningslinjer for norsk boligproduksjon," *Teknisk-økonomiske småskrifter* 4 (Oslo: Det Norske Arbeiderpartis forlag, 1936).
- 9 Original quote in Norwegian: "Dels er det husenes tilstand som ikke alltid er som den bør være. ... Den annen side ved bolignøden viser sig, når vi ser efter hvor mange mennesker det bor i hver enkelt bolig." Jørgen, "Bo bedre," 3.
- 10 Original quote in Norwegian: "like mange som hele befolkningen i Bergen og Oslo tilsammen." Øvergaard Jørgen, "Bo bedre," 4.
- 11 Original quote in Norwegian: "De enkelte kan ikke undgå å forstyrre hverandre; de går til sengs og står op til forskjellig tid; skolebarn skal lese lekser mens de voksne går ut og inn: en av familien har kanskje nattarbeide og skal forsøke å sove mens de andre er i virksomhet." Øvergaard Jørgen, "Bo bedre," 5.

When the socialist architects became part of this association, they became part of a professional-political environment that demanded their knowledge and allowed it to be used to shape political plans and programs. The Technical Association published its own series of writings, called *Teknisk-økonomiske småskrifter* (Technical-economic pamphlets), which addressed some of the most important political issues of the time, particularly those related to business and labor. The pamphlets in the series were written by members of the various specialized groups within the Technical Association and were used as a knowledge base within the party organization.

BETTER LIVING

As early as 1936, architects contributed to this series with a booklet. It was called "Bo bedre: bolignøden og boligbehovet, bygger vi for mange boliger, retningslinjer for norsk boligproduksjon" (Better living: The housing shortage and housing need, are we building too many homes? Guidelines for Norwegian housing production) and was written by Gunnar Øvergaard Jørgen. The booklet was only sixteen pages long, but it was extensive in terms of content. The text covered the following topics: *bolignøden i den offisielle statistikk* (housing shortage in official statistics), *overbefolkede leiligheter* (overcrowded apartments), *en ny by av Oslos størrelse* (a new city of Oslo's size), and *hvor meget må det bygges* (how much needs to be built)?⁸

Gunnar Øvergaard Jørgen started with a definition of the poor housing conditions: "Partly, there is the condition of the houses, which is not always as it should be. ... The other side of the housing shortage becomes apparent when we look at how many people live in each housing unit."⁹ The housing problem was thus expressed in two ways: the physical condition of the houses and overcrowding. The architect pointed out that although there were no statistics on the percentage of the country's housing that had a poor technical standard, it was likely to be quite high. Overcrowding, on the other hand, was well documented. Øvergaard Jørgen claimed that although the data from the last census was quite alarming, the official statistics still did not provide an accurate picture of the real housing shortage: while according to the official criteria, there were 160,000 people living in severely overcrowded housing (the same amount as the entire population of Bergen and Trondheim combined), he argued that the official statistics were too theoretical in their definition of overcrowding and didn't for instance consider the fact that overcrowding was unevenly distributed among the population.¹⁰ This overcrowding in turn had significant negative consequences for the population, particularly in terms of their mental health: Øvergaard Jørgen described the family life that it supported as both difficult and exhausting—particularly problematic was the fact that both the kitchen and living room had to serve as bedrooms: "Individuals cannot avoid disturbing each other; they go to bed and wake up at different times; schoolchildren have to do homework while the adults come in and out; someone in the family might have night work and try to sleep while others are awake."¹¹ He concluded his diagnosis of the housing problems with the demand



In the years after Arbeiderpartiet (the Norwegian Labor Party) came to power, Teknisk Forening (Technical Association) contributed to the party's policy development through a series of publications. The booklet "Bo bedre" (Better living) was published in 1936 and contained an analysis of the housing situation.

- 12 Øvergaard Jørgen, "Bo bedre," 7.
 13 Øvergaard Jørgen, "Bo bedre," 7.
 14 Original quote in Norwegian: "Det dreier seg om å utbygge bygningsindustrien, å hindre den spekulasjon som allerede nu er påferde og som er blitt hovedårsaken til de stigende byggepriser; og det dreier seg om å ordne kredittvesenet og gjøre det til et hensiktsmessig redskap for byggevirksomheten. Til slutt blir det for de for de laveste inntekters vedkommende nødvendig å øke betalingsevnen ved offentlig støtte i en eller annen form." Øvergaard Jørgen, "Bo bedre," 11.
 15 Øvergaard Jørgen, "Bo bedre," 10.
 16 Original quote in Norwegian: "Vi har i byggevirksomheten et særlig tydelig eksempel på, at det er ulønnsomt å la være å sette arbeide igang." Øvergaard Jørgen, "Bo bedre," 10–11.
 17 Original quote in Norwegian: "Det forutsetter blandt annet en arbeiderregjering som har støtte i et sterkt stortingsflertall, og som kan samarbeide med arbeiderstyrte kommuner." Øvergaard Jørgen, "Bo bedre," 13.

for a completely different housing standard, both in terms of quality and size.

Having identified the problem, Øvergaard Jørgen then moved on to outlining proposed solutions. First of all, new criteria for overcrowding had to be developed. The architect's main requirement was that the kitchen should not be considered a living space, as it was in the official statistics, and that the minimum size of a dwelling should not be calculated on the basis of more than two people per room, meaning that a household of four people needed at least two rooms *and* a kitchen. By applying this criterion, an even greater housing shortage was revealed. According to Øvergaard Jørgen, this could only be met through systematic new construction, at a scale commensurate with a new city the size of Oslo.¹² This meant that the intensity of construction activity had to be doubled. The socialist architect dismissed the conservatives' claim that the housing shortage would disappear if left to market forces for a few years.¹³ To combat overcrowding and eliminate substandard housing, a systematic transformation of the entire housing sector was required:

It is about expanding the construction industry, preventing the speculation that is already underway and has become the main cause of rising construction prices; and it is about organizing the credit system and making it an appropriate tool for construction activity. Finally, for those with the lowest incomes, it will be necessary to increase their ability to pay through public support in some form or another.¹⁴

Gunnar Øvergaard Jørgen did not describe in detail how the transformation should take place in practice, but he emphasized an important basic principle: namely, that such a transformation would yield significant socioeconomic benefits, particularly in terms of the general labor market.¹⁵ Increased housing production would mean increased employment and production in the construction industry, transportation sector, and among material producers. It would also mean increased investments and increased national income. "In the construction industry," Øvergaard Jørgen concluded, "we have a particularly clear example of the fact that it is unprofitable to refrain from initiating work."¹⁶ This represented a new approach to the housing issue, reframing housing construction as a form of value creation that the whole society would benefit from. This would become the focal point of the socialist architects' and Arbeiderpartiet's housing policy program, and the small booklet represented a breakthrough in this way of addressing the housing question.

In this key text on housing policy, Gunnar Øvergaard Jørgen argued along three lines: a technical and functional line (addressing the homes themselves), an organizational line (addressing housing production), and a political line (addressing governance): a plan that could guarantee individuals and families a dignified existence in the future required, in his words, "among other things, a Labor government with support from a strong majority in parliament and the ability to collaborate with worker-controlled municipalities."¹⁷ The sentence becomes particularly interesting when considering the timing of the booklet's release. "Bo bedre" was published just a few weeks before a parliamentary election in October 1936, a

- 18 Gunnar Øvergaard Jørgen, "Hvordan bor folk i Norge? – Hvad trenges det av hus?," in *Vi snakker om hus* [Talking about houses], Eyvind Alnæs (Oslo: Stenersen 1937), 14–15.
- 19 Teknisk Forening av D.N.A., "Boligbygging i Norge" [Housing construction in Norway], *Teknisk-økonomiske småskrifter* (Oslo: Det Norske Arbeiderpartis forlag, 1937).
- 20 Teknisk Forening av D.N.A., "Boligbygging i Norge," 5.

period of great anticipation. While Arbeiderpartiet was indeed in government, their position was far from secure. The party campaigned on a program focused on action and change and needed strong issues for the election campaign. The housing issue was one such matter. And *this* is where "Bo bedre" came into the picture and likely had far greater significance than its modest format would suggest. The booklet was actively used in the election campaign and in the party's education and information activities. For example, in September 1936, a whole range of newspapers within the labor movement's press published an abbreviated version of the text, spread across two articles. These articles were prominently featured in newspapers such as *Sarpsborg Arbeiderblad* (on Saturday, September 12) and *Tidens Krav* (on September 18, 1936) and authored by Gunnar Øvergaard Jørgen. In this way, both the housing issue and the young architect became known to newspaper readers across the country just before the parliamentary election.

The booklet was also utilized in the educational activities of the labor movement. The movement placed a strong emphasis on education within its own ranks, particularly through the so-called Arbeidernes Oplysningsforbund (AOF, or the Workers' Enlightenment Association). In 1936, AOF offered a correspondence course on "Current Politics." One of the topics covered in the course was housing policy, and "Bo bedre" was listed as required reading. In the autumn of 1936, the socialist architects also delivered a series of radio lectures that were broadcast nationally including a lecture by Gunnar Øvergaard Jørgen, "Hvordan bor folk i Norge? – Hvad trenges det av hus?" (How do people in Norway live? What kind of houses are needed?), an adapted version of "Bo bedre."¹⁸

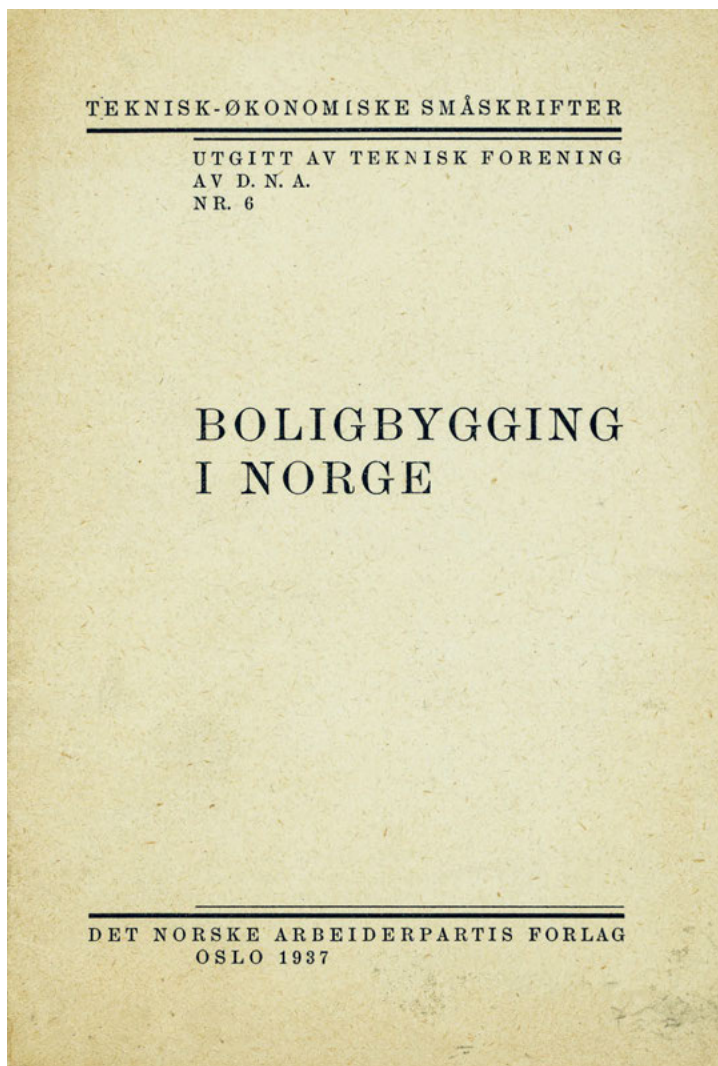
The way the small booklet "Bo bedre" was distributed, discussed, and used illustrates how the socialist architects operated and spread their knowledge and viewpoints. The booklet is a prime example of how the architects in the Technical Association contributed to exploring the housing issue and proposing solutions at the intersection of technology and the planned economy. Through this seemingly modest publication, the architects helped outline the contours of a new housing policy. At the same time, the extensive publicity that the booklet received must have contributed to establishing the socialist architects as experts and giving them credibility within the labor movement.

NEW GUIDELINES FOR HOUSING POLICY

The following year, in 1937, the architects in the Technical Association released a new booklet on housing policy, this time titled "Boligbygging i Norge" (Housing construction in Norway).¹⁹ The title page indicates that the booklet was written by the Technical Association at the request of Arbeiderpartiet's labor planning committee. While "Bo bedre" can be seen as a fresh approach to the housing issue, "Boligbygging i Norge" appears more as a study and a draft of a housing policy program.

The text began by stating, "Housing conditions are one of the most crucial factors for the overall living conditions of the people" and "Housing construction plays a vital role in the country's economic life."²⁰ With these two sentences, the socialist architects

The 1937 booklet "Boligbygging i Norge" (Housing construction in Norway) was Teknisk Forening's second publication on housing policy. Here, the architects proposed a number of measures to solve the housing problem. Their analysis formed the basis for a completely new national plan for housing construction.



- 21 Original quote in Norwegian: "stor betydning for samfundet om boligbyggingen holdes oppe eller om den ligger nede." Teknisk Forening av D.N.A., "Boligbygging i Norge," 5.
- 22 Original quote in Norwegian: "Over hundre års erfaring har vist at det kapitalistiske samfunds boligbygging på privat initiativ ikke kan løse boligspørsmålet slik som befolkningens behov krever det." Teknisk Forening av D.N.A., "Boligbygging i Norge" 7.
- 23 Teknisk Forening av D.N.A., "Boligbygging i Norge," 8.
- 24 Teknisk Forening av D.N.A., "Boligbygging i Norge," 12.
- 25 Teknisk Forening av D.N.A., "Boligbygging i Norge," 12.

placed the housing issue where they believed it belonged, namely at the intersection of the people's living conditions and the country's economy. The following paradox was thereby presented: half of the country's population lived in unsatisfactory housing conditions, while a significant portion of the country's construction workers were unemployed. The argument was that doubling housing construction would meet the housing needs while simultaneously creating full employment in the construction industry. Therefore, it was deemed "of great importance to society whether housing construction is maintained or halted."²¹ In the text, the housing issue was thus portrayed as a source of increased employment, production, and value creation, but not as an area for regular business activities. In a capitalist society, it was the availability of land and capital that governed housing construction, and these assets were controlled by a few. Therefore, it was also the prospect of maximizing profits that directed housing construction, rather than the actual housing needs. "Over a hundred years of experience has shown," wrote the booklet's authors, "that housing construction in a capitalist society based on private initiative cannot solve the housing question as required by the needs of the population."²²

The solution lay in a systematic planning of the housing construction industry that would place housing production and the housing stock under public control and management, and raise the average income level to enable rent to be paid without public subsidies.²³ In other words, housing construction had to be significantly expanded, while the population simultaneously had to be enabled to afford the new homes. This required a rationalization of construction activities, a new organization of housing credit and public support, and a general increase in income. Doubling housing construction would lead to a significant increase in employment and production in the construction industry. Increasing employment in the construction industry was an important point in itself, and it went hand-in-hand with the general demand within the labor movement for modernization and rationalization. The construction industry, which was disparaged for not having properly utilized the progressive potentials of modern technology, included not only construction workers but also those involved in producing, supplying, and importing building materials, as well as other industries such as the transportation sector. In other words, it was an industry of great socioeconomic significance.

Furthermore, it was necessary to establish a "technical apparatus that can gather experiences and disseminate them to all the thousands of construction sites."²⁴ Cooperative building societies should be responsible for construction activities, and a central consulting office for cooperative building societies should be established. The tasks of the consulting office would include "developing building designs, conveying technical expertise, assisting with loan acquisitions, and providing advice when organizing cooperative building societies."²⁵ A similar central office, the Building Industry's Material Office, would handle material distribution. The Material Office was intended to play a key role in construction activities, and it would be organized as a joint-stock company with the state, municipalities, cooperative building societies, construction worker unions, material factories, and material dealers as shareholders. The office would contribute to rationalizing the production,

distribution, storage, and transportation of building materials, as well as keeping track of the building industry's material needs and the production capacity of companies producing building materials. The central office would allocate orders, make purchases, control prices, and help initiate domestic production of building materials. And, importantly, prevent speculation.

The construction workers' trade unions were assigned an important role in the new housing system described by the socialist architects in the booklet. The construction workers possessed valuable knowledge, already had an effective, nationwide organization, and represented a significant power factor within the labor movement. However, the architects would also play a role in the new system, amongst other things in formalizing urban and regional planning work in the face of higher densities.²⁶ A State Urban Planning and Building Directorate had to be established, and county architects had to be appointed. The county architects would assist the cooperative building societies and serve as a link between the local building societies and the central office. The booklet also discussed new ways of financing the housing construction. Commercial housing credit had to be better organized, and effective public financial organizations needed to be established. The architects suggested that a state bank for housing should be established as well as systems for rental support. The municipalities were also allocated an important role, primarily in facilitating cooperative housing construction. This involved assessing housing conditions, housing needs, and affordability, as well as providing land areas and necessary infrastructure.

In "Boligbygging i Norge," the architects outlined a series of measures that can be understood as constituting a comprehensive plan to solve the housing problem. To achieve a new systematic approach in housing construction, a new organizational and technical apparatus had to be established, along with the creation of new financing schemes and institutions. The starting point was the significant social and socioeconomic importance of housing construction, and the argument that increased housing construction would not only eliminate the housing shortage, but also boost employment and production across all aspects of the construction industry runs as a common thread throughout the entire text.

A NATIONAL PLAN FOR HOUSING CONSTRUCTION

It was Arbeiderpartiet's program committee that had commissioned the architects of the Technical Association to develop a national plan for housing construction, and in the spring of 1937, Minister of Social Affairs Oscar Torp announced that such a plan was underway. In June 1937, Arbeiderpartiet's national executive committee held a meeting. Here, a new plan for the party's economic and social policies was adopted, including new guidelines for its housing policy.

The new guidelines were published in the form of a small pamphlet titled "Aktuelle Arbeidsoppgaver for Det Norske Arbeiderparti" (Current tasks for the Norwegian Labor Party), which gave housing issues its own chapter and began by stating that "Good housing is necessary to create a healthy and happy generation; poor housing

- 27 Original quote in Norwegian: "Gode boliger er nødvendige for å skape en sund og lykkelig slekt, slette boligforhold er en av de fremste årsaker til dårlige levekår, sykdom og nedsatt arbeidsevne." An excerpt of "Aktuelle Arbeidsoppgaver for Det Norske Arbeiderparti" (Current tasks for the Norwegian Labor Party) was included in the booklet "Boligbygging i Norge," from which the following quotes are taken. See Teknisk Forening av D. N. A., "Boligbygging i Norge," 30.
- 28 Teknisk Forening av D. N. A., "Boligbygging i Norge," 30.
- 29 Teknisk Forening av D. N. A., "Boligbygging i Norge," 30.
- 30 Gunnar Øvergaard Jørgen, "En landsplan for boligbygging" [A national plan for housing construction], *Det 20de århundre* 4 (1937): 161; Gunnar Øvergaard Jørgen, "Boligplanen i praksis" [The housing plan in practice], *Det 20de århundre* 8 (1937): 304.
- 31 Gunnar Øvergaard Jørgen also published two articles about the plan for housing in the architect's journal *Byggkunst*. See Gunnar Øvergaard Jørgen, "Landsplan for boligbygging" [National plan for housing construction], *Byggkunst* (1937): 207; and Gunnar Øvergaard Jørgen, "Boligsaken på landsbygden" [The housing issue in the countryside], *Byggkunst* (1938): 87.
- 32 Teknisk Forening av DNA, D. Saksarkiv. Mappe Boligkonferanse 18. september 1937. Arbeiderbevegelsens arkiv og bibliotek. [Archive of the Technical Association, archive series D, Housing Conference September 18th 1937, The Norwegian Labor Movement archives and Library].
- 33 Gunnar Øvergaard Jørgen, "Hvad trenger Oslo av boliger?" [What does Oslo need in terms of housing?], *Arbeiderbladet*, October 12, 1937.

conditions are one of the leading causes of poor living conditions, illness, and reduced work capacity."²⁷ It further emphasized that the housing issue could not be solved by the market; in this field, the state and municipalities had to take the lead. It stated: "To provide homes for the growing population, to reduce the existing housing shortage, and to create sustainable employment in the construction industry and related industries, there must be a significant expansion of housing construction."²⁸ These are the same viewpoints expressed by the socialist architects in "Bo bedre" and "Boligbygging i Norge," and the pamphlet advocated alleviating the housing shortage, providing employment for construction workers, and stimulating growth in related industries. Continuing in the same vein, it repeated the ideas and arguments from the architects' texts point by point, culminating in the following proposal: "A national plan for housing construction should be developed, which integrates the measures to be promoted regarding technology, credit, and budgetary matters."²⁹ The socialist architects' writings formed the basis for this national plan, and the new guidelines emerged as a summary and concise formulation of the knowledge base that the architects had developed during their first year as party members and members of the Technical Association.

The national plan was made known through the party press in 1937. Gunnar Øvergaard Jørgen presented the plan in two extensive articles, published in the journal *Det 20de århundre*³⁰ and the members' magazine of the Building Workers' Union, *Bygningsarbeideren*.³¹ The national plan for housing construction was also the topic for a preparatory meeting organized by the Technical Association in collaboration with Arbeiderpartiet and the Norwegian Building Workers' Union in Oslo on September 18, 1937. This meeting took the form of a major housing conference with participants from across the country, including some of the top politicians from within the party, with the purpose of gaining an overview of housing conditions in different parts of the country and discussing how the national plan should be implemented in practice.³²

Just under a month after the housing conference, on October 11, 1937, the architect group within the Technical Association organized an open housing meeting in collaboration with the Oslo branch of Arbeiderpartiet. The program featured lectures by Gunnar Øvergaard Jørgen and Frode Rinnan. Øvergaard Jørgen's lecture was titled "Good Housing for the Whole People" and focused on the national plan for housing construction. Following the lectures, the party's election film *By og land, hand i hand* (City and countryside, hand in hand) was shown. While the housing conference in September had gathered professionals and party members for discussions on the housing plan, this was an election meeting open to everyone. There were elections in 1937 as well—specifically, municipal elections. Housing became one of the main issues for Arbeiderpartiet, granting the socialist architects, led by Gunnar Øvergaard Jørgen, both speaking time and media coverage.

The day after the election meeting, *Arbeiderbladet* (The workers' newspaper) featured a prominent article by Øvergaard Jørgen on its front page. The title was "Hvad trenger Oslo av boliger?" (What does Oslo need in terms of housing?).³³ In the article—the first in a series of newspaper articles that the architect wrote in *Arbeiderbladet* leading up to the election—he wrote about the

Det 20^{de} århundre

HEFTE 4
MAI 1937

MØT-DAG

Innhold:

Utenrikskronikk.

—
1ste mai 1937.

—
Dagfin Juel:
Den kapitalistiske
opgangstid.

Ole Colbjørnsen:
Krisefast folke-
økonomi.

Johan Vogt:
Lønn, pris og profitt.

Gunnar Øvergaard
Jørgen:
En landsplan for
boligbygging.

Olav Storstein:
Nordahl Grieg.

Ingrid Gaustad:
Lærebøkene
i historie.

—
Kronologi.

Redaksjon:

Finn Moe.
Arne Ording.



50 ØRE

The journal *Det 20de Århundre* (*The 20th Century*) was published by the labor party and featured articles of a more academic-ideological nature as well as articles on culture. The journal was important for policy development within the party, and in 1937, architect Gunnar Øvergaard Jørgen introduced housing policy into its pages.

- 34 Original quote in Norwegian: "Men den som har lite å rutte med, må snart slå av på kravene til boligen." Gunnar Øvergaard Jørgen, "Riv rønnene. Bygg vakre hjem" [Tear down the derelict houses. Build beautiful homes], *Arbeiderkvinnen* 10 (1937): 7.
- 35 Øvergaard Jørgen, "Riv rønnene. Bygg vakre hjem," 7.
- 36 Øvergaard Jørgen, "Riv rønnene. Bygg vakre hjem," 7.
- 37 Ida Blom, "'Et dobbelt ansvar' – kvinner og menn i norsk arbeiderbevegelse 1918–1940" ["A dual responsibility": Women and men in the Norwegian labor movement, 1918–1940], *Arbeiderhistorie* (1998): 5–33.
- 38 Original quote in Norwegian: "Boligpolitikk, gratis skolemateriell, bedre lønninger for den mannlige arbeider, støtte til streikende ble sett som viktige tiltak for å beskytte familien mot kapitalistisk utbytting," Blom, "'Et dobbelt ansvar,'" 9.
- 39 Original quote in Norwegian: "arbeide for den beste boligpolitikken, den beste barneomsorgen og støtte til mødre, handikappede og eldre," Blom, "'Et dobbelt ansvar,'" 29.
- 40 Original quote in Norwegian: "Arbeiderkvinner! Frem til kommunevalget 1937 med boligbyggingen som merkesak!" Øvergaard Jørgen, "Riv rønnene. Bygg vakre hjem," 7. The election went very well for the Labor Party. The party received 43 percent support nationwide and 52 percent in Oslo.
- 41 "Boligplanen studeres" [The housing plan is being studied], *Arbeiderbladet*, February 12, 1938.

overcrowding and the poor condition of many dwellings in the city, ultimately concluding that a new housing policy was needed.

One of Øvergaard Jørgen's articles stood out from the rest. Published in the magazine *Arbeiderkvinnen* (The working woman), he presented the housing issue as a particularly important matter for women. Food, clothing, and shelter were stated as the most essential needs for families, and it was the responsibility of women to take care of the home—and, most importantly, to make ends meet: "But those who have little to spend must soon lower their housing demands," he stated.³⁴ Far too many people lived in housing that was inconvenient, expensive, and a threat to both their physical and the mental health. The architect wrote that new and larger homes needed to be built, and "it must be done in a way so that most people can afford to live there."³⁵ Furthermore, working-class women should also be entitled to "some of the technical improvements that greatly facilitate housework" and in cities, "residential areas should have childcare facilities and playgrounds where children can be safe while their mothers are at work."³⁶

In the article "'Et dobbelt ansvar' – kvinner og menn i norsk arbeiderbevegelse 1918–1940" ("A dual responsibility": Women and men in the Norwegian labor movement, 1918–1940) from 1998,³⁷ historian Ida Blom describes *Arbeiderkvinnen* as a political magazine for working-class housewives, noting that throughout the interwar period, the magazine specifically appealed to working-class women to fight for those of the party's core issues that concerned families: "Housing policy, free school materials, better wages for male workers, support for strikers were seen as important measures to protect the family from capitalist exploitation."³⁸ According to Blom, women's particular understanding of social policy issues made welfare a suitable arena for them, which could be used to garner their vote: for this reason, Arbeiderpartiet appealed to women to "work for the best housing policy, the best childcare, and support for mothers, the disabled, and the elderly."³⁹ Gunnar Øvergaard Jørgen's article fits well within this framework. The article addressed an important social policy issue, and the author specifically appealed to women as managers of the household and as holders of a special understanding and interest in housing policy. Arbeiderpartiet represented those who suffered the most from the housing shortage and was therefore the only party that could create "order, fairness, and security in the housing market," wrote Gunnar Øvergaard Jørgen in the last paragraph, before concluding with a spirited appeal: "Working women! Rally for the 1937 municipal elections and support the housing construction campaign!"⁴⁰

The national housing construction plan was also the subject of study, education, and discussion in various parts of the labor movement. For example, the Building Workers' Union made the national plan a key issue at its national convention. The Tenants' Association in Oslo formed its own study circle, where all the points in the plan were "thoroughly debated," according to *Arbeiderbladet* on February 12, 1938.⁴¹

Housing had been on Arbeiderpartiet's agenda since the late nineteenth century, but the national plan of 1937 represented something new. Previously, the party had primarily advocated for rent regulation and increased public support for housing construction, without delving deeper into the questions of housing production

- 42 Øvergaard Jørgen, "Boligplanen i praksis," 304.
- 43 Berge Furre, *Norsk Historie 1914–2000: Industrisamfunnet – Frå vokstervisje til framtidstvil* [Norwegian history, 1914–2000: Industrial society, from certain growth to future doubt] (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 2000), 86.
- 44 Øvergaard Jørgen, "Boligplanen i praksis," 305.
- 45 Furre, *Norsk Historie 1914–2000*, 71.

itself. The housing construction proposed by the socialist architects was not to be seen as yet another expense on a crisis-ridden social budget, but as an engine for production, employment, and economic growth. The architects were particularly concerned with this socio-economic argument and repeatedly emphasized that "Among social economists, there is practically unanimity that greatly expanded housing construction is the most effective measure that states can deploy against the crisis that is expected."⁴² This was a new way of looking at, and arguing for, large-scale housing construction. When the party rallied around this new approach, it was likely because the architects managed to incorporate housing into the current political discussion. The keyword here is *crisis policy*.

HOUSING CONSTRUCTION AS *CRISIS POLICY*

The political project of the labor movement during the second half of the 1930s can be summarized in one term: *crisis policy*. Arbeiderpartiet came to power in a period of crisis. The party campaigned on a crisis policy and gained support because of it. The state of crisis stimulated new thinking, particularly in the economic field. An important feature of the crisis policy was the new role assigned to the state, which was to create growth through active economic policies. The belief that it was possible to steer the economy and actively shape society created new space for the action of professionals in various areas of society. In short, crisis policy meant a new way of understanding and shaping politics, and several historians argued that this laid the foundation for the postwar era of the planned economy. According to historian Berge Furre, the Arbeiderpartiet government appeared exceptionally active in the years after 1935:

Particularly, the government managed to create an image of itself as proactive and industrious. It displayed significant activity, especially in the economic field, and announced numerous "measures" and initiatives. ...There were constant discussions about new plans: both short-term and long-term. There was a flurry of reports, committees, proposals on social security, housing construction, industrial development, new roads, railways, power plants, schools, and so on.⁴³

The crisis politics were all about issues, measures, and plans. The main focus was *to get the wheels turning*: namely, to boost production, employment, and economic growth. This was how the crisis could be overcome, and this is what Gunnar Øvergaard Jørgen referred to when he wrote that economists believed housing construction could be used as a form of crisis management.⁴⁴ The fact that architects used arguments from economics is a sign of the paradigm shift that took place in economic thinking in the 1930s, which was characterized by the belief that change was possible through implementing new economic policies—referred to by Berge Furre as "the Keynesian revolution."⁴⁵ The architects had evidently embraced this line of thinking and now applied it to their own field. Ole Colbjørnsen, one of the party's key strategists and the one who first formulated *crisis politics*, also emphasized this in an

Det 20^{de} århundre

HEFTE 8

OKT. 1937

38. ÅRGANG

MOT-DAG

Innhold:

Utenrikskronikk.

Nye oppgaver.

Karl Evang:
Ernæringspolitikk.

Fredrik Haslund:
Elektrisitetsspolitikk.

Øvergård Jørgen:
Boligplanen
i praksis.

Åke Ording:
Budgettet.

Innenrikskronikk

Redaksjon:

Finn Moe.
Arne Ording.



(Illustrasjon fra *La Turquie Kamaliste*.)

50 ØRE

MOT NYE OPGAVER

Gunnar Øvergaard Jørgen continued with an explanation of the new housing plan in a later issue of the journal *Det 20de Århundre* in 1937. There were municipal elections in Norway at the time, and the Labor Party made the housing issue into one of its main topics.

- 46 Ole Colbjørnsen, "De aktuelle arbeidsoppgaver" [The relevant tasks], *Det 20de århundre* 6 (1937): 224.
- 47 Jan Eivind Myhre, *Historie. En introduksjon til grunnlagsproblemer* [History: An introduction to fundamental problems] (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 2014), 175–76.

article in 1937, wherein he described housing, alongside nutrition, as "the nearly perfect synthesis between social progress policy and active economic expansion policy."⁴⁶ This is a good example of how the socialist architects worked at the intersection of their profession and politics. It can be assumed that they gained support for their ideas about housing and housing policy exactly because they anchored their housing policy in crisis politics and argued credibly that housing construction could contribute to pulling the country out of that (economic) crisis.

THE ARCHITECTS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE WELFARE STATE

In his book on the theory of history, historian Jan Eivind Myhre uses the term "windows of opportunity" to characterize situations where new possibilities arise; according to Myhre, we encounter such windows "when the possibility for a new type of action emerges at a specific point in history, where a structural change has taken place or where the relationships between individuals and specific structures have changed."⁴⁷ It was precisely such a window of opportunity that opened up in 1935 when Arbeiderpartiet formed the government. The years between 1935 and 1940 can be seen as a period in which ideas, viewpoints, solutions, and perspectives were introduced, debated, and further developed. 1935 thus represents a moment in history where it became possible to act in new ways, and the socialist architects seized this opportunity.

During this period, the labor movement attracted professionals from various fields of society. This was related to the fact that social planning lacked a tradition and had not yet been experienced. The very idea of actively planning for the future was new, and there was a need for knowledgeable and creative individuals who could contribute to the development of the plans and programs that the party needed. The socialist architects took on this role, and their primary contribution lay in their ability to formulate and concretize important social tasks and develop professional solutions to political problems. The national plan for housing construction is a good example of this. The architects succeeded in integrating the housing issue into the current political discourse and making it relevant and manageable. And although they did not offer architectural solutions in a strict sense—they wrote more about the financing of housing than the physical design of them, to put it simply—there was no doubt that they acted and saw themselves as architects, and that they believed that the organizational aspect of shaping the environment also was a question of architecture.

The formation of the government in 1935 has thus remained a pivotal moment in history. 1935 is regarded as the beginning of the so-called "social democratic era" in Norwegian history, and among historians, there is consensus that it was between 1935 and 1940 that the outlines of the postwar welfare state were drawn. The epoch-making aspect of the power shift in 1935 was that politics changed its character and came to be understood as a form of active societal transformation. Historian May-Brith Ohman Nielsen particularly emphasizes the new and modern way in which Arbeiderpartiet formulated and implemented their policies. According

- 48 May-Brith Ohman Nielsen, *Etter 1914*
[After 1914] (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2011), 84.
49 May-Brith Ohman Nielsen, *Etter 1914*, 84.

to Ohman Nielsen, a new type of politician and a new political language emerged: "From around 1930, the 'objective' expert who was a 'specialist' and 'expert' in a particular area of politics became the new type of politician. Especially in times of crisis, politicians needed specialized knowledge and often education."⁴⁸ Regarding the changes in language, Nielsen writes: "The old politicians quoted famous poets, 'great men,' and historical events. The new ones presented tables and charts and discussed future solutions."⁴⁹ The socialist architects thrived in this new political environment. They represented a new type of professionals, who were both politically engaged and capable of presenting tables and charts and planning the future.

Arbeiderpartiet developed a program for systematic and far-reaching societal transformation while also focusing on solving practical and concrete tasks in the present. This means that the overarching political objectives needed to be concretized and linked to practical, feasible measures as a response to the current situation. In order to formulate constructive policies, the labor movement needed experts with knowledge in various fields, such as doctors and economists, engineers—and architects. The socialist architects established themselves as actors in a complex network of organizations, unions, and associations. Through their new role as experts, they also contributed to expanding the space for political action. Through their work in the Technical Association of Arbeiderpartiet and the Building Workers' Union, with the formulation of the national plan for housing construction, campaigning during elections, and extensive writing and lecturing activities, the socialist architects unfolded themselves in the architect role they had fought for since their student days, namely as planners and builders of society.

Gunnar
Øvergård Jørgen:

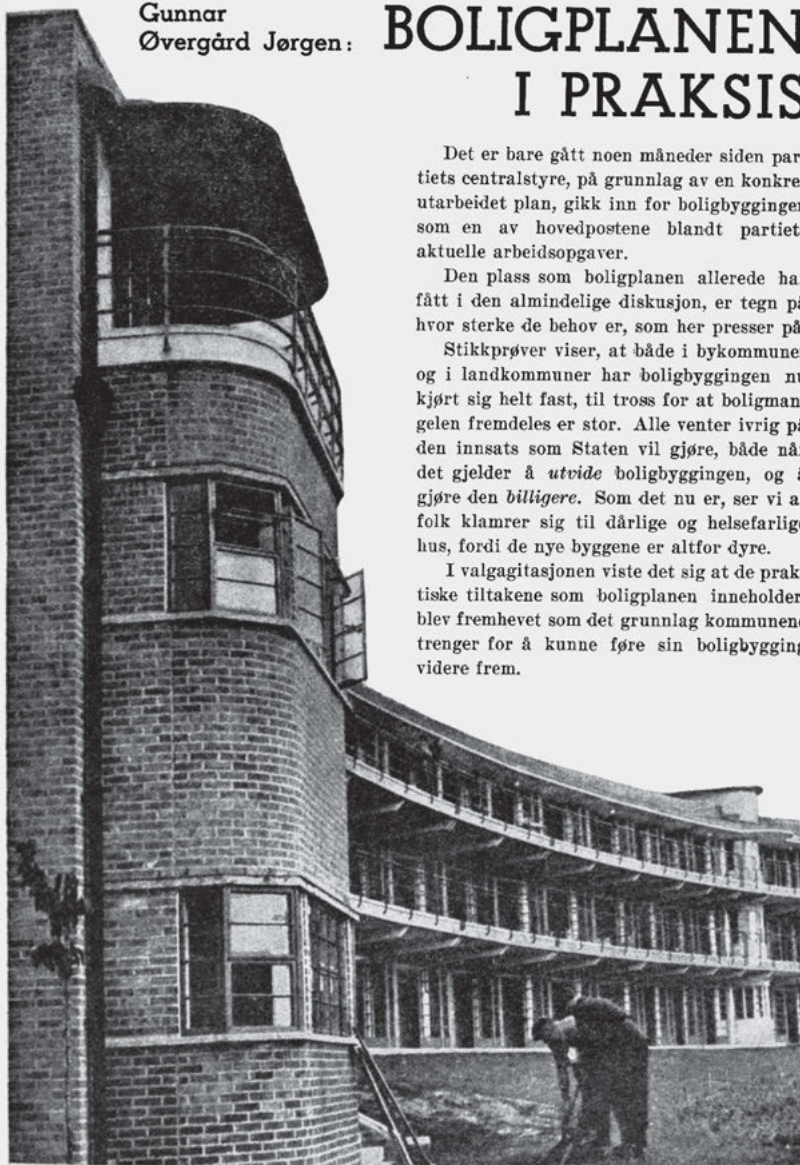
BOLIGPLANEN I PRAKSIS

Det er bare gått noen måneder siden partiets centralstyre, på grunnlag av en konkret utarbeidet plan, gikk inn for boligbyggingen som en av hovedpostene blandt partiets aktuelle arbeidsoppgaver.

Den plass som boligplanen allerede har fått i den almindelige diskusjon, er tegn på hvor sterke de behov er, som her presser på.

Stikkprøver viser, at både i bykommuner og i landkommuner har boligbyggingen nu kjørt sig helt fast, til tross for at boligmannegelen fremdeles er stor. Alle venter ivrig på den innsats som Staten vil gjøre, både når det gjelder å utvide boligbyggingen, og å gjøre den billigere. Som det nu er, ser vi at folk klamrer sig til dårlige og helsefarlige hus, fordi de nye byggene er altfor dyre.

I valgagitasjonen viste det sig at de praktiske tiltakene som boligplanen inneholder, blev fremhevet som det grunnlag kommunene trenger for å kunne føre sin boligbygging videre frem.



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"Boligplanen i praksis" (The housing plan in practice) was the title of Gunnar Øvergård Jørgen's second major article in *Det 20de Århundre* in 1937. Through his numerous articles in the various organs of the labor movement, the architect established himself as the Labor Party's expert on housing.

