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Das mehrsprachige Webportal publiziert fortlaufend Informationen zur historisch-politischen Bildung in Schulen, Gedenkstätten und anderen Einrichtungen zur Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts. Schwerpunkte bilden der Nationalsozialismus, der Zweite Weltkrieg sowie die Folgegeschichte in den Ländern Europas bis zu den politischen Umbrüchen 1989.

Dabei nimmt es Bildungsangebote in den Fokus, die einen Gegenwartsbezug der Geschichte herausstellen und bietet einen Erfahrungsaustausch über historisch-politische Bildung in Europa an.

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Prisoner report from 1945 about the construction of the Buchenwald Railway

Squandering Public Resources by the SS

A great deal of light could have been shed on how the SS, the Nazi elite, administrated public funds in "model" fashion by way of the records of the Buchenwald train administration, had these records not been totally destroyed during the air raid of August 24, 1944.

The construction of the railway between Weimar and Buchenwald is an outstanding example of this. On March 18, 1943, the Reich Leader SS [Heinrich Himmler] ordered the construction of the SS railway, under condition that the test run take place on June 21, 1943. Anyone could see that even a railway sufficient only for wartime demands could not be constructed that quickly because of the 13 kilometer distance, the condition of the soil – clay with a high stone content – and the sharp incline from the Weimar train station to the Buchenwald station located 460 meters high on the Ettersberg mountain. The first construction foreman to start work, SS Second Lieutenant (SS Untersturmführer) Betram, pointed out the impossibility of meeting the specified deadline. He was then forced to accept the placement of SS First Lieutenant (SS Obersturmführer) Alfred Sorge, a notoriously brutal slave driver, above him as general construction supervisor. Sorge's task was to force the acceleration of the

building pace so that the test run could take place on June 21, 1943. He had had many years of solid experience as the ruthless construction leader of Oranienburg-Sachsenhausen concentration camp, and brought along his trusted helpers and beaters SS-Sergeants (SS-Hauptscharführer) Baumann and Bohn.

Twelve-hour night and day shifts, a regime of terrible beatings for all the prisoners, the use of a dog squad against them both during work and during their marches to and from the workplace, and non-stop work without Sundays or holidays off made it possible for the railway – which even included a temporary station building – to be completed by the evening of June 20th, enabling the test run to occur under the observation of all precautions. This test took place in the presence of SS Brigadier General (SS Brigadeführer) Dr. Kammler, an engineer, and other Nazi bigwigs. A social evening was held for members of the SS and civilian railway construction officials, where promotions and a large number of medals were awarded. Beer and hard liquor were served, and cash bonuses, whose receipt was

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confirmed very belatedly and only in part, were also distributed. The prisoners themselves also had a "good" day without beatings and persecution. After months, they could finally bathe and clean themselves up.

Obviously, a railway built in this manner was unusable. The "real" railway construction began afterwards, and the modifications to it required an additional year. For austerity reasons, the tracks were not totally dismantled nor the sections totally rebuilt, as the rules required. This resulted in all sorts of landslides and slippage the next time the snow melted, which in turn required extensive repair work....

Work was distributed verbally to private contractors, who were, obviously, all Nazis. According to the written bids and offers, they completed the work only three, four, or more years after taking it up, "to keep in accordance with the rules." At this time, most of the contractual work was already either partially or fully completed. The bid announcements were drafted so that substantial work was to be paid by hourly wages, whose magnitude substantially exceeded the actual contract. Of course, every contractor wanted extensive "special requests" from clients, which being outside the contracts, were

more profitable for the contractor. It is obvious that under these circumstances, public money was squandered in a way that bore no relationship to actual expenses. Moreover, the maintenance of the incorrectly built railway embankment took exorbitant funds and hours of work. (Material Otto Halle, in: Harald Rockstuhl (ed.), Günter Fromm: *Die Weimar-Rastenberger Eisenbahn* –*Die Buchenwaldbahn*, Bad Langensalza 1993, p. 85)