THE GREEN NEW DEAL AND THE FUTURE OF WORK

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PART IV

Transforming Infrastructure

CHAPTER 11

A Green New Deal for Housing

DANIEL ALDANA COHEN

When Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez ran in her primary against incumbent Democrat Joe Crowley in 2018, she had the Green New Deal on her website. But her big talking points were her district's cost-of-living crisis, anchored in rising housing costs, gentrification, and Crowley's links to luxury real estate developers. "It's time we stand up to the luxury developer lobby," she wrote on April 25 on Twitter. "Every official is too scared to do it—except me."

With her bold Green New Deal resolution in February 2019, she linked the climate and housing crises.[1] The resolution stated clearly that all Americans were entitled to "affordable, safe, and adequate housing." But neither she nor her allies further elaborated on the housing piece, focusing instead on creating millions of new jobs.

Talking about jobs is understandable. But as her campaign emphasized, the crushing cost of housing is just as central as stagnating wages are to workers' economic pain, if not more so. Luxury developments, she said, made the four main crises in her district—affordability, inequality, immigrant security, and homelessness—even worse. Across the country, median incomes have stagnated since 2000. In that same period, a foreclosure boom has shredded millions of families' savings, and average urban rental costs have increased by 50 percent.[2] Overall, just one in five Americans eligible for housing subsidies actually receives them.

At the time of finishing this essay, during the long tail of the COVID-19 economic crash during summer 2021, 6 million renters were facing the threat of eviction, down from a high of 20 million facing eviction just months prior. President Joe Biden was elected on the promise of $2 trillion in clean energy spending

over four years, including measures to build green affordable housing (up to 1.5 million units), albeit with no specificity about how.[3] As negotiations over the infrastructure bill dragged on through the middle of 2021, it is impossible to project what fraction of that agenda might pass through budget reconciliation. Whatever bills ultimately pass in 2021 or 2022, no one expects them to be sufficient to ensure rapid decarbonization or to resolve the country's emergencies of class and racial inequality. In what many activists call the "decade of the Green New Deal," the best we'll get in its first years is a down payment.

So the short-term investment future is cloudy. But the long-term of climate and social needs is clear: neither a Green New Deal nor a more modest package of climate justice investments can deliver economic justice and solidify mass support without tackling housing head on.

And the most ambitious version of that agenda remains the Green New Deal framework—massive public investment that would tackle climate change and inequalities at the same time and in the same places. A Green New Deal for housing in particular means building twelve million new, public, carbon-neutral homes in ten years. And again. And again. And again. Twelve million isn't a crazy number. The United States is already building well over one million housing units a year.[4] And the demand for twelve million units is the rallying cry of the national #HomesGuarantee movement (full disclosure, I am on that movement's policy team).[5] The current housing system is broken. And climate breakdown only makes it more urgent. Millions of people will need new homes as extreme weather makes swathes of the country unlivable.[6] And in addition to building this new housing, this framework demands healthy, green retrofits to existing housing, especially working-class people's housing, to equivalent standards—carbon-neutral, energy efficient, healthy, and modern. In both new and retrofitted housing, well-insulated buildings would require additional ventilation and air filtration to ensure that tightly insulated buildings are always full of clean, fresh air. In this way, there is actually a happy overlap between the measures that would make housing healthier during respiratory disease outbreaks and housing that is healthy and efficient day in and day out. Finally, this overall vision would involve a broad range of measures, including zoning reform and rent control, to ensure that working-class people can live in walkable, transit-rich neighborhoods with short commutes to work, services, and leisure spaces.

The connections should be obvious. Yet, historically, housing has fit awkwardly into left climate debates. It didn't turn up in early Green New Deal proposals; it was absent from Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything* and from the demands of the massive 2014 People's Climate March in New York City. Where conventional climate discourse does meet housing, it's usually in the form of proposals from the likes of Elon Musk, to put a solar panel on every suburban home and a Tesla in every driveway. Green jobs proposals overlap with desperately needed energy upgrade programs for existing buildings—like a huge scale-up of federally subsidized weatherization for poor and working-class households, municipal building upgrade mandates, and deep energy retrofits of public housing.[7] But they pay no attention to the need for new construction—a Green New Deal for housing's flagship program.

We can change that. A huge build-out of high-quality, beautifully designed, meticulously financed public housing, with diversity of design and governance structure would meet millions of people's housing needs and create hundreds of thousands of skilled jobs in the no-carbon construction sector for decades.

Federal grant programs could ensure that these jobs are undertaken either through unions or at union-level wages, with benefits in places where unions don't yet exist. What's more, the majority of the work would not be on site but in producing the materials for construction, placing orders, administering programs, and so on. All along the supply chain for this home building, labor movements, worker cooperatives, and public policies could fight to raise wages, shorten work hours, and improve working conditions. The gradual "industrialization" of sustainable construction at scale would be a chance to bring the entire housing industry up to "high road" labor standards. Done right, the new housing would yield lovely, walkable, mixed-used, diverse, and democratic communities across the country.

To be sure, raw population density alone isn't enough. It does lower carbon emissions, but study after study also finds that when residents of dense neighborhoods are wealthy, the footprint of their luxury consumption—from iPads to plane trips—overwhelms the carbon savings that come from walking to brunch.[8]

Per capita, carbon footprints in the West Village are two to three times higher than those of comparably dense neighborhoods in the Bronx.[9] Dense, working-class neighborhoods near public transit, anchored by public housing, are good to live in and have small carbon footprints. Right now, well-planned public transit hubs in hot land markets raise housing costs and displace low-income residents

to different neighborhoods.[10] Public transit-plus-housing would be far fairer—and would suck carbon out of the streets (see chapter 12 by J. Mijin Cha and Lara Skinner in this volume for more on public transit).

Meanwhile, the working-class women of color who populate the housing movements that fight against gentrification and demand more affordable housing might not always talk about climate change—although increasingly they do.[11] But their demands are objectively low-carbon. Their movements and demands are essential to any coalition that would decarbonize urban life.

CANCEL MARKET MECHANISMS

The need for a homes guarantee through a program of mass public home building is overwhelming. In city after city, gentrification is unleashing cultural and economic traumas. A national eviction epidemic, only aggravated by the COVID-19 crisis, is deepening poverty, throwing families onto the street for making a little too much noise or simply for committing the crime of being poor.[12] Eviction threatens the 17 percent of U.S. renter households that pay over half their income in rent, while another 21 percent are paying over a third.[13] As David Madden and Peter Marcuse discuss, "According to the standard measures of affordability, there is no U.S. state where a full-time minimum-wage worker can afford to rent or own a one-bedroom dwelling."[14]

Meanwhile, both "predatory inclusion" and unequal homeownership make housing the single most important factor in the appalling wealth disparity between white and Black Americans, a structural divide widened by racist New Deal–era mortgage policies and deepened further since.[15]

The housing crisis also manifests in buildings' damaged guts, where failing boilers and busted window frames leak carbon and break budgets. In the mid-Atlantic, over half of all Black households have recently suffered utility shutoffs, cut back on food or medicine to pay utility bills, or kept homes dangerously hot or cold to stave off bankruptcy.[16] A fifth of white households are just as fuel-poor. In New York City after Hurricane Sandy, 45 percent of public housing apartments in affected areas had visible mold after the storm, but even before the storm, that number was 34 percent.[17] The climate and housing crises are already converging, and the connections will deepen over time.

Advocates have won mighty legal victories to finally enforce the 1968 Fair Housing Act, passed in the wake of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, that should in theory ensure adequate, affordable housing for people of color. But the current market and affordable housing tool kits can't build the needed new homes, especially as the climate and housing crises merge.

This century, sea-level rise alone could cover the land on which a projected thirteen million Americans will live.[18] Tens of millions more are projected to live on land that would flood intermittently. That makes the twentieth century's great migration, which New Deal redlining channeled into lasting segregation, look like a friendly game of musical chairs. Heat, fire, drought, and other impacts will likely displace millions more. Those same pressures worldwide, occurring at a far vaster scale, will increase rates of immigration and refugee arrival.[19]

A market approach to these crushing housing pressures would be disastrous. Real estate and construction companies would be the only beneficiaries of a push to build more homes with private construction, a subprime building boom turbocharged with tax credits, and financing through "predatory home loans."[20] We saw how that story ends in 2008. Another private housing boom would repeat the pathologies of earlier ones, locking in decades of segregation, fueling poverty, eviction, and foreclosure.[21]

The tangle of public–private partnerships and market tweaks that currently pass for affordable housing policy is almost as bad. At present, the main mechanism for federally financed affordable housing construction is the Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) program, which subsidizes private developers. As money for real public housing dried up decades ago, LIHTC funds increased. A classic liberal compromise, this public–private partnership has become a bloated corporate giveaway that housing advocates miserably defend as the best there is. The Right savages its corruption and inefficiencies, while research shows a long-term decline in the program's bang—actual low-income housing—for its buck.[22] And even worse, the program barely shelters its vulnerable tenants from eviction, the first responsibility of stable affordable housing.[23]

Other remedies are just as weak, from federal to local levels. Section 8 housing vouchers improve individuals' lives; they also concentrate poverty and leave the broken housing market intact.[24] In cities, raging debates over zoning and other market mechanisms to increase housing supply mask an underlying consensus.[25] All but a hard-core fringe of market fetishists recognize the need for

the construction of nonmarket housing alongside new private construction.[26] The real debate is over how much nonmarket housing and how to build it.

Even the Clintonite Center for American Progress is coming around. Their 2018 report, "Homes for All," called for direct federal grants to pay for the construction of one million units of high-quality, mixed-income public housing in five years. But a million units is too few. And the report's idea of only building on already existing public land betrays a lingering unwillingness to confront the very land market that's the central problem.[27]

It's time to let go of tax credits and market nudges and get real. Just as Medicare for All and a federal jobs guarantee would attack health and job needs at their roots, we need to bypass the money-suck of corrupt public–private partnerships and enact a homes guarantee backed by mass public housing build-out at the scale of our needs. Indeed, it is *through* a homes guarantee that many of the person-hours envisioned by a jobs guarantee could be delivered.

Despite the propaganda of the real estate industry and a cowering class of centrist wonks, European and American precedents show us exactly how the public can house millions of people affordably, safely, without carbon—and with style.

TOWARD TEMPLES OF PUBLIC LUXURY

In the summer of 2018, standing in a grassy garden in Vienna, I had what felt like a religious awakening. I'd come to the city's ostensible public housing temple, Karl Marx-Hof, a giant leafy complex of 1,200 apartments, with gently rounded arches and fine stonework surrounding broad lawns, fountains, and gardens. But Vienna itself is the temple.

The city's Social Democrats—whose radicals, in an exception for Europe, never defected to form a separate communist party—were first elected after World War I. They haven't lost a free election since. (They were, it's true, beaten by fascists in a civil war.)

In 1919 they inaugurated what became known as Red Vienna, most famous for its massive public home-building program.[28] They levied harsh real estate taxes that devastated the land market, making it cheap to buy land to build on. They raised a third of the needed housing funds from luxury taxes. A political poster from the period shows a muscular red fist swiping a bottle of champagne

from an ice bucket, while horrified bourgeois in tuxedos and gowns back off. Taxing rich people's spending on champagne, racehorses, and servants redirected money into bricks, tile, and gardens for the working class. And the Social Democrats built housing in every neighborhood: no one should be able to tell a person's status from their postal code.

These weren't just rooms in square boxes. The complexes integrated sophisticated services. Karl Marx-Hof has laundries, a dental clinic, a maternity clinic, a health insurance office, a youth hostel, several commercial properties, and a city-run interior design consultancy. The social fabric woven into the housing developments connected socialist and labor movement commitments to affordable housing with the best ideas of a feminist movement that was born on the barricades of 1848 and a public health movement that quickly followed.

Vienna held design contests for public housing, and the best architects competed. As I toured projects across the city, I saw a wide range of gardens, courtyards, stairwells, cornices, archways, laundry facilities, and other common spaces. Almost uniformly five or six stories high, walkable, dense, green, shaded, and interwoven into a pleasantly dense (but not overwhelming) urban fabric, Viennese housing is one giant joke at the housing market's expense.

Today, roughly a third of the city's housing is still public, city-owned. Another third is limited-equity cooperatives, the more recent trend, showing even more innovative designs. A final third is private, with good quality and low costs. Even in Europe's racist, neoliberal rubble, Vienna can hold its head up. Its most immigrant-dense, working-class, and public-housing-rich neighborhoods vote in huge numbers against the archconservatives who draw support from beyond the city's limits. Vienna has recently implemented free day care for children aged zero to seven. Public transit costs a euro a day for a yearly pass. "People do get very angry if a bus takes longer than seven minutes," one of my guides, the historian and neighborhood councillor Armin Puller sighed, with a grimace to show his dissatisfaction at the service's disintegrating quality.

And carbon? Vienna's summers are almost as hot as New York's. But in most public and cooperative housing, air-conditioning is banned. Some buildings from the postwar period are brutally hot—they could use the occasional air conditioner. But most housing benefits from the city's quality of design and are comfortable year-round. Puller showed me one cooperative complex that surrounded flexible play spaces, their grounds creatively landscaped like a Star Trek caricature of utopia; the buildings' balconies had sliding plastic doors that could

instantly turn broad patios into cozy sunrooms. I cried a little on the inside. When he next showed me an experimental public school where each classroom had a dedicated outdoor space, with wheeled chairs and tables so that groups could shuttle between microclimates at will, a few tears leaked. All of us could have this.

Of course, Vienna is far from perfect. You can't have eco-socialism in one capitalist, European city. But guess what: when the working classes build lasting, creative institutions that raise and spend money well, life is a lot better. And with Vienna's extraordinary transit and dense housing, its localized carbon emissions are nearly half as low as New York's.[29]

TWELVE MILLION NO-CARBON HOMES

Today American public housing projects are unjustly stigmatized, but it's also true that a lot of it was built on the cheap and badly maintained, turning the ideal of social housing into a symbol of urban decay.[30]

Could the United States reverse that damage and achieve anything resembling Red Vienna's achievements? "Social Housing in the United States," a 2018 report by the People's Policy Project, a left-wing policy think tank, shows how Vienna, Sweden, and Finland managed to produce such high-quality housing—and how the United States could do the same.[31] Two takeaways stand out.

First: quality and financing. With upfront investment and intelligent policy design, you get glorious housing by pricing generous maintenance costs into tenants' monthly payments. Then, for the poorest tenants, you subsidize out of a separate antipoverty fund—one column for quality public housing and a second column for abolishing poverty.

The other takeaway: speed. In the 1960s Sweden had about three million housing units. Many were crumbling; plus, they needed more. With some admittedly rough edges, Sweden built one million public homes in ten years. They increased their housing stock by roughly a third in a decade.

The People's Policy Project proposal is more modest: ten million public housing units in ten years, federally financed and locally implemented with financial structures similar to those used in Vienna and Sweden. The cost? In 2019 Rep. Ilhan Omar released a bill that proposed building twelve million units of social

housing to the "highest environmental standard," and estimated the cost at $1 trillion, roughly two-thirds of the Trump 2018 $1.8 trillion tax cut.[32]

Yes, there would be obstacles. The biggest is local resistance in many of the best places to build. Because much of this housing will help people of color live in mostly white suburbs, locals will rebel. School districts will be battlegrounds. Indeed, white suburbs and leafy urban neighborhoods have long refused public housing developments, violating the Fair Housing Act. But a Green New Deal government would enforce that law, wielding every legal and financial carrot and stick it can muster—and mass mobilization could be the most powerful. Another obstacle is land prices in desirable areas. Here Vienna's precedent of punishing real estate taxes is key: flatten speculation, build homes.

What's more, the inevitable local battles that a huge infusion of federal money will bring are actually good—the result is more likely to reflect local groups' particular needs.[33] No one wants to live in a PowerPoint crudely blocked together in Washington, D.C. At first local battles over implementation will be frustrating. But we're talking about a political context in which millions have clogged the streets to overthrow the political establishment. And it will be easier to mobilize a public housing coalition of angry, rent-burdened tenants; racial and housing justice groups; unionized construction workers (and prospective workers); and local politicians who want to get reelected around massive public investment rather than a measly LIHTC tax credit scheme.

There's no substitute for mass mobilization, but there are many rewards from fostering it. Funding should allow motivated groups to experiment with limited-equity cooperatives and community land trusts, even if much of the new housing would probably be built and governed by local authorities, at least early on.[34] Public homes should also be built in different shapes and sizes, with the program reaching beyond cities and suburban transit nodes into rural areas blighted by poor home quality—from Appalachian towns to Indigenous reservations—where local control over details will be essential. There should also be aggressive oversight by auditors to stamp out opportunism and corruption. From Red Vienna to the New Deal infrastructure programs, keeping public projects clean was key to holding mass support.

As noted, democratic neighborhoods anchored by dense, well-connected public housing are the gold standard of democratic, no-carbon urbanism. Public construction standards and smart localization also make these bulwarks of

ruggedness to withstand brutal weather. And their construction would strengthen other Green New Deal staples.

A low-carbon homes guarantee is a great fit for a job guarantee.[35] Decarbonizing the economy requires electrifying everything—replacing stoves and water heaters and mastering technologies like home heating pumps that both warm and cool. (New York City has just become the largest U.S. city to ban gas utilities in new construction.[36]) The best accelerator of buildings' technological improvement? Smart public procurement. Weatherizing existing homes and swapping their appliances will be a necessary but tedious slog.[37] A huge home-building program with a net-zero-carbon mandate could train and equip tens of thousands of workers in the skills needed to strip carbon from each of the country's houses, apartments, and offices.

You could have a threadbare, patchwork quilt of training programs, jurisdiction by jurisdiction, with baby firms struggling to sell big ideas to luxury home builders. Or you could join up federal law, federal money, local social movements, and the world's best science, engineering, and craft standards. Tough call.

BUILDING THE DREAM

You make buildings carbon-neutral by slashing their energy use and powering what's left with renewables. But there's more than just wire linking the public housing ideal and the project of vast public, renewable power.

The two are linked by an irresistible dream: ordinary people seizing control of their place in the world. That's no empty abstraction. Take New York State's grassroots campaign for a just transition, NY Renews. The coalition was started by environmental justice, labor, and housing organizers after the 2014 People's Climate March in New York. After focusing for years on environmental justice, these housing-oriented organizers knew they had to branch out, connecting to the state's rural antifracking groups, labor unions, and community hubs. Four key leaders took road trips upstate to build the coalition that's leading the charge for its Green New Deal–style Climate and Community Protection Act.[38]

And in November 2019 Representative Ocasio-Cortez introduced the Green New Deal for Public Housing Act, which would retrofit the country's one million units of public housing, removing all toxic materials, electrifying their energy systems to enable complete decarbonization, and favoring public housing

residents for the work itself. (I led the research for the bill.) The bill would also repeal the notorious Faircloth Amendment, which at present makes it effectively illegal for municipal authorities to build more public housing. And Representative Ocasio-Cortez advanced the idea that retrofitted public housing should contain community services and useful consumer spaces, like affordable organic grocers. This suggests something more like a Red Vienna model of mixed-use social housing, which new green social housing would ideally emulate.

The research I led for the act gives some sense of what a Green New Deal for housing would look like for labor. Using standardized economic multipliers, we estimated that the proposed green retrofits to every public housing unit in the country would cost between $119 and $172 billion over ten years. (On an annual basis, that is just a fraction of the cost of homeowners deducting mortgage interest payments from their federal income tax.) This retrofit program alone would create up to 240,000 jobs per year overall, including up to 35,000 jobs in skilled maintenance and manufacturing on site per year.[39] Considering only these on-site jobs, we found that more of these jobs would be created in red states than blue states. Most of these jobs, of course, would occur across the complex labor chain.

Our jobs projections for the retrofit of the New York City Housing Authority alone took advantage of a more complex regional model—it estimated that the top five categories for new job creation would be construction and maintenance, followed by professional scientific and technical services, administrative and waste management services, real estate and rental and leasing, and health care and social assistance.[40] In short, investment creates work—and a lot of it. We also separately estimated the number of manufacturing jobs created by bulk purchases of new, electric, highly efficient appliances as well as low-flow toilets; nationally, we expect to create 8,000 jobs, including 2,100 in manufacturing, over ten years.[41] And all relevant appliances, including electric induction stoves, are already manufactured in the United States. The vast majority of this new work would clearly occur outside factories, and a lot of it would be indirectly created by investment and thus not subject to particular regulations. Nonetheless, the scope for improving conditions from tightening labor markets through new employment alone, never mind specific legislative provisions, would be profound.

And in the spring of 2021, Representative Ocasio-Cortez and Sen. Bernie Sanders released an updated and improved version of the bill. This time the bill added substantial labor provisions based on extensive consultations with a range

of national building trade leaders. Perhaps the most important provision was a more focused, detailed apprenticeship program for public housing residents, ensuring that when these apprentices are hired for retrofit, it is in the context of a training program that offers a clear pipeline into a union career.[42] The climate policy network that I cofounded to lead that research, the climate + community project, also led the research for a Green New Deal for K–12 public schools bill introduced by Rep. Jamaal Bowman.[43] The section of that bill devoted to healthy, green, carbon-neutral school retrofits built on these improved labor provisions; on their strength, the bill won the backing of the Building and Construction Trades Council of New York. (The bill also won the endorsement of the American Federation of Teachers.) While it may take some time for the labor movement and trades unions within it to wholeheartedly embrace the Green New Deal as an abstract ideal, we are starting to see that once we develop specific, concrete legislative proposals with sustained dialogue with union leaders, it is possible to change those unions' relationship to climate politics.

While we did not conduct a comparable analysis of Representative Omar's proposed $1 trillion bill to construct twelve million units of social housing, it would be reasonable to impute from our projections of the public housing retrofits that a roughly six times greater investment in new construction would yield four to eight times as many jobs, given the comparability of the retrofit and new construction sectors. On the other hand, some of this work would simply be moving construction from the private market to a supplanting public homebuilding program. Given the limits of forecasting the future, it might be reasonable to assume that one of the greatest labor benefits of a mass public homebuilding program would come in the form of regulated higher standards and compensation—perhaps even shorter work weeks and more work sharing. In other words, an expansive Green New Deal for housing would not just create more green jobs—it could also create much better green jobs. Certainly, in Red Vienna, the government deliberately employed artisans (who needed work) to produce detailed decors that yielded buildings less fashionably modernist than, say, the social housing of contemporaneous Frankfurt. With a Green New Deal for housing, labor policy and architectural style would inevitably evolve together.

And no doubt all this work and skill would spillover beyond housing. Schools, dormitories, hospitals, libraries, and of course all manner of commercial buildings will require retrofits. Workers will ultimately not just be rebuilding the spaces of "others" but, indeed, the spaces of work itself! While the COVID-19

pandemic has raised some unfortunate critiques of density—ultimately, public health policy has determined the geography of outbreaks, not raw residential density—architects have reacted with vim to the notion that increasing air replacement rates, improving ventilation, removing toxic building materials, and otherwise improving indoor air quality, could combine an agenda of green retrofits with a healthier attitude to construction and maintenance.

Meanwhile, there is also an obscure but surprisingly strong historical precedent linking social housing and public power. One of New York's storied socialist cooperative housing complexes was actually designed in homage to Vienna's Karl Marx-Hof, echoing its elaborate masonry and round arches. The Amalgamated Dwellings in New York's Lower East Side was built for a leftist Jewish textile workers' union in 1931 to house 236 families. The co-op still stands. The building's designer, Roland Wank, was inspired by Red Vienna. Remarkably for downtown Manhattan—now and then—the building proper only covers about half of its expensive lot space, devoting the rest to a large, garden-studded courtyard.[44]

As I learned during a recent visit with William Rockwell, an architect, resident, and the building's unofficial historian, even the rooftops were specially designed for dancing and parties. As we discussed the intricate Art Deco stonework, Rockwell insisted, "This is not cost effective. This is about love, making a statement." From the start, the Dwellings included a library and an open cultural space with a cozy stage for performances, for making the good life together. The multifunctional, airy design links a radical New York tradition to Austria's labor, socialist, feminist, and public health movements, themselves rooted in the Europe-wide revolt of 1848.

Wank was a Hungarian leftist who studied architecture in Budapest and briefly in Vienna, then immigrated to the United States in 1924 to chase new dreams. Shortly after designing the Amalgamated Dwellings, Wank took a job with the New Deal's Tennessee Valley Authority, which was set up by Franklin D. Roosevelt to break monopolistic and useless private electricity utilities. Wank became the authority's chief architect. He built celebrated workers' housing around the country, led the design of several hydroelectric dams, and helped steward the Rural Electrification Administration that brought electric power to tens of millions of Americans through democratic cooperatives (they still

operate). Wank's dams are known for their elegant, monumental, and public-oriented design. Critics were stunned by their beauty.

Wank also innovated by establishing visitors' plazas and sculpting roads for ordinary people to absorb the infrastructure's glory as they came in to visit. As one obituary put it, Wank "saw to it that [the dams] were approached as one would the Acropolis."[45] The towns Wank built for workers and people displaced by dams were innovative. One of them, Norris, featured the country's first green belt. The town also excluded Black residents and workers. Wank's work crystallized all that was good in the New Deal—and all that was rotten. The New Deal didn't just reproduce Jim Crow, it hardened it.

Yet we can reconstruct some of the New Deal's, and Wank's, best insights—namely, that experimentation and equality had to run through infrastructure big and small. Abolition democracy, as first articulated by W. E. B. Du Bois in those years, will require even more public power: plentiful no-carbon energy, a truly democratic government, and democratic housing for working people.[46]

From the Lower East Side to rural Tennessee, Wank built structures that made socialism's grand promises monumental, intimate, and useful. Thinking about Wank's work helps us focus on the ten million public, no-carbon homes' core premise: climate justice will be visceral. It's about more than solar photovoltaic cells, healthy rainforests, and plant protein. It's about how we work and live: the stone, glass, and steel that we shape with our hands to protect us from the elements—and to bind us to their beauty. The politics of climate change and the transformation of the built environment are the same damn thing.

And they have a history. There was a bright red line between the street architects who built barricades across Europe in 1848, founding a continent's socialist and feminist politics, and the arrival of no-carbon hydroelectricity, built by public institutions and delivered by cooperatives in rural America's poor heartland. That line curved through the greatest public home-building project of Europe, and the great socialist cooperative tradition of New York City, tracing brick-and-mortar homes and bright green gardens that made the abstract ideals of social equality literally tangible—justice you can run your fingers over. It was, to be sure, a crooked line and a line that divided. It needs to be redrawn with an ambition scarcely imaginable on the Left even a year ago.

Ocasio-Cortez's pivot from housing to climate was coherent, as was her subsequent turn to combining the two in legislation. The two challenges are one—and urgent. We can think huge and act fast, one Herculean decade at a time. In

1941, as Nazis threatened to swallow Europe for good and the New Deal became a war economy, Roland Wank, the builder of immigrant homes and public power, published a moving essay on architecture as politics. Anticipating today's mood, he urged his fellow builders to embrace the era's radical uncertainty, to attack inequalities mercilessly, and to take pleasure "in struggle when the fight is hot and passion runs high."[47]

Seizing the political moment, Wank continued, "is one of the vital experiences that make life worth living."[48] His essay's title is a rebuke to his failures, and to the failures of the New Deal, which a Green New Deal must correct. The simple title is also a slogan, a fierce clap-back to the critics who want to slow our pace and shrink our desires, who want to nudge the markets we plan to transcend, hoard the power we plan to share, and who scorn the public dream-homes that we'll build for our resplendent survival: "Nowhere to go but forward."

NOTES

This chapter has been adapted from an essay published in *Jacobin* (jacobinmag.com).

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