

## *Hitler's Autobahn - A propaganda myth still strong today*

Sven Koerber-Abe

The Autobahn is probably one of the most significant modern landmarks of Germany and can be seen in general as a symbol of automotive engineering, one of the largest and best-known German industrial sectors<sup>1</sup>. The Autobahn's international fame even goes so far that for some time now it has been attracting visitors to Germany as an explicit tourist destination, even from far-flung foreign countries<sup>2</sup>.

However, even today in large parts of the population of Germany as well as foreign countries, the Autobahn is considered as a work that was created by the National Socialists - and in particular by Adolf Hitler. This assumption is not only circulating among outspoken right-wing radical citizens, but can be found in various variations in almost all strata of Germany: for example Eva Herman, the former newscaster of the *Tagesschau* [the main news program of Germany's public broadcaster *ARD*] mentioned in a widely noticed talk show on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2007 on the second public television channel *ZDF*, that although the National Socialists committed heinous atrocities, they also created good things like the Autobahn that are still in use today<sup>3</sup>. What are the reasons that such assumptions are still accepted as facts in many parts of Germany and many other countries? And to what extent are these assumptions based on *true* facts? It will be the task of this article to examine and explain the historical truth and lies surrounding the Autobahn and how these were used by the National

Socialists.

Proper names, technical terms and several German quotations are given in German in this article. These are followed by the author's English translation or explanations in square brackets at their first appearance.

### **1. Current state and distinctive features of the Autobahn**

Germany's Autobahn is owned by the federal government and, since 2021, is managed by the newly created *Autobahn GmbH des Bundes* [Autobahn company of the federal government].<sup>4</sup> The total length of Germany's Autobahn network is 13,192 kilometers, making it the fourth-largest national highway network in the world after the networks of China, the United States and Spain.<sup>5</sup> According to the *Straßenverkehrsordnung StVO* [German Road Traffic Regulations], which apply throughout Germany, various restrictions are in force on what type of motor vehicles may use the Autobahn:

Autobahnen (...) dürfen nur mit Kraftfahrzeugen benutzt werden, deren durch die Bauart bestimmte Höchstgeschwindigkeit mehr als 60 km/h beträgt.

[The Autobahn (...) may only be used by motor vehicles whose maximum speed, determined by their design, is more than 60 km/h.].

BUNDESAMT FÜR JUSTIZ, 2013, § 18 Abs. 1 Satz 1 StVO

Similarly, maximum heights and widths for vehicles are precisely prescribed.

One distinctive feature that has made the German highway network famous (or rather infamous) worldwide is the absence of a speed limit for most vehicles: only motor vehicles with a total mass of more than 3.5 t, vehicles with trailers and buses are subject to a limit of 80 km/h.<sup>6</sup> Otherwise, there is no legally prescribed speed limit except in special local circumstances that require a legally binding reduction in speed, for example to reduce the risk of accidents

on particularly dangerous stretches of road. According to the *Bundesanstalt für Straßenwesen* [Federal Highway Organization], in 2015 around 70% of the German Autobahn were without any form of speed limit, and additionally at approx. 10% of the Autobahn time-limited speed limits had to be set up at various locations due to roadworks.<sup>7</sup> Since 1978, there has been a so-called *Richtgeschwindigkeit* [guideline speed] of 130 km/h, but this is not legally binding and therefore only has to be regarded as a kind of “recommendation” or as an appeal to the responsibility of road users.<sup>8</sup> Another distinctive feature of the Autobahn is the free use for passenger cars and motorcycles; only for trucks over 12 t a toll has been charged since August 2013, which was extended to trucks over 7.5 t in October 2015.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. International forerunners of the German Autobahn

In National Socialist propaganda, the Autobahn was elevated to the status of a purely German achievement, even as an intellectual feat of Adolf Hitler himself (for more details, see 4.4.1). From a historical point of view, however, one can by no means speak of original German-national ideas here - quite the contrary: both inside and outside of Europe, there were several precursors of national highways that explicitly served as both direct and indirect models for Germany’s Autobahn.

### 2.1 Long Island Motor Parkway (USA)

Depending on the definition of “highway”, the USA is the first country in the world to build the first, real highways, i.e. roads which are to be used exclusively by motor vehicles as well as being kept free of intersections. As early as 1908, construction of the *Long Island Motor Parkway*, sometimes referred to as the *Vanderbilt Motor Parkway*, began in the state of New York. Initially designed as a purely private, 10-kilometer-long automobile racetrack without

intersections thanks to the use of overpasses and underpasses, it was built by the president of the *New York Central Railroad Company*, William Kissam Vanderbilt II. It was eventually extended to over 72 kilometers and made available for public use; for this purpose, a toll system was set up at several toll booths along the Parkway.<sup>10</sup> Although the Long Island Motor Parkway was already considered obsolete by the 1920s due to advances in the construction of other state parkways, it provided important ideas and a first proof-of-concept for future expressway construction.

## **2.2 Autostrada dei Laghi (Italy)**

Italy can be regarded as direct model for Germany regarding national highway construction and its propagandistic usage: construction work began as early as March 1923, and in September 1924, the first section of the Autostrada from Milano to Varese, which could be used by all motor vehicles after paying a toll, was inaugurated. In the following years, further sections to the lakes Lago di Como and Lago di Maggiore let the Autostrada grow to a length of over 478 kilometers and gave, in combination with the already completed section that led close to Lago di Varese, the Italian highway the official name *Autostrada dei Lagi* [Motorway of the Lakes]<sup>11</sup>. The Italian fascists under Benito Mussolini pushed the construction of the Autostrada, because the construction work could serve on one hand as a means to fight the high unemployment in Italy at that time, and could on the other hand be used as an effective means for fascist propaganda: the highway symbolized progress, modernity, power and national greatness as an Italian-national achievement.<sup>12</sup> The Italian engineer Dr. Piero Puricelli took over the planning of the Autostrada<sup>13</sup>, which was by no means concealed by the fascists - on the contrary, he enjoyed a high reputation both in Italy and abroad due to his achievements for the Autostrada and was always a close confidant of

Mussolini.<sup>14</sup> This same Dr. Puricelli was also to exert a not inconsiderable influence on the planning of one of Germany's first highways: according to VAHRENKAMP (2004, p. 227-228), the Italian Autostrada not only served as a technical and impulse-giving model for the large-scale project of building a highway system from the Hanseatic cities Hamburg, Bremen and Lübeck via Frankfurt am Main to Basel in Switzerland (“HAFRABA”; for more on this topic see 3.2), but Dr. Puricelli even actively collaborated as an advisor to the *Verein zur Vorbereitung der Autostraße Hansestädte-Frankfurt-Basel* [Association for the preparation of the Hansestädte-Frankfurt-Basel motorway]. He was able to carry out this activity without problems due to his verifiable good knowledge of the German language.

### 3. First expressways in Germany before 1933

In Germany, there had also been various efforts - long before the National Socialists came to power in 1933 - to build motor vehicle-only highways.

#### 3.1 AVUS (Berlin)

As early as 1909, the *Kaiserlicher Automobil-Klub* [Royal Automobile Club] initiated the founding of the *Automobil-Verkehrs- und Übungsstraße GmbH* [Automobile Traffic and Training Road Ltd. Co.] in order to build a modern, internationally competitive automobile racing circuit whose parallel tracks stretched from Berlin to Nikolassee. As the naming suggests, the initially declared goal of the so called *AVUS* was to serve as a car racing track on the one hand, and as a research and practice track for Germany's steadily growing automobile industry on the other.<sup>15</sup> The AVUS was realized as a 20-kilometer long high-speed racetrack, which is already made clear by its layout: it runs almost entirely straight for 10 kilometers, with the opposing lanes running separately very close to each other in parallel. Only at the respective ends there are

*Hitler's Autobahn - A propaganda myth still strong today*

two very tight curves, which actually make the AVUS an extremely elongated circular track (see Figure 1).



Image 1: Layout of the AVUS

Although planning for construction began as early as 1909, actual construction did not start until 1913. Due to the First World War and subsequent financial shortcomings, the opening could not finally take place until September 1921 with an inaugural automobile race.<sup>16</sup> An emphasis on the idea of the AVUS as a high-speed racetrack was again made years later in 1937, when the originally flat north curve of the AVUS was rebuilt as a banked curve. This made even higher speeds possible on it for both racing and automobile industry experiments, was very popular with race spectators, but proved extremely dangerous with a number of fatal accidents.

Similar to the Long Island Motor Parkway in the USA mentioned in 2.1, the AVUS was open to the motorized public for a fee: except on days when a race was held on it, the AVUS thus served as a highway connection between the towns of Berlin and Nikolassee.<sup>17</sup> Whether this type of public use occurred as a direct imitation of the American parkway cannot be proven - however, the possibilities of a public, fee-based usage of the American race track were verifiably known to the operators of the AVUS, since German racers regularly participated in the Vanderbilt Cup Races held in New York State at least since the year 1908.<sup>18</sup>

### 3.2 HAFRABA (Hanseatic cities-Frankfurt am Main-Basel)

As already mentioned in 2.2, in November 1926 the foundation of the *Verein zur Vorbereitung der Autostraße Hamburg - Frankfurt - Basel* [Association for the preparation of the motor road Hamburg - Frankfurt - Basel] had been decided in Frankfurt am Main.<sup>19</sup> In 1928, “Hamburg” was replaced by “Hans-estädte”, meaning the Hanseatic cities of Hamburg, Lübeck and Bremen.



Image 2: The planned route of the HAFRABA through Germany

The motivation for the plan of an over 800 kilometer long highway across Germany to Switzerland was, among other things, the steady increase of cars, which had been even more rapid in other countries than in Germany and gave an idea of what the automotive situation would probably be like in Germany in a few years. According to FRIEDRICH (2006, p. 72), in 1924 every 321<sup>st</sup> citizen in Germany owned a motor car, while at the same time in France there was one car for every 90<sup>th</sup> citizen, in Great Britain for every 71<sup>st</sup> and in the USA already for every 7<sup>th</sup> citizen. The number of private-owned vehicles in Germany more than doubled from 100,340 cars in the year 1923 to 206,456 in

*Hitler's Autobahn - A propaganda myth still strong today*

1926. Planning for the construction of the HAFRABA proceeded rapidly, so that by the beginning of 1927 the route of the 881 kilometer long main line as well as road construction specifications had already been worked out in all-encompassing detail. The project was presented to the general public at the *International Automobile Exhibition* in Cologne in May 1927.<sup>20</sup> However, despite the almost completely worked out construction plans, the management of HAFRABA faced difficulties from the outset in being able to finance this major project, not least because Germany was undergoing major political upheavals at the time with various Reichstag dissolutions. Significantly, it was the National Socialist Party, among others, that - until their own seizure of power - vehemently opposed the construction of the highway, as in their eyes it would only serve the car driving pleasures of the rich upper class.<sup>21</sup> In order to make this large-scale construction project palatable to the general German population and especially to the German government, the HAFRABA Association pointed out - in a similar way as it had already been done with the construction of the Italian Autostrada - that the construction of a national expressway could serve as an urgently needed means to tackle the current high unemployment figures in Germany: according to FRIEDRICH (2006, p. 75), it was calculated by the HAFRABA Association that the construction of the expressway would secure the immediate and continuous employment of 40,000 workers over two years, as well as employment for another 20,000 workers in the auxiliary industries of road construction, such as stone construction.

According to STERN (2008, p. 10), in the course of the construction planning and the accompanying efforts of the HAFRABA Association to propagate a highway for Germany, a formative German-language designation for this new type of road first appeared in February 1927: in the technical journal *Verkehrstechnik Nr. 5* the term "Autobahn" was used, in reference to the state railroad company *Deutsche Reichsbahn*. The term Autobahn was to be used as



a general designation for German highways, is still in general use right up to the present day and, above all, carries connotations in the sense of a conceptual distinction from highways in other countries.

In the end, despite the extremely detailed elaboration of the construction planning, construction work on the HAFRABA could not be started until the National Socialists seized power in 1933. However, the HAFRABA was to form a big part of the planning basis for the work on the Reichsautobahn, which was to be enacted vehemently by the National Socialists shortly after their seizure of power, using a wide range of propaganda measures.

### 3.3 Rheinische Provinzialstraße Köln-Bonn

As early as 1925, the construction of an approx. 20 kilometers long highway connecting the cities of Köln [Cologne] and Bonn was planned and pushed forward, primarily by the provincial governor Johannes Horion as well as the mayor of Cologne and later first chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany Konrad Adenauer. The main reason for this was the already high utilization rate of the local roads and, in particular, the railroad lines, which were not allowed to be expanded any further due to the Treaty of Versailles following the defeat in World War I.<sup>22</sup> However, the construction of this highway failed in the early years due to uncertainties about financing through a planned toll: since it was to be a public road, no tolls could be charged by law. It was not until October 1929 that a change in the financing model allowed construction of the highway to begin. Similar to the construction of the Italian Autostrada as well as the plans for the HAFRABA, the construction of the *Rheinische Provinzialstraße Köln-Bonn* was now primarily intended as a job-creation tool in a time of extremely high unemployment in Germany. Accordingly, a large part of the construction financing was provided by the *Arbeitslosenhilfefonds* [German Unemployment Relief Fund].<sup>23</sup> By the time it

### *Hitler's Autobahn - A propaganda myth still strong today*

opened in August 1932, a total of more than 5,500 workers had built the highway - mostly by hand without the aid of heavy construction machinery. From the outset, the planners decided not to use heavy construction machinery in order to employ as many workers as possible so that the construction could be realized as an effective work creation measure.

The directional lanes of this four lane highway, which had initially been separated only by a continuous white line, were separated by median barriers after one year of use following a noticeably high number of accidents. Intersections with other roads or train tracks were completely avoided by the use of bridges and underpasses.

#### **4. The National Socialists and the Reichsautobahn**

After Adolf Hitler was elected Reichskanzler [Chancellor of Germany] in January 1933, a rethinking occurred within the National Socialist Workers' Party of Germany regarding the construction of highways. It should be emphasized, however, that - as already explained in this article - highways had not only been planned but had also been in use for several years in various foreign countries as well as within Germany, and the German term "Autobahn" had also been in use for several years. For the further treatment of this article, i.e. the historical examination of how the National Socialists pushed the expansion of the Autobahn and tried to rewrite its history, it will be important to always be aware of these historical facts.

##### **4.1 Reasons for the sudden support of highway construction**

Within the first weeks of the seizure of power, various persons within the party leadership of the National Socialists, first and foremost Adolf Hitler, set out to abandon the previously practiced opposition to highway construction and, on the contrary, now actively promoted it by various means. Several

motives can be listed for this sudden change of mind.

#### 4.1.1 Trucks as an independent substitute/competitor to railroads

A not inconsiderable motivation for advocating the expansion of expressways resulted from the German defeat in World War I, and in particular from the following occupation of the Ruhr area by France. According to VAHRENKAMP (2004, p. 237-239), this occupation led to an almost complete confiscation of the transport capacities of the German national railways, the Deutsche Reichsbahn, in the Ruhr region, the effects of which extended far beyond this region. The resulting shortcomings, especially in freight traffic, could partially be offset by the use of trucks. Despite their relative novelty, these transport vehicles were able to prove their practicability within a short period of time, as well as their independence from the rail infrastructure in particular. The growth figures for trucks used in Germany show this clearly: in the 1920s, the number of trucks increased by 22% annually, while at the same time the effectiveness of these transport vehicles steadily increased. The average cost of a transport by truck could be reduced by about 60% within the 1920s due to technical progress in truck construction.<sup>24</sup> Another statistic highlights possible speed advantages compared to the transport of goods by rail: while the average speed at which goods were transported by rail in the 1920s was 1.5 to 3 kilometers per hour, an average speed of over 14 km/h could be achieved with trucks. The possibility of delivery directly to the final destination, independent of station locations, was another advantage of truck transport. Thus, for the first time in the 1920s, a direct competitor to the railroad's almost complete monopoly on long-distance transportation emerged that could offer decisive advantages and at the same time stimulate the general transportation market in Germany. Likewise, for Hitler in particular, promoting truck traffic was also desirable because it would provide the German Reich with sufficient

transportation vehicles in the event of a possible war.<sup>25</sup>

#### **4.1.2 Autobahn construction as a gigantic job creation measure**

Unemployment figures were on the rise during the years of the Weimar Republic, exacerbated in part by the Great Depression of the late 1920s. According to LONGERICH (1995, p. 303-304), 2.8 million people were officially counted without work in Germany in 1929. By 1931, this figure had risen to over 4 million, and by 1932, official figures put the number of unemployed in Germany at over 6 million. However, the *officially not registered unemployed* (referred to by LONGERICH as the “invisible unemployed”), which amounted to an estimated 2.5 million people in 1932, also have to be added to these unemployment figures. Especially in the case of a populist party like the National Socialist Workers' Party, the degree to which rampant unemployment in Germany could be tackled can be taken as a general measure of its success. The National Socialists were evidently aware of the possibilities large-scale construction of expressways could offer in creating jobs relatively quickly for a relatively large number of people, since this effect could already be observed in Italy with the construction of the Autostrada as well as in Germany with the construction of the Rheinische Provinzialstraße Köln-Bonn, and has further been calculated within the plans for the HAFRABA - the construction of which had been vehemently opposed by the National Socialists until Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor. It is therefore not surprising that, as VAHRENKAMP (2004, p. 229) showed, a large number of letters from the years 1933 to 1935 from district leaders and district councils to the National Socialist government were found in the Federal Archives of the Federal Republic of Germany, in which the beginning of highway construction work in their districts had been asked for as soon as possible, since unemployment and the resulting poverty had skyrocketed there.

#### 4.2 Start of the construction of the Reichsautobahn in 1933

Consequently, it is not surprising that Adolf Hitler in particular, as chief strategist of the NSDAP, pushed for the construction of the Reichsautobahn<sup>26</sup>, to begin as soon as possible and therefore wanted to transform the opposition to highway construction previously practiced by his party into all-encompassing support. Since the National Socialist Workers' Party was fundamentally based on the *Führerprinzip* [the practice of dictatorship and all-encompassing top-down decision making], Hitler was able to steer his party comrades onto a course supporting highway construction in a relatively short time. The local politicians of the districts and the general population, who were suffering greatly from the high unemployment, were not expected to offer too much resistance to the construction work - on the contrary, in most cases they were likely to welcome these job-creation measures, as the above-mentioned letters found in the Federal Archives made clear. The only major problem that remained was the financing of this gigantic project.

In his speech on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1933, i.e. on Labor Day - this date was deliberately chosen for symbolic reasons - Hitler sets out his intentions of job creation measures for the German people:

Und damit ergibt sich eine weitere Aufgabe: die Beseitigung der Arbeitslosigkeit durch Arbeitsbeschaffung. Die Arbeitsbeschaffung teilen wir in zwei große Gruppen. Zunächst die private Arbeitsbeschaffung. Hier wird noch in diesem Jahre ein großes Werk in Angriff genommen, ein Werk, das die deutschen Bauten, die Häuser wieder in Ordnung bringen und damit Hunderttausenden Arbeit geben wird. Wir stellen ein Programm auf, (...) das Programm unseres Straßenneubaues, eine gigantische Aufgabe, die Milliarden erfordert. Wir werden die Widerstände dagegen aus dem Wege räumen und die Aufgabe groß beginnen. Wir werden damit eine Serie öffentlicher Arbeiten einleiten, die mithelfen, die Arbeitslosenzahl immer

*Hitler's Autobahn - A propaganda myth still strong today*

weiter herunterzudrücken.

[And this gives rise to another task: the elimination of unemployment through the creation of jobs. We will divide job creation into two large groups. First, private sector job creation. In this area, a major project will be launched this year, a project that will put German buildings and houses back in order and thus provide work for hundreds of thousands of people. We set up a schedule, (...) the schedule of our new road construction, a gigantic task requiring billions. We will remove every opposition to it and start this task in a big way. We will thus initiate a series of public projects that will help to reduce the unemployment figures further and further.]

Adolf Hitler, 1933. Quoted in: DOMARUS, 1965, p. 263

In order to give the construction of the Reichsautobahn a legal basis, the *Gesetz über die Errichtung eines Unternehmens Reichsautobahn* [Law on the Establishment of the Reichsautobahn Corporation] was enacted on June 30, 1933. This law placed the construction of the Reichsautobahn, of all things, under the control of the German railroad company Deutsche Reichsbahn:

Die Deutsche Reichsbahn-Gesellschaft wird ermächtigt, zum Bau und Betrieb eines leistungsfähigen Netzes von Kraftfahrbahnen ein Zweigunternehmen zu errichten, welches den Namen „Reichsautobahnen“ trägt.

[The Deutsche Reichsbahn Company is authorized to establish a branch company for the construction and operation of an efficient network of highways, which shall bear the name 'Reichsautobahnen'.]

REICHSGESETZBLATT Nr. 28, 1933, p. 509, § 1

The powers of the new Reichsautobahn company were further specified and expanded in the course of 1933.<sup>27</sup> The incorporation of the Reichsautobahn under the state railroad company may at first seem surprising and illogical -

after all, this highway was to become a direct competitor of the railroad. On the contrary, however, this proved to be a clever move on the part of the National Socialists: since the construction of the Reichsautobahn was now directly subordinated to the Deutsche Reichsbahn and the latter thus gained direct influence on the construction and operation of it, the hitherto persistent resistance of the German railroad company could be broken. A closer look at the newly created law reveals, however, that it was not the Deutsche Reichsbahn itself but a so-called *Generalinspektor* [Chief Inspector] independent of the Deutsche Reichsbahn that was to be given authority over the most important areas, such as *Linienführung* [route planning] and *Ausgestaltung der Kraftfahrbahnen* [actual construction of the motorways].<sup>28</sup> Fritz Todt was appointed the first and, until the end of the war, only Generalinspektor subordinate directly to Hitler. Under § 6, the Deutsche Reichsbahn itself was only permitted to appoint advisory boards without any binding authority.

On August 18 the next important step in their preparations for the construction of the Reichsautobahn was taken by the National Socialists: on this day, the HAFRABA Association was forcibly dissolved. All plans and other resources developed so far had to be transferred to the newly founded *Gesellschaft zur Vorbereitung des Reichsautobahnbaus e.V. (GEZUVOR)* [Society for the Preparation of the Reichsautobahn Construction].<sup>29</sup> Thus, quite a large part of the preliminary work and herein especially the planning stage could be taken over directly. Also, actual examples of successful completion and operation had already been provided by the highway of the Rheinische Provinzialstraße Köln-Bonn and the Italian Autostrada, which since years ago had been in active use.

### 4.3 Financing of the construction work

As far as the financing of the Reichsautobahn was concerned, the forced sub-

*Hitler's Autobahn - A propaganda myth still strong today*

division of the construction project under the German railroad company Deutsche Reichsbahn could again be seen as a clever move on the part of the National Socialists. Since - at least on paper - the Deutsche Reichsbahn was responsible for the construction of the Reichsautobahn, it also had to provide the capital stock of this newly formed construction company, which amounted to 50 million Reichsmark.<sup>30</sup> However, since this initial capital was by no means sufficient to be able to complete the planned lines, further sources of financing had to be tapped. The *Deutsche Reichsbank* [Central Bank of Germany] and above all Reichsbank President Hjalmar Schacht, who had been a supporter of the National Socialist Party in Germany's high economic circles from the earliest days, devised a plan for financing the Autobahn construction work. For this purpose, the *Reichsautobahnen-Bedarfs-Gesellschaft mbH (RABG)* [Corporation for the Needs of the Reichsautobahn] was founded, which, according to HARTMANNSGRUBER (2004, p. 654), was a "*phantom company with the sole purpose of concealing the fact of credit creation by means of expansion of money circulation under the direction of the Reichsbank by feigning real capital strength*". By means of a network of bills of exchange, which could be seen as legally and financially at least questionable, 1.15 billion Reichsmark were made available for the construction of the Reichsautobahn between 1934 and 1936.<sup>31</sup> However, because of the financial uncertainty of these bills of exchange as well as the ever-increasing construction costs, the Reichsbank withdrew completely from financing the Reichsautobahn project in 1936, which suddenly confronted the National Socialists with the problem of having to find a new source of funds within a very short time. The successful example of the construction of the Rheinische Provinzialstraße Köln-Bonn was again used as a guideline. As described in Section 3.3, the *Arbeitslosenhilfefonds* [German Unemployment Relief Fund] had contributed a large part of the funds for its construction, since the construction of the expressway was officially



considered a job creation measure. Consequently, the absolute bulk of the construction financing of the Reichsautobahn was provided by the *Reichsanstalt für Arbeitslosenvermittlung und Arbeitslosenversicherung (RAVAV)* [German Agency for Recruitment of the Unemployed and Unemployment Insurance], the sum of which amounted to over 3.3 billion Reichsmarks by March 1945.<sup>32</sup>

Adolf Hitler's first groundbreaking ceremony to mark the start of construction of the Reichsautobahn, which was exploited to the extreme by the media, took place on September 23, 1933, on the Frankfurt-Mannheim section.<sup>33</sup> A long series of similar groundbreakings as inauguration ceremonies for further construction sections was to follow in the years to come.

The targets for Reichsautobahn construction were quite strict: starting in 1936, at least 1,000 kilometers had to be completed each year. This goal could be reached in 1936 and 1937, which, like Hitler's long series of groundbreaking ceremonies, was exploited in the German media.<sup>34</sup> On May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1938, however, Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler announced the start of construction on a new, even larger mammoth project than the Reichsautobahn had ever been: on the border with France in western Germany, the so-called *Westwall*<sup>35</sup> was to be built, a military defense system consisting of more than 11,000 bunkers as well as a multitude of trenches and fortified tank traps.<sup>36</sup> In order to be able to carry out this new construction project, which, just like the construction work on the Reichsautobahn was to be exploited propagandistically in all types of media, a considerable number of workers as well as construction tools and vehicles had to be diverted from Reichsautobahn construction, all of which were added to the construction of the Westwall. The construction goal of 3,000 kilometers of the Reichsautobahn in 1938 could only be achieved with some trickery; for example, a large number of kilometers had been declared as completed in the media, but in reality these were mere provisional roads with only one single lane.<sup>37</sup> Construction continued under this forced reduced output

### *Hitler's Autobahn - A propaganda myth still strong today*

more or less steadily until the end of 1941, but then had to be stopped altogether due to the general deterioration of Germany's war situation. In total, of the more than 20,000 planned kilometers just under 3,819 kilometers were actually completed.<sup>38</sup>

#### **4.4 The Autobahn as a Propaganda Instrument**

Long before the first groundbreaking ceremonies marked the start of construction work, the leadership of the National Socialist Party - in particular party leader Adolf Hitler together with Joseph Goebbels who later would be Minister of Propaganda - were already thinking about how this mammoth project could be exploited for propaganda purposes. From today's perspective, it is interesting to see that the Reichsautobahn was to be used in several different ways as a propaganda tool by the National Socialists, and in some cases even attempts were made to rewrite factual history for more effective propaganda use.

##### **4.4.1 Adolf Hitler as perceived "inventor" of the Autobahn**

The fact that Autobahn-like highways had already been in general use, both domestically and abroad, long before the National Socialists ever came to power in Germany has been adequately demonstrated at the beginning of this article. These historical facts, however, seemed to diminish the effectiveness of Nazi propaganda surrounding the Autobahn construction, since after all this great project of Reich Chancellor Hitler would appear as merely a copy or, at best, a continuation of already long-established projects. In order to be able to emphasize the outstanding position of the Reich Chancellor, the *Führer* [leader] of all Germans, and especially his unique genius, it was not enough for the Reichsautobahn project to be mentioned merely as another point in the long history of highway construction. Rather, various means were to be used to try

to portray Germany's Reichsautobahn as an outstanding monumental project, unprecedented anywhere in the world, and in this process to elevate Adolf Hitler as its sole, God-given ingenious mastermind.

One of the measures to let Hitler be seen - especially in his perception on the part of the German people - as the "true inventor" of the Autobahn was the subsequent creation of falsified historical facts. Since genuine historical facts, such as the construction and use of foreign highways like the Italian Autostrada could hardly be erased from the history books as well as from the memory of the people, historical facts now had to be invented in retrospect, which were supposed to prove that Hitler had already thought up concrete ideas and plans long before others had begun their (historically secured) planning in this regard. Especially the time period of Hitler's imprisonment from March 1924 to December of the same year in the prison of Landsberg am Lech was now officially stated as the period in which Hitler had his ingenious mental inspirations of building a Germany-wide highway. In various media this was now stated as a generally known fact, as shown for example by the poem of Herybert Menzel, one of the most famous German poets at the time of the Third Reich:

Während seiner Haft, als seine Bewegung zerschlagen war, als seine Gegner ihn selbst vernichtet hielten, als er das Buch der Deutschen schrieb, da schlug er auch die Karte unseres Vaterlandes auf seinen Knien auseinander und dachte in sie hinein seine Reichsautobahnen: So werden sie laufen! Da kaum noch einer an ihn glaubte, glaubte er so fest an sich und seine Aufgabe und bereitete alles vor.

[During his imprisonment, when his movement was crushed, when his opponents thought he himself was destroyed, when he wrote the Book of the Germans, he also unfolded the map of our fatherland on his knees and thought into it his Reichsautobahn: So it will proceed! Since hardly any-

*Hitler's Autobahn - A propaganda myth still strong today*

one believed in him anymore, he believed so firmly in himself and his task and prepared everything.]

Herybert MENZEL, *Das Erlebnis der Reichsautobahn*, Reichsministerium Speer, Munich 1943. Excerpt in: KULKE, 2016

However, in contrast to these invented historiographies, no evidence or hints at his strokes of genius regarding the construction of the Autobahn can be found in Adolf Hitler's factual history. Even in his two-volume book *Mein Kampf*, which for the biggest part had been written during his imprisonment in Landsberg and which almost comprehensively describes every detail and motivation of his political and social convictions, there is no mention whatsoever of road building projects he was planning, let alone of a nationwide highway system.<sup>39</sup>

Facts and evidence that could speak against Hitler as the first thinker of the Autobahn were erased or reinterpreted as far as possible. This is what happened, for example, with the Rheinische Provinzialstraße Köln-Bonn, which had already been in public operation since August 1932. From the state side, this actual Autobahn was “downgraded” and now merely listed as a *Kraftwagenstraße erster Ordnung* [first-order motor road].<sup>40</sup> Thus, in National Socialist historiography, the Reichsautobahn built by Führer Hitler could be praised as the very first. It was not until the end of the 1930s that plans became known to integrate the Rheinische Provinzialstraße Köln-Bonn into the German Reichsautobahn network, deliberately concealing the fact that this road had actually been in active use for several years before the Reichsautobahn conceived by the Führer had been completed. The same was done with the AVUS, which was opened to traffic in 1940 as a connection to the Berlin Ring.

It should come as no surprise that the actual inventors and builders of the preceding Autobahn highways did not agree with the forced erasure of their

works from the history books and the memory of the Germans, only to be able to elevate the National Socialist Reich Chancellor, who demonstrably had no influence whatsoever on the initial planning and construction of the German Autobahn. Within Germany, however, those complaints were silenced with sustained pressure from the National Socialists. For example, German news magazine *Der Spiegel* printed parts of a letter from Fritz Todt, Generalinspektor now responsible for Reichsautobahn construction, to Kurt Kaftan, the press officer of HAFRABA, which reveal the means the National Socialists used to silence dissenting voices to the falsification of German historiography:

Ich darf Sie bei dieser Gelegenheit darauf aufmerksam machen, daß Ihre Darlegungen auch insofern nicht richtig sind, als die Jetzige Ausführung der Reichsautobahnen schon auf Pläne des Führers im Jahre 1924 zurückgeht. Diese Reichsautobahnen, wie wir sie jetzt bauen, haben nicht als von der Hafraba vorbereitet, und nicht als von mir (...) gebaut zu gelten, sondern einzig und allein als die Straßen Adolf Hitlers. Sehr geehrter Herr Kaftan, ich schreibe Ihnen diesen Brief nicht als Rüge, aber als eine Warnung und in der Absicht, daß Sie für Ihre schriftstellerische Tätigkeit die Einstellung finden möchten, die ich für die einzig richtige halte.

[I would like to take this opportunity to point out to you that your statements also are incorrect insofar as the current construction of the Reichsautobahn already goes back to plans of the Führer in 1924. These Reich highways, as we are building them now, are not to be considered as prepared by the Hafraba, and not as built by me (...), but solely as the roads of Adolf Hitler. Dear Mr. Kaftan, I am writing you this letter not as a rebuke, but as a warning and with the intention that you would like to find for your writing activity the attitude which I consider to be the only correct one.]

DER SPIEGEL 3/1963, p. 57

*Hitler's Autobahn - A propaganda myth still strong today*

In ways like this, people living in Germany could be intimidated to accept the history of the creation of the Autobahn propagated by the National Socialists - or at least to remain silent about the true historic events - since it was well known in Germany how, after their seizure of power, the National Socialist rulers dealt with unwanted opponents of their worldview. However, people living abroad could not be intimidated so easily, which is clearly shown, for example, by the reaction of the internationally well-known engineer of the Italian Autostrada, Dr. Puricelli, who is mentioned earlier under 2.2. Incensed by the history now propagated in Germany regarding the origin of the Autobahn, he now wrote extremely sharp letters to, among others, the Generalinspektor of the German Reichsautobahn and even threatened to call in Duce Benito Mussolini, whom he was well acquainted, in this matter. The letters of Dr. Puricelli preserved in the *Bundesarchiv* [Federal Archives of Germany] show that he was not the least bit taken with the revision of history by the National Socialists.<sup>41</sup> He makes it clear that not Adolf Hitler, but he himself was the inventor of the Autobahn: *“Mit der Unterstützung Mussolinis habe ich die erste Autostraße erdacht, studiert und ausgeführt - und zwar im Jahre 1922.”* [With the support of Mussolini, I conceived, studied and executed the first Autobahn – that was in 1922.] (PURICELLI, December 3, 1937, In: FRIEDRICH 2013). Likewise, he clearly states his own pioneering role in the first International Road Congresses, as well as the pioneering role of the HAFRABA for the construction of the German Reichsautobahn, and makes it equally clear that he officially belonged to the HAFRABA association as a consultant. Furthermore, he strongly affirms several times that he will never give his consent for a rewriting of factual history: *“Ich kann aber nicht erlauben, dass mir die Idee, mein geistiges Eigentum, genommen oder abgestritten wird.”* [But I cannot allow the idea, my intellectual property, to be taken from me or being denied.] (PURICELLI, December 3, 1937, In: FRIEDRICH 2013). Only through vari-

ous undertakings of appeasement and concessions on the part of, among others, the managing director of the HAFRABA association, Willy Hof, was Inspector General Todt at least able to dissuade Dr. Puricelli from calling on Mussolini in this matter.

#### 4.4.2 Exploitation of Autobahn construction in the media

The construction work on the Reichsautobahn proved to be extremely versatile in its usability for National Socialist propaganda. In contrast to a single building to be erected, multiple “first groundbreaking” by the Führer Adolf Hitler could take place in all areas through which the Autobahn was to pass in the future. This was exploited in all available mass media, especially in the press as well as in news shows in German cinemas. According to VAHRENKAMP, 2004, p. 229, the construction works on the Reichsautobahn were started almost simultaneously in 22 places spread all over Germany. For the respective resident population, especially in the provinces - quite in contrast to buildings that were to be built in distant, wealthy cities such as Berlin or Frankfurt - these construction works would have a direct influence on the areas in which they lived and, once completed, would also have a positive and immediate effect on their transport and economic situation. Knowing this, a series of ground-breaking ceremonies were held by Hitler himself throughout Germany at the start of construction; the photos taken during these ceremonies, as can be seen for example in Image 3, had an effect that should not be underestimated, not only on the population of the major German cities that were to be connected by the Reichsautobahn, but above all on the rural areas of Germany, which were now directly connected to the major cities by the Reichsautobahn, so to speak.

However, not only these first groundbreakings enjoyed propagandistic exploitation; especially the opening ceremonies at the completion of sections

*Hitler's Autobahn - A propaganda myth still strong today*



Image 3: One of the many groundbreaking by the Führer himself

of the Reichsautobahn were celebrated as mass events. For example, for the opening of the mere 22-kilometer stretch between Frankfurt and Darmstadt on May 19, 1935, more than 600,000 people were mobilized to line up media-effectively along the newly constructed Reichsautobahn.<sup>42</sup>

Even unusual-seeming propagandistic methods were used to convey the Reichsautobahn idea to as many layers of the German population as possible. Several art exhibitions were held with the theme of staging “Hitler's roads” as artistic muses, for example, the 1936 exhibition “Die Straßen Adolf Hitlers in der Kunst” [The Roads of Adolf Hitler in Art], held in Munich, Berlin, and Breslau, among other cities.<sup>43</sup> More than 500 works, such as paintings and sculptures, gave the Reichsautobahn, which was essentially purely utilitarian, an artistic gloss that was intended to set it apart from ordinary roads and foreign highways. As a modern branch of art, photography was also used to



depict, on the one hand, the construction work done by heroically depicted workers and, on the other hand, the completed Reichsautobahn in actual use. These photos were mainly used in the press, but sometimes there were also photo exhibitions as well as book publications by well-known photo artists on this subject, such as Erna LENDVAI-DIRCKSEN (1937).

The relatively new mass medium of the motion picture, which had been used extensively by the National Socialists, was also used to propagate the idea of the Reichsautobahn. On the one hand, there were a large number of educational films and documentaries on topics that directly addressed the construction of the Reichsautobahn as well as indirectly dealt with it, such as the documentary film *Vierhundert bauen eine Brücke* [Four hundred men are building a bridge] from 1936/37.<sup>44</sup> Even a Reichsautobahn feature drama was made: the fictional film drama *Mann für Mann* [Man for Man], released to German cinemas in 1939, explicitly focused on the heroic struggle of workers in creating the Reichsautobahn.<sup>45</sup> This film work was produced by the *Universum Film AG (Ufa)*, Germany's biggest film production company, which had been nationalized during the Third Reich and produced a variety of films both overtly and covertly propagating National Socialism.

#### 4.4.3 Propaganda and symbolic politics inherent in the Reichsautobahn

However, it was not only through its media presence that propaganda was carried out for and about the Reichsautobahn - propagandistic stylistic devices were inherent in the Autobahn itself. That the symbolic power of the German Autobahn was by no means a coincidence, but was planned from the beginning, can be seen in the explanations of Generalinspektor Todt and his hand-picked architects and landscape consultants. According to REITSAM (2004, p. 240-241), the Generalinspektor understood the Reichsautobahn construction as a model project of "German technology," whereby the population was to per-

*Hitler's Autobahn - A propaganda myth still strong today*

ceive those roads of Adolf Hitler as exclusively German cultural creations. From the very beginning, the Reichsautobahn was thus to be distinguished from foreign highways in aesthetic terms as well. The concept applied to Reichsautobahn construction was not based on modern ideologies such as liberalism or even internationalism, but on a völkisch-national [ethnic German national] understanding of technology in general. Generalinspektor Todt explains in this regard:

Straßen sind Kulturgüter. (...) Die Erfüllung des reinen Verkehrs-zwecks ist nicht der letzte Sinn des deutschen Straßenbaus. Die deutsche Straße muß Ausdruck ihrer Landschaft und Ausdruck deutschen Wesens sein.

[Roads are cultural assets. (...) The fulfillment of pure traffic purpose is not the final purpose of German road construction. The German road must be an expression of its landscape and an expression of German essence.]

TODT, Fritz, 1937, quoted in REITSAM, 2004, p. 19

The very nature of the Reichsautobahn itself, its design embedding in the landscape, was thus intended - immediately understandable to any observer, especially on an emotional level - to be a gigantic symbol of National Socialist Germany. The design of the entrance to the Reichsautobahn at the state border near Salzburg, conceived by Hitler's favorite architect Albert Speer, which was never realized due to the start of the war, makes this propagandistic concept obvious even from today's perspective. As can be seen in Image 4, it was immediately clear to every user of the Reichsautobahn who was to drive through that gate, whether German or foreign, whose achievement the Autobahn was. This architectural style can be found in one form or another in all the buildings created by the National Socialists and, especially through their architectural nature, in itself sends a message to all viewers that is both subliminal and clearly perceptible.



Image 4: The planned entrance to the Reichsautobahn at the border to Austria

Not only the carriageways of the Reichsautobahn, but above all every structure that goes hand in hand with it, such as driveways, bridges, rest and service stations, as well as leisure and recreational facilities, were intended to send emotional messages to viewers and users in addition to their obvious purpose of use.

#### 4.5 The Job Creation Measure in Reality

One of the declared goals of the construction of the Reichsautobahn was its widely propagated purpose as a job creation measure for a large number of German unemployed of that time, as described in 4.1.2. Since the construction of the Rheinische Provinzialstraße Köln-Bonn could be used as a direct model for the construction of an Autobahn as a job creation measure (cf. 3.3), and since the planning of HAFRABA also addressed its construction as a measure to tackle unemployment (cf. 3.2), the National Socialists were able to take their cues for their own construction works. In particular, they adopted the tactic

*Hitler's Autobahn - A propaganda myth still strong today*

used in the construction of the Provinzialstraße to employ as many people as possible in the construction work by omitting heavy construction machinery and concentrating on human manual labor. Thus, in a letter of November 29, 1933, the *Reichsautobahndirektion* [Directorate of the Reichsautobahn] instructed the chief construction managers that the use of large equipment was undesirable.<sup>46</sup> Only if extraordinarily difficult conditions on site made the use of heavy equipment unavoidable, heavy machinery could be requested, but in such cases approval first had to be obtained from Fritz Todt, Generalinspektor in charge of highway construction. This resulted in extremely harsh working conditions and consequently in absenteeism among the workers due to injury and illness, which, together with the comparatively low pay, quickly led to resentment among the workers. In the media which were directly controlled by the National Socialists, as well as in the media which were sympathetic to or neutral toward the National Socialists, those circumstances of the construction work were concealed or, at best, addressed in an embellishing manner. Accordingly, at the beginning of the Reichsautobahn construction, the marching of the construction workers through the cities was celebrated like military parades, as the newspaper *Badische Presse*, for example, portrays this event in Heidelberg:

Unter klingendem Spiel zogen die Arbeiter in geschlossenem Zug durch die in reichem Fahنشmuck prangende Neckarstadt (...). In Reih und Glied standen SA, SS, Arbeitsdienst, Polizeimannschaften und das Heer der Arbeitslosen, über denen Transparente mit den Worten ‚Aus Arbeitslosigkeit und Not führt uns heute Adolf Hitler‘.

[The workers marched in a closed procession through the Neckar city, which was resplendent in rich flag decorations (...). In rank and file stood SA, SS, labor service, police teams and the army of the unemployed, above flying banners with the words 'From unemployment and misery Adolf Hitler leads us today'.]

Badische Presse, March 21, 1934 (quoted in VAHRENKAMP, 2009, p. 13).

In neutral media, which sporadically still existed in Germany at that time, the truth about the grievances during the construction of the Reichsautobahn was revealed unvarnished. Reports from the *Sozialdemokratische Partei* [German Social Democratic Party] in particular disclosed the harsh reality of the workers and their deliberately hard work without heavy construction machinery, low pay, and absolutely inadequate housing and food.<sup>47</sup>

#### 4.5.1 German workers' strikes

As a direct consequence of these harsh working conditions, the unthinkable occurred in the Third Reich: workers went on strike, for example at the construction sites on the Autobahn Hamburg-Bremen, and in some cases were even supported in this by guards who actually should have kept them in check and were directly subordinate to the NSDAP.<sup>48</sup> The reaction of the National Socialists, first and foremost Generalinspektor Todt, was twofold. On the one hand, those who vociferously criticized the working conditions and pay were arrested and some were even sent to concentration camps.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, the abuses at the construction sites and the difficult working conditions could not be further glossed over or even denied. Above all, in order to appease the workers, some of whom had previously had to sleep only in makeshift tents or barracks, the “*Gesetz über die Unterkunft bei Bauten*” [Law on Accommodation in Construction] was enacted on December 13, 1934, in order to provide the workers with “*Schlaf- und Aufenthaltsräume bereitzustellen, die die Arbeiter gegen Gefahren für die Gesundheit, insbesondere gegen Unbilden der Witterung schützen*” [sleeping and recreation rooms that protect them against health hazards, especially against the inclemency of the weather].<sup>50</sup> However, the fact that this law promised suitable accommodations for workers on paper

only becomes clear in § 2, where it is described that the *Reichsarbeitsminister* [Minister of Labor] can determine what requirements the actual accommodations described in § 1 must - or need not - fulfill on site. In the National Socialist media, photos of comfortable model barracks for the Autobahn workers were printed, but these rarely had anything in common with the real accommodations to be found on site.

#### **4.5.2 Use of forced laborers**

An exodus of many workers in Germany's steadily improving economic situation in 1936 and 1937 from Autobahn construction work into other industrial sectors with better working conditions and higher pay had direct consequences on the way work on the Reichsautobahn continued. This was only reinforced by Hitler's announcement in May 1938 that the Westwall, already described in 4.2, was to be built, since work on this giant fortification now had priority at the Führer's behest and was to be carried out by as many workers as possible.

The permission of the construction management to allow the use of heavy construction machinery due to the lack of manpower instead of forcing even the heaviest work to be carried out by hand without specialized construction machinery, as had been the case up to then, could not be implemented in practice entirely as hoped, since in addition to the manpower, much of the heavy construction machinery was also withdrawn for the construction of the Westwall. As a way out of this situation, Generalinspektor Todt demanded the massive use of prisoners of war and civilian prisoners for the construction of the Reichsautobahn, which was approved and immediately permitted by the *Reichsarbeitsministerium* [Reich Ministry of Labor] and the *Auswärtiges Amt* [Foreign Office]. According to SCHÜTZ et al (1996, p. 87), out of a total of 62,600 workers in the construction of the Reichsautobahn at the end of 1940, only 21,900 were regular (i.e. German) workers; 28,600 were prisoners of war

and civilian prisoners, 1,100 were workers from Poland that had regular working contracts, 5,700 were workers from the areas of today's Czech Republic and Slovakia with regular working contracts and 4,700 "other" workers whose contract conditions varied. GRUNER (1998, p. 12-18) states in more detail that mainly Jewish persons were deported to Germany and forced to do labor, starting with 1,300 people from the Jewish ghetto of Litzmannstadt (the Polish city of Lodz, occupied and renamed by the National Socialists) in December 1940 to the Reichsautobahn construction site at Frankfurt/Oder-Posen. The working conditions and accommodations, due to which the German workers had gone on strike a few months earlier, were even far worse for the forced laborers. They were held behind barbed wire and under the strictest security measures by the local police as well as the *Gestapo* ["Geheime Staatspolizei", Secret State Police] and forced to work. Following this same pattern, forced laborers were also sent to other highway construction sections in the German Reich. However, a planned large-scale project by the *Reichsstatthalter* [German governor of foreign countries under German control] and the Ministry of Labor in 1941 to further deport 73,000 Jewish persons to Germany for forced labor, in addition to the nearly 30,000 forced laborers already deported for construction work, failed due to an objection by Hitler and the leadership of the National Socialist Party of Germany: if this plan was carried out, the number of Jewish persons in Germany would increase by more than 40%, which ran counter to the plans of the National Socialists to drive the Jewish faith out of the German Reich altogether.<sup>51</sup> Thus, in the fall of 1941, in some construction sections, especially in eastern Germany, more than half of the workers employed were deported forced laborers of the Jewish faith from eastern European countries. On the other hand, in the construction sections in western Germany, for example, Jewish forced laborers from Luxembourg were deported for forced labor.

That the fact of the use of deported forced laborers in the construction of the

*Hitler's Autobahn - A propaganda myth still strong today*

Reichsautobahn did not have and partly still does not have too much publicity among the German population, as well as the difficulty to obtain exact figures of this use of forced laborers today, can be attributed to extensive measures to conceal these facts on the part of the National Socialist rulers. GRUNER (1998, p. 14), for example, was able to prove that there had been specific instructions to refrain from any concrete specifications or even mentioning of those "Judenlager" [Jewish camps] during the time of the extensive deportations of Jewish German citizens, which rose steadily through the years to a peak in February and March 1943, and above all not to record any evidence of this in writing. For example, during the extensive arrests and subsequent deportations of the remaining Jewish population of Berlin in February 1943, the instructions were that the Jewish forced laborers were not to be recorded in writing:

Auch die in verschiedenen Betrieben (...) geschlossen eingesetzten polnischen Juden, die jeweils in geschlossenen Lagern untergebracht sind, dürfen hierbei nicht erfaßt werden.

[The Polish Jews deployed to various factories (...), who are housed in closed camps respectively, are hereby not to be recorded.]

GRUNER, 1998, p. 14

The list compiled by GRUNER of proven camps for Jewish forced laborers distributed over the German "Altreich", i.e. the areas of Germany according to the borders of 1937, shows that out of a total of 44 camps verifiably at least 19 camps had forced Jewish laborers to work on the construction of the Reichsautobahn.<sup>52</sup> Because of these deliberately concealed facts about the use of forced labor, it is consequently impossible to compile reliable figures about exactly how many forced laborers were made to work on the construction of the Reichsautobahn and where, or even how many of them died in the process and in what manner.



A typical example is the forced labor camp “Oderblick” in the German-Polish border region near Swiecko. According to eyewitnesses still alive today, more than 10,000 forced laborers were imprisoned in this camp, who were to be used, among other things, in the construction of the Reichsautobahn. According to those eyewitness accounts, the living conditions for the forced laborers imprisoned here could be described as purely catastrophic, which resulted in thousands of the inmates perishing here: *“They had hardly any food and supplies.”*<sup>53</sup> Due to the active concealment of the facts of the forced labor camps on the part of the National Socialists, however, not much verified information about these camps exist today, apart from those eyewitness accounts. Indicative of this is the memorial plaque at the site of the former “Oderblick” camp, on which only 30 names of forced laborers who died here are listed; these are the names of the only dead of that camp that could be identified to date.

The problem of concealing and covering up the facts and circumstances of the deportations and the use of forced laborers in the Third Reich, as demonstrated by this example, basically applies to all forced labor camps and the fates of the people forced to do hardest work and who largely perished in the process in the Third Reich and European territories occupied by it.

Estimates, such as those made by the Corporate History Department which was set up by the Volkswagen Group to deal with its own National Socialist history, put the total number of forced laborers used in the Third Reich at over 7 million people, consisting of foreign civilians, prisoners of war, and concentration camp inmates.<sup>54</sup>

The facts that the “roads of the Führer” were built by dissatisfied, sometimes even striking German workers under deliberately brought about harsh conditions, and further to a large extent by deported foreign - even Jewish (!) - forced laborers, were facts that ran contrary to the National Socialist

### *Hitler's Autobahn - A propaganda myth still strong today*

propaganda of job creation measures for the German people with the construction of those drivable monuments to the Führer and unsurprisingly found no mention in the German media landscape that was almost totally controlled by the National Socialists.

#### **4.5.3 End of construction work**

With a few exceptions, construction work on the Reichsautobahn was halted at the beginning of 1942 due to the war, which also put an end to the use of forced laborers at these construction sites. These forced laborers were for the most part included in the deportations carried out until June 1943, which now also included all Jewish forced laborers from the camps within Germany, and were shipped to camps in the territories occupied by Germany in Eastern Europe.

#### **4.6 The real benefits and effects of the construction works as job creation measures**

How can the construction work of the Reichsautobahn be realistically evaluated from today's perspective as an effective job creation measure, as tirelessly propagated by the National Socialists in all available media? After all, it cannot be denied that through the efforts of the National Socialists and especially their leadership, large-scale construction work took place and thus provided at least a starting signal for one of the most famous German modern technical achievements. Well, purely from the figures known today, the greatest effectiveness of the Reichsautobahn must be seen more in the context as a gigantic propaganda tool and less as a real job creation measure: The figures given by SCHÜTZ et al (1996, p. 56-57) for the number of people officially employed in the construction of the Reichsautobahn must be considered rather small, especially in relation to the total number of unemployed in Germany during the years of

National Socialist rule. For example, it can be proven today that in August 1934, just about 50,000 German workers were directly employed in the construction of the Reichsautobahn. This number reached its absolute peak in July 1936 with about 124,483 workers and then fluctuated between 80,000 and 110,000 officially counted workers in the years 1937-1939. Compared with the figures of over 6 million officially registered unemployed in Germany in 1932, it must be said today that even the peak of employment of German workers in the construction of the Reichsautobahn in no way lived up to the propagandistically disseminated messages of extensive procurement measures. To this must be added the fact of the use of deported forced laborers from abroad, the exact numbers of which can probably never be precisely stated.

Apart from this, the German labor market had recovered nevertheless to large parts in the course of Germany's general economic recovery in 1934, when the official unemployment figures had fallen to 2.5 million.<sup>55</sup> It goes without saying that such information did not find any mention in the German media of the time.

#### 4.7 German highways without cars?

One problem that remained despite all the apparent advantages that the construction of the Reichsautobahn was supposed to bring was the glaring lack of cars that could have driven those roads of the Führer in the first place. As already described at 3.2, cars were still rather rare in Germany compared to other European and especially American countries. On the contrary, cars have always been seen in Germany as a symbol of wealth and a leisure pursuit for the rich upper class, rather than something that ordinary workers could ever afford. For this reason, the majority of Germany's ordinary population, even the broad base of the National Socialist Workers' Party, had largely rejected plans to build the Reichsautobahn.<sup>56</sup> According to KÖNIG (2004, p. 257), the

*Hitler's Autobahn - A propaganda myth still strong today*

German Bureau of Statistics even stated that as late as 1937, only 1.1% of all car buyers in Germany had been workers.

This was the starting point for another move of National Socialist economic propaganda, when the *Reichsverband der Deutschen Automobilindustrie (RDA)* [Reich Association of the German Automobile Industry] commissioned automobile designer Ferdinand Porsche, who had close ties to the National Socialist Party, on June 22, 1934, to develop a car that was as cheap as possible and could be produced in large quantities on assembly lines.<sup>57</sup> The Nazi sub-organization of the *Deutsche Arbeitsfront* [German Labor Front] named “Kraft durch Freude (KdF)” [“Strength through joy”] finally put these plans into practice on May 28, 1937, when the *Gesellschaft zur Vorbereitung des Deutschen Volkswagens mbH* [Company for the Preparation of the German Volkswagen Ltd.] was founded and work began on building a factory for the “car for the people” (i.e. the literal translation of the term Volkswagen) on a large scale near the town of Fallersleben.

With the slogan “*Fünf Mark die Woche musst Du sparen – willst Du im eignen Wagen fahren*” [“Five Reichsmark a week you have to save - if you want to drive your own car”], more than 330,000 Germans could be encouraged to pay a part of their salary every week in order to receive an automobile sometime in the future that did not actually exist yet.<sup>58</sup> Although not a single Volkswagen was delivered to the German savers who had been paying over the years by the end of the war (the workers' deposits were used to produce military vehicles and weapons with extensive use of forced labor in the gigantic VW factories that gave birth to the new city called “Wolfsburg”), the effect of “dreaming of owning a car” had a direct impact on the broad acceptance of the German population regarding the Reichsautobahn, who now saw those highways all the more as - at least in the future, when they will own their own car - bringing them personal and immediate benefits in terms of traffic and leisure.

As was the case with the construction of the Reichsautobahn, in retrospect it was again clearly evident that there was a wide gap between the propaganda praising the automobile for everyone and the nationwide highways, which was tirelessly disseminated by the National Socialist-controlled media, and the harsh reality.

## 5. Conclusion

The fact that the Reichsautobahn is not based on the genius of Adolf Hitler can be sufficiently proven by historical facts. Neither within Germany nor in comparison with other countries can this major National Socialist project be considered a pioneer of national expressway systems. However, the National Socialists knew how to use clever propaganda in all available media to present an image of the Reichsautobahn as a God-given stroke of genius by the Führer. At the same time, facts that could have cast a negative image on the Reichsautobahn and its praised effects for the German Reich were embellished or concealed, and a deliberate deception of the population was carried out.

With regard to the widely propagated job creation measures, with which the extremely costly construction work was justified and even exalted, it must be clearly stated in retrospect that in view of the labor market and the economic situation of the time, the reality of this highway construction could in no way live up to those media praises. Also, the German workers directly involved in the construction were deceived from the very beginning about the conditions at the construction sites, which sometimes even culminated in strikes. Further, the fact that the Reichsautobahn continued to be built over the years primarily through the mass use of forced laborers brought in from abroad, was actively kept secret from the German population and covered up by the National Socialist rulers in Germany.

The situation was similar with other projects that were supposed to justify

*Hitler's Autobahn - A propaganda myth still strong today*

the construction of the Reichsautobahn, such as the “Volkswagen” project, for which more than 330,000 Germans were encouraged to pay in savings deposits every week. The result of this car project, namely that not a single depositor was to receive his car by the end of the war, but rather that all savings deposits and factories were used to produce military goods, fits seamlessly into the fraudulent history of the construction of the Reichsautobahn.

The circumstance that, despite these historical facts, even today the opinion of the German Autobahn as a kind of genius gift from Hitler to the German people still circulates in large parts of the population shows how strong the propaganda of the National Socialists continued to be about this major construction project. And to neutralize this propaganda with historical facts is proving to be a difficult undertaking, because even today there is hardly any neutral media material on the construction of the Reichsautobahn: with regard to contemporary material, presently there seem to exist almost only those propagandistic materials disseminated by the National Socialists, which even today allow the image of the “roads of the Führer” to live on in the minds of people in Germany and partly even abroad.

In a sense, therefore, these circumstances show us today how all-encompassing and effective the propaganda techniques of the National Socialists were at that time.

- 
- 1 STATISTISCHES BUNDESAMT, 2022, p. 17
  - 2 WURZEL, 2017, as well as PANDER, 2022
  - 3 STILLE, 2007
  - 4 BUNDESMINISTERIUM FÜR DIGITALES UND VERKEHR, 2021, *Änderung der Anordnung über die Vertretung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland im Geschäftsbereich des Bundesministeriums für Verkehr und digitale Infrastruktur*
  - 5 *ibid.*, *Längenstatistik der Straßen des überörtlichen Verkehrs, Stand: 1. Januar 2021*
  - 6 BUNDESAMT FÜR JUSTIZ, 2013, § 18 Abs. 5 Satz 1 StVO
  - 7 BUNDESANSTALT FÜR STRASSENWESEN, 2017, p. 5

- 8 BUNDESAMT FÜR JUSTIZ, 2021, § 6 Abs. 1 Nr. 2 StVG
- 9 *ibid.*, § 1 - 15 BFStrMG
- 10 LAY, 1995, p. 255
- 11 MANGARANO, et al, 1970, p. 129-131
- 12 STROHKARK, 2001, p. 91-92
- 13 SENATO DELLA REPUBBLICA, 2022
- 14 ZELLER, 1990, p. 46
- 15 FREY, 1915, p. 605-607
- 16 Berlin.de, 2022
- 17 The afore mentioned banked curve was not open to the motorized public but was used only in races and experiments.
- 18 Vanderbilt Museum, 2022
- 19 FRIEDRICH, 2006, p. 71
- 20 *ibid.*, p. 74
- 21 VAHRENKAMP, 2004, p. 248
- 22 KELLER, 2014, p. 214
- 23 *ibid.*, p. 216
- 24 VAHRENKAMP (2004), p. 238
- 25 *ibid.* p. 244
- 26 The National Socialists preferred to use the designation "Reichsautobahn" instead of „Autobahn“, the addition of "Reich" bearing the meaning of "German Empire" or "national". This designation can also found in the names of other companies, e.g. the national railroad company "Deutsche Reichsbahn".
- 27 REICHSGESETZBLATT Nr. 32, 1933, p. 521 and REICHSGESETZBLATT Nr. 143, 1933, p. 1081
- 28 REICHSGESETZBLATT Nr. 28, 1933, p. 509, § 5 and § 8
- 29 VAHRENKAMP, 2004, p. 253
- 30 STERN, 2008, p. 13
- 31 HARTMANNSGRUBER, 2004, p. 655-663
- 32 *ibid.*, p. 665
- 33 DUMSCHAT, 2021
- 34 VAHRENKAMP, 2004, p. 252
- 35 In the English-speaking world, the Westwall was also known as the "Siegfried Line" or, in French, "Ligne Siegfried".
- 36 GROSS, 1982, p. 27 - 30
- 37 VAHRENKAMP, 2004, p. 252
- 38 SCHÜTZ, et al, 1996, p. 10-12
- 39 HITLER, 1925 & HITLER, 1927
- 40 KELLER, 2014, p. 4
- 41 FRIEDRICH, 2013
- 42 SCHÜTZ, et al, 2009, p. 51

*Hitler's Autobahn - A propaganda myth still strong today*

- 43 GRÖNER, 2002, p. 14
- 44 DEUTSCHES FILMINSTITUT & FILMMUSEUM e.V., *Vierhundert bauen eine Brücke*
- 45 *ibid.*, *Mann für Mann*
- 46 VAHRENKAMP, 2009, p. 65
- 47 RINGS, 1994, p. 206-207
- 48 VAHRENKAMP, 2001, p. 67
- 49 SCHÜTZ, et al, 1996, p. 71
- 50 REICHSGESETZBLATT Nr. 143, p. 1234, § 1
- 51 GRUBER, 1996, p. 13
- 52 GRUNER, 1998, p. 14-18
- 53 Quotation from HRECZUK (2008)
- 54 KOCKS, et al, 1999, p. 5
- 55 VAHRENKAMP, 2001, p. 21
- 56 VAHRENKAMP, 2004, p. 24
- 57 LUPA, 2008, p. 10
- 58 KÖNIG, 2004, p. 258

**Bibliography**

- ARCHIV DES LANDSCHAFTSVERBANDES RHEINLAND, 6. August 1932 - Freigabe der Kraftfahrstraße Köln-Bonn, Pulheim, 2014. Accessed Online 6<sup>th</sup> August 2022, [https://afz.lvr.de/de/archiv\\_des\\_lvr/dokument\\_des\\_monats/dokument\\_2014\\_08/2014\\_08.html](https://afz.lvr.de/de/archiv_des_lvr/dokument_des_monats/dokument_2014_08/2014_08.html)
- Berlin.de – Das offizielle Hauptstadtportal, AVUS, Berlin, BerlinOnline Stadtportal GmbH & Co. KG, 2022. Accessed online 6<sup>th</sup> August 2022, <https://www.berlin.de/sehenswuerdigkeiten/5317411-3558930-avus.html>
- BUNDESAMT FÜR JUSTIZ, Straßenverkehrs-Ordnung (StVO), Bonn, 2013. Accessed online 1<sup>st</sup> August 2022, [https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/stvo\\_2013/StVO.pdf](https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/stvo_2013/StVO.pdf)
- BUNDESAMT FÜR JUSTIZ, Gesetz über die Erhebung von streckenbezogenen Gebühren für die Benutzung von Bundesautobahnen und Bundesstraßen (Bundesfernstraßenmautgesetz – BFStrMG), Bonn, 2021. Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> August 2022, <https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/bfstrmg/BFStrMG.pdf>
- BUNDESAMT FÜR JUSTIZ, Straßenverkehrsgesetz (StVG), Bonn, 2021. Accessed online 1<sup>st</sup> August 2022, <https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/stvg/StVG.pdf>
- BUNDESANSTALT FÜR STRASSENWESEN, Tempolimits auf Bundesautobahnen 2015 - Schlussbericht zum Arbeitsprogramm-Projekt, Bergisch-Gladbach, 2017. Accessed online 1<sup>st</sup> August 2022, <https://www.bast.de/DE/Publikationen/Fachveroeffentlichungen/Verkehrstechnik/Downloads/V1-BAB-Tempolimit-2015.pdf>
- BUNDESMINISTERIUM FÜR DIGITALES UND VERKEHR, Änderung der Anordnung über die Vertretung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland im Geschäftsbereich des Bundesministeriums für Verkehr und digitale Infrastruktur (Vertretungsordnung



- Bundesverwaltung für Verkehr und Digitale Infrastruktur – VertrOBVI), Berlin, 2021. Accessed online 1<sup>st</sup> August 2022, [https://www.bmvi.de/SharedDocs/DE/Anlage/StB/aenderung-vertretungs-ordnung-des-bmvi.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile](https://www.bmvi.de/SharedDocs/DE/Anlage/StB/aenderung-vertretungs-ordnung-des-bmvi.pdf?__blob=publicationFile)
- BUNDESMINISTERIUM FÜR DIGITALE UND VERKEHR, Längenstatistik der Straßen des überörtlichen Verkehrs, Stand: 1. Januar 2021, Berlin, 2021. Accessed online 1<sup>st</sup> August 2022, [https://www.bmvi.de/SharedDocs/DE/Anlage/StB/laengenstatistik-2021.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile](https://www.bmvi.de/SharedDocs/DE/Anlage/StB/laengenstatistik-2021.pdf?__blob=publicationFile)
  - DER SPIEGEL 3/1963, Ein Straßenmärchen, Hamburg, Spiegel Verlag, 1963, p. 55-57
  - DEUTSCHES FILMINSTITUT & FILMMUSEUM e.V., Filmportal, Mann für Mann, Frankfurt am Main. Accessed online 26<sup>th</sup> August 2022. [https://www.filmportal.de/film/mann-fuer-mann\\_5ccf5d77ca804fc2b1dd665c63388de5](https://www.filmportal.de/film/mann-fuer-mann_5ccf5d77ca804fc2b1dd665c63388de5)
  - DEUTSCHES FILMINSTITUT & FILMMUSEUM e.V., Filmportal, Vierhundert bauen eine Brücke, Frankfurt am Main. Accessed online 26<sup>th</sup> August 2022. <https://www.filmportal.de/film/vierhundert-bauen-eine-bruecke-ein-film-vom-werden-der-reichsautobahnen>
  - DOMARUS, Max, Hitler - Reden und Proklamationen 1932 – 1945, Teil 1, Triumph, Leonberg, Pamminger & Partner, 1965
  - DUMSCHAT, Sabine, 23.9.1933 - Gründungsakt des Reichsautobahnbaus, Berlin, Bundesarchiv, 2021. Accessed online 14<sup>th</sup> August 2022, [https://www.bundesarchiv.de/DE/Content/Virtuelle-Ausstellungen/NS-Digitalisierung/2021-09-22\\_autobahn.html](https://www.bundesarchiv.de/DE/Content/Virtuelle-Ausstellungen/NS-Digitalisierung/2021-09-22_autobahn.html)
  - FREY, Adolf, “Verkehrs- und Übungsstraße für Kraftwagen von Berlin nach Potsdam”, Zentralblatt der Bauverwaltung, Nr. 92, Berlin, Verlag von Wilhelm Ernst & Sohn, 1915, p. 605–607. Accessed online 4<sup>th</sup> August 2022, [https://digital.zlb.de/viewer/image/14688302\\_1915/1/LOG\\_0003/](https://digital.zlb.de/viewer/image/14688302_1915/1/LOG_0003/)
  - FRIEDRICH, Karl-Heinz, „„Tunlich geradlinig“. Die Gründung des Vereins „HAFRABA“ 1926 und der Bau der deutschen Autobahnen“, Mitteilungen aus dem Bundesarchiv, Heft 2/2006, Koblenz, Bundesarchiv, 2006
  - FRIEDRICH, Karl-Heinz, Ein sehr, sehr guter Rat, Koblenz, Bundesarchiv, 2013. Accessed online 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2022, <https://www.bundesarchiv.de/DE/Content/Virtuelle-Ausstellungen/Ein-Sehr-Sehr-Guter-Rat/ein-sehr-sehr-guter-rat.html>
  - GRÖNER, Anke, “Zieh die Bahn durch Deutsches Land” – Gemälde zur Reichsautobahn von Carl Theodor Protzen (1887 – 1956), Wien, Böhlau Verlag, 2022
  - GROSS, Manfred, Der Westwall zwischen Niederrhein und Schnee-Eifel, Köln, Rheinland-Verlag GmbH, 1982
  - GRUNER, Wolf (1998), Die Arbeitslager für den Zwangseinsatz deutscher und nicht-deutscher Juden im Dritten Reich, 4. Kapitel, Berlin, Stiftung Topographie des Terrors (Hrg.), Gedenkstättenreundbrief Nr. 81, 1998
  - HARTMANNGRUBER, Friedrich, „... ungeachtet der noch ungeklärten Finanzierung“ - Finanzplanung und Kapitalbeschaffung für den Bau der Reichsautobahnen 1933-1945“, Historische Zeitschrift Nr. 278, München, Oldenbourg Verlag, 2004
  - HITLER, Adolf, Mein Kampf – Erster Band, München, Franz-Eher-Verlag, 1925

*Hitler's Autobahn - A propaganda myth still strong today*

- HITLER, Adolf, *Mein Kampf – Mein Kampf – Zweiter Band*, München, Franz-Eher-Verlag, 1927
- HRE CZUK, Agnieszka, “Zwangsarbeiter - Schwieriges Gedenken”, *Die Tageszeitung* 8. Mai 2008, Berlin, TAZ Verlags- und Vertriebsgesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung, 2008. Accessed online 11<sup>th</sup> September 2022, <https://taz.de/Zwangsarbeiter/!5182427/>
- KELLER, Christoph, “Ein Stück Autobahngeschichte im Kottenforst – Zur Planung der Reichsautobahn Köln-Bonn-Trier”, *Bonner Geschichtsblätter* Nr. 64, Bonn, Bonner Heimat- und Geschichtsverein (Stadtarchiv), 2014, p. 213-230
- KOCKS, Klaus, UHL, Hans-Jürgen, *Learning from history. Comments on efforts by Volkswagen's workforce, labor representatives, executives and corporate management to come to terms with the issue of forced labor during the Third Reich*, Wolfsburg, Volkswagen Aktiengesellschaft, Corporate History Department, 1999
- KÖNIG, Wolfgang, “Adolf Hitler vs. Henry Ford: The Volkswagen, the Role of America as a Model, and the Failure of a Nazi Consumer Society”, *German Studies Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2 May 2004, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004, pp. 249-268
- KULKE, Ulli, “Wie Hitler die Idee mit der Autobahn klaut”, *Die Welt* 01.05.2016, Berlin, Axel Springer SE, 2016
- LAY, Maxwell G., *Die Geschichte der Straße: Vom Trampelpfad zur Autobahn*, Frankfurt am Main, Campus Verlag, 1995
- LENDVAI-DIRCKSEN, Erna, *Reichsautobahn - Mensch und Werk*, Bayreuth, Gauverlag Bayreuth GmbH, 1937
- LONGERICH, Peter, *Deutschland 1918 - 1933. Die Weimarer Republik. Handbuch zur Geschichte*, Köln, Fackelträger-Verlag, 1995
- LUPA, Markus, *Volkswagen Chronicle - Becoming a Global Player. Historical Notes*, Wolfsburg, Volkswagen Aktiengesellschaft, Corporate History Department, 2008
- MANGARANO, Alfio, PELEZZI, Guiseppa, “Les Premières Autoroutes réalisées en Italie / Italy's first motorways”, *Aipcr/Piarc 1909-1969*, Paris, Aipcr/Piarc, 1970, p. 129-140
- PANDER, Jürgen, “Die deutsche Autobahn, Sehnsuchtsort von Rasern aus aller Welt”, *Der Spiegel*, Hamburg, Spiegel Verlag, 2022. Accessed online 31<sup>st</sup> July 2022, <https://www.spiegel.de/auto/fahrkultur/autobahn-tourismus-in-deutschland-traumziel-linke-spur-a-f4517474-a68f-42bf-9a66-b1f5fbfa4d21>
- Reichsgesetzblatt Nr. 143, 18. Dezember 1933, Berlin, Reichsministerium des Innern, 1933. Accessed online scan on 12<sup>th</sup> August 2022, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Deutsches\\_Reichsgesetzblatt\\_33T1\\_143\\_1081.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Deutsches_Reichsgesetzblatt_33T1_143_1081.jpg)
- Reichsgesetzblatt Nr. 28, 30. Juni 1933, Berlin, Reichsministerium des Innern, 1933. Accessed online scan on 12<sup>th</sup> August 2022, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Deutsches\\_Reichsgesetzblatt\\_33T2\\_028\\_0509.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Deutsches_Reichsgesetzblatt_33T2_028_0509.jpg)
- Reichsgesetzblatt Nr. 32, 12. August 1933, Berlin, Reichsministerium des Innern, 1933. Accessed online scan on 12<sup>th</sup> August 2022, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Deutsches\\_Reichsgesetzblatt\\_33T2\\_032\\_0521.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Deutsches_Reichsgesetzblatt_33T2_032_0521.jpg)

- REITSAM, Charlotte, Reichsautobahn im Spannungsfeld - Internationale und interdisziplinäre Verflechtungen, Habilitationsschrift, München, Fakultät für Architektur der Technischen Universität München, 2004
- RINGS, Hanspeter, "Die Reichsautobahn – Monument der Stärke?", Architektur in Mannheim, Mannheim, Edition Quadrat, 1994, p. 200-213
- SCHÜTZ, Erhard, GRUBER, Eckhard, Mythos Reichsautobahn – Bau und Inszenierung der "Straßen des Führers" 1933 – 1941, Berlin, Ch. Links Verlag, 1996
- SENATO DELLA REPUBBLICA, PURICELLI Piero. Accessed online 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2022, <https://notes9.senato.it/web/senregno.nsf/ed09445904d7899dc1257114003829b4/c8d9d90adee649064125646f005eca80?>
- STATISTISCHES BUNDESAMT, Außenhandel – Details zum Außenhandel Mai 2022. Accessed online 31<sup>st</sup> July 2022, [https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Wirtschaft/Aussenhandel/Publikationen/Downloads-Aussenhandel/statistischer-bericht-aussenhandel-2070100221055.xlsx?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile](https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Wirtschaft/Aussenhandel/Publikationen/Downloads-Aussenhandel/statistischer-bericht-aussenhandel-2070100221055.xlsx?__blob=publicationFile)
- STERN, Volkhard, Der Autobahn-Schnellverkehr der Deutschen Reichsbahn, Freiburg, EK-Verlag, 2008
- STILLE, Lana, "Talkshow-Rauswurf - Eva und die Autobahn", Die Tageszeitung, Berlin, TAZ Verlags- und Vertriebsgesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung, 2007. Accessed online 31<sup>st</sup> July 2022, <https://taz.de/Talkshow-Rauswurf/15193694/>
- STROHKARK, Ingrid, Die Wahrnehmung von ‚Landschaft‘ und der Bau von Autobahnen in Deutschland, Frankreich und Italien vor 1933, Dissertation an der Hochschule für Künste, Berlin, 2001. Accessed online 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2022, <https://www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/item/LTOYQ7MU22NZ3MMHTVRT3447PHTC3TPU>
- VAHRENKAMP, Richard, "Der Autobahnbau 1933 bis 1939 und das hessische Autobahnnetz". Zeitschrift des Vereins für Hessische Geschichte und Landeskunde (ZHG) Band 109, Kassel, Verein für hessische Geschichte und Landeskunde, 2004, p. 225-266
- VAHRENKAMP, Richard, "Die Autobahn als Infrastruktur und der Autobahnbau 1933 – 1943 in Deutschland", Working Paper in the History of Mobility No. 3/2001, Kassel, University of Kassel - Faculty of Economics and Management, 2009. Accessed online 29<sup>th</sup> August 2022, [http://vahrenkamp.org/files/WP3\\_Autobahn\\_1933.pdf](http://vahrenkamp.org/files/WP3_Autobahn_1933.pdf)
- VANDERBILT MUSEUM, Observing 115th Anniversary of Vanderbilt Cup Races, New York, 2022. Accessed Online 6<sup>th</sup> August 2022, <https://www.vanderbiltmuseum.org/observing-115th-anniversary-of-vanderbilt-cup-races/>
- WURZEL, Steffen, "Chinesen auf deutschen Autobahnen - „Ein ganz besonderer Thrill“", Köln, Deutschlandfunk, 2017. Accessed online 31<sup>st</sup> July 2022, <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/chinesen-auf-deutschen-autobahnen-ein-ganz-besonderer-thrill-100.html>
- ZELLER, Thomas, Strasse, Bahn, Panorama - Verkehrswege und Landschaftsveränderung in Deutschland von 1930 bis 1990, Frankfurt am Main, Campus Verlag, 2002

## ヒトラーのアウトバーン

—根強いプロパガンダ神話

### ケルバー阿部スヴェン

アウトバーンがアドルフ・ヒトラーの天才の手腕によるものでないことは、歴史的事実によって十分に証明されるものである。またこの一大プロジェクトが、ドイツ国内においても、他国との比較においても、決して国营高速道路システムの先駆けなどではなかったことも事実である。しかし当時の国家社会主義者たちは、あらゆるメディアを駆使した巧みなプロパガンダに熟知していた。「総統の天賦の才が生み出したアウトバーン」というイメージを植えつける術に長け、同時に、アウトバーンとドイツ帝国に対する否定的イメージを与えかねない事実は巧妙に隠され、国民は意図的に欺かれた。

莫大な建設費用に対する正当性や、国民の高揚を煽る雇用創出政策が広く宣伝された。しかし当時の労働市場と経済状況に鑑みれば、アウトバーン建設の現実が、当時のメディアの賞賛には到底応えられるものではなかったことは、紛れもない事実である。

その過酷な労働環境にドイツ人労働者たちはストライキまで起こし、外国からは大量の強制労働者が連行され、建設現場に投入され続けていた。アウトバーン建設がこうした状況下で推し進められていたという不都合な事実は、ドイツの国家社会主義者たちによって積極的に隠蔽された。

こうした手口は他の国家プロジェクトにおいても同様であった。33万人以上のドイツ人が毎週積立預金で支払うことを奨励された「フォルクスワーゲン・プロジェクト」もその一例である。現実には全預金が軍需品に注ぎ込まれ、最終的にこの自動車プロジェクトは、終戦までに誰一人として自分の車を受け取ることができないままに終わりを迎えた。

数々の歴史的不正の事実にもかかわらず、今日尚もアウトバーンを、ヒトラーからドイツ国民への一種の恩恵とみなす意見が、ドイツ国民の大部分を占め

ているという事情は、この大工事において国家社会主義者のプロパガンダがいかに強力なものであったかを示している。アウトバーン建設に関する、当時の中立的メディア資料はほとんど存在しない。なぜなら現存の資料に関しては、国家社会主義者によって流布された宣伝用資料がほとんどであり、そのために今日でさえ「総統の道路」のイメージがドイツの人々の心の中、さらには一部の外国においてさえも生き続けているのである。

このような状況は、当時の国家社会主義者の宣伝技術がいかに包括的かつ効果的であったかを、今日の我々に示している。