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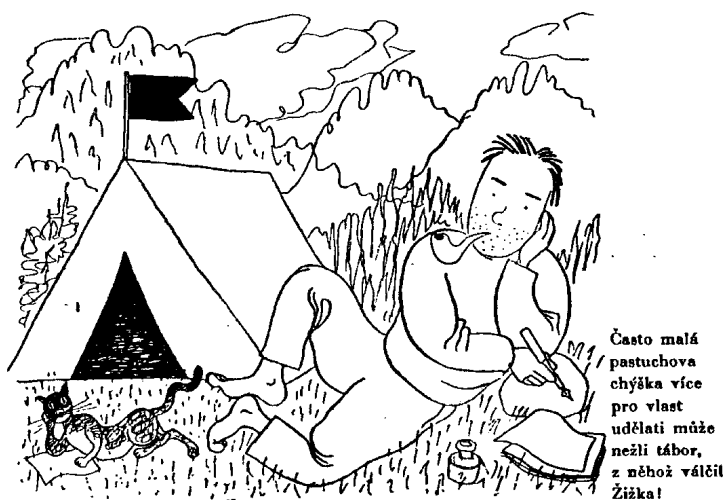
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● 1928

From left: Karel Teige, Jan E. Koula, Madame de Mandrot, Oldřich Tyl and Le Corbusier on the roof of Tyl's YWCA Hostel in Prague.
(Courtesy of Olga Hilmerová, Prague)



Translation:
Sometimes a small shepherd's tent
will do more for one's country than
an entire army camp, such as that of
our warlord Žižka before one of his
campaigns (during the Hussite wars).

Adolf Hoffmeister, Karl Teige (= dreams about minimal dwelling).
From the *Jízdní řád literatury a poezie*, Prague, 1932

● 1932

AN AVANT-GARDIST'S SOLITUDE

the housing crisis

2.

the housing shortage and housing overproduction • overpopulation • housing policy

The so-called housing shortage, so much talked about in the press these days, cannot be simply dismissed by admitting that the working class is generally living in bad, overcrowded, and unhealthy apartments. The housing shortage is not just a phenomenon of the present and is not merely an evil that has visited the oppressed classes in the past, or the modern proletariat alone. On the contrary, it has affected almost equally all of the oppressed classes at all times. There is only one way to surmount it: put an end, once and for all, to all exploitation and oppression of the working class by the ruling class. The term "housing crisis," as it is currently understood, essentially stands for nothing other than the worsening of the already miserable housing conditions, caused by the influx of people into the cities . . . [and] increases in rent . . . , a calamity that is not confined only to the working class, but one that is also starting to affect the small bourgeoisie as well.

—Engels, *On the Housing Question*, 1872

The **minimum dwelling**, as the current battle cry of the architectural avant-garde, is supposed to be the answer to all the particulars of the ongoing housing crisis. To avoid any future misunderstanding concerning this slogan, we wish to point out from the start that in this book the term "minimum dwelling" is not to be understood as a tiny dwelling for a little man! That is not the idea. Besides, the term "little man" is really a petit bourgeois invention and an architectural fiction, used by social science to put a label on a nonexistent creature. As an architectural slogan, the minimum dwelling should not be envisioned as a reduced or restricted version of a small bourgeois apartment; and it has nothing in common with so-called minimum apartments in rental tenement houses, built at the end of the last century, or with a kind of popular version of conventional apartments of reduced quality, with rooms so small as to render them uninhabitable. Moreover, it certainly does not represent a miniaturized version of a bourgeois villa.

On the contrary, in the program of modern architecture the minimum dwelling is intended to signify a **new dwelling type**, far in advance of conventional housing precedents and superior to past housing types, which were built not only for "eternity" but for rent exploitation as well. Apart from being a safe repository of capital and securing the value of a mortgage loan, and apart from its "eternal value" as architecture, the house requires irrationally high construction expenses, not to mention the heavy burden it places on the housewife for constant maintenance. In contrast, any minimum dwelling should be low-cost on principle; yet any reductions in its cost should be achieved not by reducing its quality but primarily by rationalizing and industrializing construction through standardization and serial mass production. All

these cost-saving methods are well within the capacity of modern architecture. Housing norms, including a uniform standard for the mass production of houses, are all intrinsically inimical to the current individually determined "single edition" approach to designing and constructing bourgeois dwellings. Notwithstanding the failure to use modern mass production methods in house construction, the reduction of costs by rationalizing space exerts a beneficial influence on architectural development in general. To repeat an old adage: penny wise, pound foolish. The minimum dwelling should provide more comfort for less money for its inhabitants than does the old conventional bourgeois house. The rationalization of the plan and the improvement of its overall organization ought be able to deliver higher value and higher efficiency with less floor area.¹

In its search for a new dwelling form, the architectural avant-garde has chosen **minimal area and maximal livability** as the technical formula for **minimum dwelling** design. This may also be labeled as the mini-max dwelling concept: that is, a minimal space accommodating "maximal life" for the class of the subsistence minimum, defining a dwelling that does not fall below standards needed for **biological survival** (i.e., below acceptable sanitary and hygienic norms), one that provides its inhabitants with sufficient light, access to sun and air, and a sense of open space. Those members of the architectural avant-garde who have decided to abandon projects of villas for the rich, who are trying to find a solution for the **minimum dwelling**, and who are still trying to **reproduce the prevailing lifestyle of the middle-class segment of the population on a higher level of development** are faced at the same time with the additional problem of rethinking the problem of development so as to provide the inhabitants of such minimum modern apartments with greater comfort than that provided by a mansion or patrician house, albeit lacking the ostentation of either. Unfortunately, some of the proposed **beehivelike stacks of minimal apartments** are nothing but **modified replicas of rental barracks on a higher level**. However, **in order to make it possible to accommodate the dwelling needs and the lifestyle of the proletariat even under present conditions, and in order to transform their life of suffering, their general living conditions will first have to be changed** (e.g., too many apartments crowded into a single building, life in hovels, disintegration of the traditional family and the family-based household, etc.): they will have to be raised to a higher level, where they will become the source of boundless cultural progress.

Under present conditions, the dwelling of members of the class earning the subsistence minimum continues to be a decrepit and unhealthy hovel, far below minimum standards of hygiene and basic biological dwelling requirements, since an apartment in a new house is in most cases simply beyond their means. Attempts to make new apartments affordable to the poor have led to a further reduction of the average floor area of such small apartments from 40 m² to 36 m², and eventually to even less than 20 m². Statistical evidence confirms that a desirable biological minimum represents a higher standard than can be afforded by the proletariat, and thus even the smallest dwelling has become inaccessible for the poorest segment of the population. The slogan of the "minimum dwelling," much bandied about by the architectural avant-garde in response to the circumstances of today's housing crisis, hides the fact that a quality "minimum dwelling" is financially inaccessible for all those who presently live

¹) It should be mentioned in this context that the tendency of modern architects to reduce the square footage and cubature of a house is not motivated exclusively by economic considerations and a desire to reduce costs; to a large extent it results from their recognition that reduced furniture size needs to be accompanied by a comparable reduction of the overall dimensions of a plan, and that architectural rationalization not only allows for but demands the reduction of the overall layout of a house.

on the material level of the “subsistence minimum.” For the thousands and millions of homeless people living in inadequate and unhealthy shelters, a minimum dwelling with a desirable biological standard represents a condition that is still far beyond their financial means. It is for these reasons that the most important architectural problem of our time—namely, to provide adequate housing for people of minimum income—still remains unsolved. There is a huge gap between even a relatively low rent for a decent home and the average wage, and the discrepancy between low wages and high rents is becoming ever more severe. Moreover, when rents go down, wages usually go down as well. **This makes the housing crisis even worse.** The housing crisis, which after the Great War has bedeviled and confounded all of Europe and all the cities of the civilized world, is not, as has often been erroneously assumed, only a postwar phenomenon; and it is not—at least as far as European industrial cities are concerned—a new phenomenon. What is new is its urgency, its ferocity, and its interminable scope. To be more precise: its novel aspect can be discovered in the fact that the housing crisis, which has always been the lot of the proletariat, in our day touches even those classes that formerly remained unaffected—namely, the so-called middle classes, whose economic situation has been considerably weakened in the interim and who, as a consequence, have suffered from large-scale pauperization. It is precisely the current housing crisis and its associated rent speculation that have substantially contributed to the impoverishment of the middle class. Thus, **even though the housing crisis affects the proletariat the most, it also affects the middle classes to the extent that they have become impoverished like the proletariat.**

The housing crisis has actually been with us for many decades, sometimes even centuries, in all developed industrialized countries, ever since modern industry brought about the concentration of vast numbers of the population in the cities. The reports of the various country representatives of the International Congresses of Modern Architecture [CIAM] provide ample evidence that the housing crisis in European cities long persisted in the past, and that it has continued without interruption since 1914. Therefore, it is not just a postwar phenomenon: the Danish and Dutch country groups are the only ones who talk about the housing crisis as a direct result of the war and postwar situation.² By way of contrast, a serious housing crisis had emerged already during the first third of the nineteenth century in England, Belgium, and France, mainly caused by early industrial development and the rapid growth in the number of factory workers. In Germany and Czechoslovakia a similar situation can be observed in the sixties and the seventies of the last century. (In predominantly agrarian countries the housing crisis exhibits a somewhat different character: here we notice that poor and unhealthy housing conditions, barely fit for “cave dwellers,” persist in the villages as a legacy of medieval times). The housing crisis in European cities has now been dragging on for decades after the war and is characterized by a further deterioration of housing conditions, exacerbated and made even more acute by the current general economic crisis of capitalism, which has caused widespread unemployment and pauperization of the workers. Making the postwar housing crisis more difficult, all building activities ceased during the war, and they have suffered from complete stagnation for some years even after its end. Add to this the increased marriage rate of

²) In a commemorative paper on the housing situation in Germany, the German Ministry of Labor admits that even before 1914, a housing shortage existed in the cities and industrial districts. The housing misery in England is described in Engels’s study *The Condition of the Working Classes in England*, where (as a classic example) he paints the picture of the housing situation in Manchester during the 1840s, and where he also delivers a critique of English cottage life and industrial garden settlements.

demobilized soldiers returning from the front, which in turn has led to a change in the age distribution of the population. These factors have also contributed significantly to the aggravation of an already critical housing shortage. But at root the housing shortage is primarily a social, class-based phenomenon having many causes, all of which can be traced in their origin to the methods of capitalist economics and—ultimately—**it is the wage system that is at the root of this evil**. It is a system whose practice is to pay its labor the lowest possible rate, a rate that subsequently forces the workers to limit their expenditures to cover only the most essential of life's necessities, which by all rights should include a decent and healthy shelter. Unfortunately, it seems that a decent home does not rate the status of being essential to life in the present system. The **rental system** is an inseparable complement of the wage system: capital is not satisfied merely with the surplus value extracted from the worker's labor in the factory, but aggravates its exploitation by manipulating the economics of housing and city politics (rent, transportation, taxes): "Having been exploited by the factory owner until he finally is paid his wage in real coin, the worker is subsequently pounced upon by the second detachment of the bourgeois exploiters, the house owner, the merchant, the owner of the pawn shop, and so on" (*The Communist Manifesto*).

The housing crisis is the result of all the causes described above, whether primary or secondary, but—as we have argued—its real origin is to be found in the current economic system; it is, therefore, a necessary outcome and a concomitant phenomenon of all capitalist development. The expansion of large modern industry during the second half of the nineteenth century caused the rapid growth of cities, so that in the course of a single century, the ratio of country to city dwellers was practically reversed in some places (during the Middle Ages, the population ratio of city to country was 1 to 9). However, the housing shortage is not the result only of the city's population growth, which accelerated to the point that the building industry was unable to keep pace with it. In this connection, it should be noted that during the first years after the war the number of new dwelling units built could not catch up with the number of marriages and newly formed households and hence lagged behind population growth. The explanation for this lag should not be sought solely in population growth as such, or in the inability to expand overall construction activities to keep up with demand; instead—given the existing economic order—such building investments were simply not considered sufficiently profitable to provide for the housing needs of the less affluent. The housing crisis in the cities persists because of the increase not only in the absolute number of their inhabitants but also in the percentage of economically weak members within the total population incapable of paying the required rents—which, by the way, have increased enormously over time. The growth of cities and their urban populations is actually not so prodigious as to make it impossible for present production capacity to satisfy demand: however, if one is to seek an answer to the question of the causes of the housing shortage, it can be found in the disproportionate growth of the proletariat as part of the overall number of city inhabitants, as well as the growth of other disadvantaged groups of dispossessed and uprooted emigrants from the country to the city, including the impoverished urban middle class.

The stagnation of construction activities during the war, the increased rate of new marriages after the war, and general population growth are erroneously considered as the root causes of the current housing deficit. But in fact there is no outright housing shortage, as there is no absolute overpopulation, whose needs would actually exceed available production capabilities.³

³) Actually, there is enough food for all populations in the world, but there are too many people in relation to variable capital, and this disparity increases in inverse proportion to capital's accumulation.

Satisfaction is not constrained by the insufficiency of production; but production is limited by the buying power of the population, which is insufficient to satisfy such needs.

The assumption that the housing shortage is caused by dizzying population increases (or the increase of marriages after the war) collapses with the refutation of outdated Malthusian population laws. At the beginning of the machine age, Malthus predicted widespread penury due to excessive population increases. Understandably, he had to base his predictions on the comprehension of a world that was familiar to him, a world of the premachine and precapitalist era, a world of the old economic order: under those conditions, the well-known Malthusian axioms, which predicted that populations would increase at a geometrical rate, while food supplies would increase only in a linear fashion, represented a justified warning against expected future shortages and hunger. However, the more current estimates and calculations of modern sociology and economics assure us that Malthus's laws have lost their validity in our day, and that they are actually in error. Past economic calamities, such as famine, have been supplanted by the new, bewildering paradox of the principal calamity of the capitalist economy: overproduction.

Overproduction is a modern plague, thought to be both inconceivable and impossible in past historical periods, including Malthus's time. Malthus assumed that eventually the earth will become too small and too impoverished to support humanity. Today we find that the earth is too big and that there is more than enough land to produce food in abundance by rationalized mechanical methods. Usable agricultural areas are increasing, and hitherto barren land can be made productive even in polar regions, as evidenced by Sörgel's "Panropa" project. This proposes to build a dam across the Strait of Gibraltar, which would generate 160 million horsepower from the "white coal" of its turbines, thus providing sufficient energy to bring the whole Sahara desert under cultivation, besides gaining additional arable land by lowering the surface level of the Mediterranean. The Dutch have already started the draining of the Zuider Zee, further proof that it is theoretically possible to realize an almost unlimited quantity of additional arable and economically usable land. Add to this the increases in agricultural fertility gained by the introduction of selective breeding of high-yield seeds and the judicious use of new fertilizers, not to mention the scientific breeding of poultry, cattle, and so on, and so on. All this promises food surpluses (not food shortages). Hirsch, a contemporary author, has articulated the inappropriateness of Malthus's laws for our time: "Bread grows faster than humanity." And yet Sörgel's project remains on paper, alternative sources of wealth remain unused, the draining of the Zuider Zee has been stopped—simply because there is a glut of grain and because commercial agriculture in its "grain wars" has failed to capture new foreign markets.

Economic "land surpluses" and "production surpluses" are not conditions that are universally valid, just as there is no absolute principle concerning the problem of surplus population. Previously, population was thought to be too high, but its growth was subsequently discovered to be actually slowing down, not only as far as nonwhite races are concerned but for some white populations as well. Population growth has become more moderate, and there are indications that it is actually tending toward ultimate stabilization. In North America, indigenous growth is registered only in the southern states; and in Europe, which grew from 200 million souls to 500 million in the span of a single century (apart from the 24 million killed during the war, and 40 million who emigrated overseas), a negative birthrate has been recorded for some time. For example, from 1906 until today, population has not significantly increased in France, and the western and central parts of Europe are actually reporting stagnant population growth. In the meantime the colonial settlement of new territories has dried up as well, and emigration from Europe to America has decreased to one-tenth of its prewar level. In his

1929 paper "Weltprobleme der Bevölkerung" ["World Population Problems"], Franz Oppenheimer states that the specter of an overpopulated earth, so dreaded by Malthus, is not a real problem any more; on the contrary, there is instead the threat of depopulation. In his study on the same subject, "The Balance of Births and Deaths," Robert Kuczynsky states that western and northern Europe are actually losing population.

Non-Marxist sociologists and economists are baffled when confronted by these postwar population growth data. They try to explain the decline of birth rates and population shifts by pointing to biological rather than primarily sociological and economical causes, as if the history of mankind were a blind biological process. It is along these biological lines that in the *American Journal of Sociology* (36, no. 2 [1930]), Corrado Gini tries to explain the cyclical succession of races and nations, as resembling the growth and decline of an individual. In his view, races, just like an individual human being, pass through certain evolutionary phases: growth, stability, decline, and finally extinction. New, superior population strains allegedly make their appearance on the fringes of declining races, followed by a mixing of races and their growth by infiltration and substitution. The potency of these fresh and more robust races and populations—among which he includes the Slavs, Japanese, Chinese, Malaysians, and also a number of already mixed races—thus tends to overwhelm the old dying races. These ingenious and seemingly convincing explanations reduce the social phenomenon of population shifts to physiological, biological, or ethnic causes and circumvent the basic law of scientific sociology—namely, that societies behave differently than the individuals they contain. In effect, there is no such thing as young or aging races and, unlike individuals, neither nations nor social groups can be assigned a definite physical life span. Social phenomena obey their own autonomous laws, and no scientific sociology would be worth its name that did not recognize the specific lawfulness of social development. Society is not the arithmetical sum of its atoms, i.e., individuals, **for in the logical sense, it is not identical with the sum of its parts formally** but only dialectically: that is, it is concretely bound up with the identity of its contradictions. ("Just because every human being is a biped, a collective of a hundred people does not turn out to be a centipede!")

Elsewhere in the same journal, we find a sounder grasp of sociological principles than those advanced in Gini's contribution. Another author states correctly that the social causes of both the dynamics of population growth and the decline in birthrates are not physiological or biological phenomena, but that the answer must be sought in the recognition of specific sociological factors that contribute to a decline in fertility: these include the social standing of parents, their cultural standards, the growth of urbanization, and deliberate economically and culturally motivated birth control (see Sanford Winston, "The Relation of Certain Social Factors to Fertility," 30, no. 5 [1925]). For these reasons the population factor, in terms of the growth and decline of populations, cannot be made to serve as the basis for sociological explanations in general and housing shortages in particular.⁴ The population factor is equally inadequate for explaining more complex social phenomena, as for example the growth of cities, the depopulation of the countryside, unemployment, and so on. On the contrary, explanations of population dynamics must be based first and foremost on economic conditions that fundamentally determine social factors, such as the class struggle, the development of productive forces, and social organization, all of which determine birth- and death rates to a significant degree.

A Marxist understanding of the population problem takes its departure from the view that population law is not an a priori abstract concept: such a law can prevail only in the realm of

⁴) A. Loria, *La legge di popolazione ed il sistema sociale* (1882).

the flora and fauna, and only to the extent that the “tool making animal” [English in the original]—that is, man the producer—does not intervene.⁵ Every production method is associated with its own special population law and has its own historical validity, related exclusively to its respective production processes. Capitalist production methods foster their own population laws as well. The accumulation of capital accelerates the displacement of workers by machines, producing wealth at one extreme and misery on the other, while at the same time turning loose the so-called **reserve army** of the unemployed, which is made up of the relative surplus of the industrial workforce, that is, workers who are unable to find work. This is **capitalist overpopulation**, which manifests itself in its own unique and varied ways. Plagued by expropriation, part of the agricultural population adds to the numbers of the industrial reserve army even more: in other words, for all practical purposes, we are dealing here with a secondary source of relative overpopulation. The exodus of agrarian populations into cities is not the only prerequisite of overpopulation, even though it must be considered a very important factor and an integral part of the history of capitalism, as well as an important element in the analysis of the problem of housing and urban development. As a consequence, industrial capital has created its own homologous labor surpluses, principally as a result of mobility and dynamic growth. These have created a permanent army of unemployed, caused by the accelerating changes in the systemic structure of capitalism and accompanied by the substitution of machines for physical labor.

Thus, today's overpopulation is not the result of innate biological factors (i.e., birthrates) but can be reliably traced to existing economic conditions, best characterized by the accumulation of capital. Similarly, both increases and decreases in birth- and death rates should not be considered solely as manifestations of biological potency, such as fertility, the health and vigor of a particular race, or their resilience or degeneration, but must be qualified by the influence of social and cultural factors.⁶ Today's estimates of overpopulation are relative: It seems that contrary to claims that overpopulation persists, statistics in all western Europe show a general surplus of deaths over births, an increase in the number of suicides, the curtailment and control of conception, the spread of contraceptive practices, the rise of abortions, the institutionalization of single- or two-child families, and an increase of childless couples. All this may be interpreted as a veritable “childbirth strike,” the cause of which may be reliably traced to the impoverishment of the population and its increasing destitution. Capitalist “overpopulation” will continue to persist, even in the case of an outright decrease in population, simply because the system essentially does not depend on the natural growth or decline of its populations but instead supports its growth as a result of the accumulation of capital and the concurrent exodus of the country populations [to the cities]. This obvious phenomenon of

⁵) Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*: “Abstract population laws exist only for animals and plants. The growth or decline of populations depends on the organization of society, an organization determined by its economic structures. No law of fertility can change the fact that the population of contemporary France has practically ceased to grow.” (The big mistake of economists and sociologists is that they regard population growth as the primary source of development).

⁶) It is not possible on the basis of abstract population laws to explain why, for example, in western Europe populations have effectively ceased to grow (an annual growth rate of 2.5 million for a total of 370 million in Europe, compared to the USSR with its population of 165 million, which is growing at a rate of 3.5 million annually), and why the statistics of 1927 show that compared to the years 1870–1875, there has been a general decline in birthrates (in France, 29 percent; in England and Germany, 53 percent; and in Austria, 55 percent). The statistics on birth- and death rates of both infants and adults, social diseases (e.g., tuberculosis), and suicides are numbers that are socially conditioned as well.

capitalist overpopulation is at the same time the key that allows us to open the door to an explanation of the exigencies of overproduction, which the system has tried to overcome by eliminating human production forces and by capturing new markets; this process eventually set the stage for a universal and all-encompassing crisis of the whole economic system, while at the same time preempting the means by which that crisis could be limited and overcome. Overpopulation is therefore an evil of a different kind than Malthus suspected. **Overpopulation is today's response to industrial and agricultural overproduction, and thus represents the "surplus value" necessary for the exploitation of the economically usable surface of the earth.** And, just as overpopulation is not a natural phenomenon or a sign of biological fertility, so overproduction and surpluses are not caused by technical progress and the increase of productivity in industry and agriculture. During the Middle Ages, hunger was the result of underproduction and bad crops, a pattern that has been turned upside down dialectically in capitalism, where hunger is the effective result of overproduction. Malthus's prophecy has thus been turned on its head by a paradoxical economic situation in which wealth creates misery and surplus causes want. Contemporary vulgar Marxist economic and sociological theories similarly repeat Malthus's error by a reverse logic that discerns catastrophe in the fact that production surpasses consumption. They speculate that if there were only more people in the world, there would be no crisis of overproduction: as if in today's economy the ultimate destiny of *Homo sapiens* were to take on the exclusive role of consumer, but one who, on account of his low wages and present circumstances, in reality is first a producer who produces more than he can consume. As a result of the contradictions of the existing economic system, the relationship between production and population is presented in a mind-boggling conundrum of numbers that are being multiplied with each other, where every rise in overpopulation (meaning populations without means) is represented by an increase in the numbers of an ever-more impoverished proletariat (i.e., impoverished because of the reduction of their buying power) that corresponds, relatively speaking, to a rise in overproduction, which of course leads to a lowering of overall sales and consumption. The American journalist Will Rogers recently voiced his dissenting opinion on this matter in an article published in the *New York Times*, where he speculated that the crisis of capitalism is being caused by the existence of too many people. To alleviate this situation, he proposed a campaign for the wholesale destruction of goods and sources of production: "The agriculture department has recently hit on a brilliant idea with its regulation to destroy every third bale of cotton. Unfortunately, the main defect of this policy is the fact that there are too many people: Therefore, shoot every third person and prosperity of industry and business will return!" The paradox of overproduction is not to be found in the contradictions between population and capitalist production for profit but is rooted in the fact that production has somehow become an end in itself—production for production's sake—and even though production has increased manifold, it has been unable to increase its markets and raise consumption.

Here we touch on the very core of the historical role of capitalism, which reveals itself in a most unambiguous way by expanding the productive forces of society, while at the same time the structure of capitalist society prevents the working masses from benefiting from its achievements. This represents the basic contradiction between tending to increase production and at the same time placing limitations on consumption by curtailing the buying power of the impoverished broad masses, between upswings in production and the gradual narrowing of the consumer base: "As a consumer, the worker is important for the market. However, when he sells his only 'merchandise,' namely his work, capitalist society attempts to pay a minimum price for his efforts" (*Capital*, vol. 2). The general tendency of production is to push

toward the limits of its capacity, that is, to an absolute saturation of consumption. However, it runs up against a contingent limit set by the buying capacity of the proletarianized masses. Thus, the growth of production exceeds the growth of individual consumption capacity in accordance with the antagonistic features of capitalist society.

The housing shortage cannot be equated with an absolute shortage of apartments. Neither is the building industry technically incapable of satisfying any demand that may be caused by the increase in population numbers. Even though statistics show that the number of housing units in most cities is considerably less than the number of households, they do not prove that there is an absolute shortage of houses, especially if one takes into account that a wealthy minority presently occupies the bulk of available dwelling space. This proves that the opposite is actually true: the housing market (a significant factor of the internal market) is currently relatively saturated. Only affordable low-cost houses available to financially weak members of society are in short supply, but these are not being produced by the free market, simply because they are not profitable. Thus, with the exception of houses for the poor, the current market is well saturated, supply exceeds demand for financially qualified buyers, and the so-called housing shortage actually obscures the reality of a relative overproduction of houses. The proof of this contention can be found in the fact that a certain percentage of apartments remains vacant, while at the same time a significant percentage of the population remains without adequate housing, simply because their income is insufficient to cover the required rent. This obvious class character of the housing shortage reveals itself unambiguously in the discovery that **on the one hand there is a substantial number of medium- and large-size apartments available, whereas on the other hand, there are thousands of people without an apartment.** The shortage of smaller apartments has two causes: the first is that small apartments are not being built in sufficient numbers, because there is no guarantee that they can be rented; and the second resides in the fact that the huge demand for small apartments tends to push up their price.

We are confronted here by a fundamental discrepancy: the discrepancy between building activity and housing shortage. It can be explained by the fact that **any increase in the number of apartments is usually accompanied by a concurrent increase of home seekers who cannot afford these apartments,** which consequently remain empty. This relative overproduction of apartments therefore actually worsens the housing shortage and the misery of the proletariat and the poor. The solution to this discrepancy, which lies at the heart of the problem of the dwelling for the so-called subsistence minimum, can be found only in the socialization of housing. Nor is the housing shortage a direct result of the overpopulation of cities and the migration of country populations into cities; it is essentially caused by economic conditions that have brought about the population increase in the cities in the first place. It is modern industrial expansion that has triggered the dizzying growth of cities and caused the migration of country populations to industrial centers. However, this growth of city populations is not by itself the cause of the housing shortage. Instead, the housing shortage in our cities is the consequence of a phenomenon that can be explained by the fact that migratory population movements are closely associated with economic and social dislocations taking place within those populations. Nobody talks about a housing crisis when the population of a spa grows rapidly with the intermittent ebb and flow of wealthy visitors who build their villas there or for whom big hotels are built: such summer resorts grow like mushrooms and yet they experience no shortage of housing. The housing shortage in our cities is not caused by the vertiginous increase of city populations as such but by changes in the social structure of these populations: that is, the population is increasing mainly because of the influx of wretched country folk and because within the city population itself pauperization is increasing, with the

result that the numbers of the poor and the proletariat mount as a percentage of the overall population of the city. The housing shortage is not becoming worse just because x number of people are added to the population of a city, but because y number of proletarians and those actually or potentially unemployed have been added as well, so that the pauperization of the population is advancing more rapidly than overall population growth. The reason for this is that the country poor make up the majority of the overall number of immigrants to the city, while at the same time those who have already settled in the city are becoming increasingly impoverished.

The influx of populations into cities and industrial centers is, after all, a characteristic symptom of capitalism: it represents a rural exodus caused by the intensifying contradictions between city and country, the rivalry between industry and agriculture, and the clash between the interests of capital and landowners. Traditional small-scale land ownership was weakened and eventually ruined by capitalism, for it is in the nature of capitalist production to increase the size of its industrial population at the expense of the agricultural sector, thereby giving impetus to the rise and growth of industrial centers, which lured populations to move into cities and which naturally had a significant impact on the structure of the village and thus ultimately on the state of housing in the country: "Small-scale land ownership, which unavoidably placed the farmers at the mercy of capital, has changed the masses of the French nation into troglodytes. Sixteen million farmers with wives and children live in cellars, of which a great number do not have a single window, while a few have to make do with two, and a lucky minority may boast three. Windows in a house are what the five senses are for the head. The bourgeois order, which at the beginning of the [nineteenth] century established the state as the custodian charged with the protection of the newly redistributed small plots of land, has instead become a vulture tearing at the flesh of its victims, only to scatter the carrion into the magic cauldron of capital: the Code Napoleon is nothing but a law promoting judicial murder and forced clearance sales" (Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*).



As discussed in the preceding, we believe that as a social crisis, the housing crisis cannot be explained exclusively by the dynamics of population changes, but that it has its roots in the structure of populations with reference to society, that it represents a basic inescapable side effect of the ruling economic system, and that it is codetermined by the pauperization of the broad masses in conjunction with the intensification of the contradictions between city and country. It is for these reasons that we consider the housing shortage to be a class phenomenon, best characterized as a relative shortage of apartments for the working class and other poverty-stricken segments of the population—in short, people of the subsistence minimum. The housing question is therefore not only a problem affecting the working class and a social evil **afflicting the proletariat most**, but it touches other economically weak strata of society as well, including the impoverished petite bourgeoisie, tradespeople, working intellectuals, and so on.

The housing conditions of the strata of the subsistence minimum are intimately connected with the social and material status of these strata. In times when profits are rising, workers still remain relatively impoverished, and their housing situation is thereby worsened as well. Incidentally, the housing shortage increased even during times of industrial booms, for in such times it was possible to invest one's capital into more profitable ventures than the building of housing. Naturally, such investment has also led to a further increase in rents. Con-