

Expertise

On the
„Deutsche Reichsbahn‘s“

Receipts obtained during the Nazi Dictatorship for Services in Transporting Persons
from the German Reich and Occupied Areas of Europe to

Concentration Camps

and Similar Establishments, as well as from one Establishment to another – including Subsidiaries.
Without consideration of the „Deutsche Reichsbahn‘s“ transport of forced labor.

Submitted by the
„Train of Commemoration“
A Registered and Non-Profit Association

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More than 70 years after the beginning of mass deportation to the death camps of the German Reich, the exact amplitude of assistance rendered to this murderous enterprise by the „Deutsche Reichsbahn“ (the German Railroad) remains unresolved. But it is certain: without this assistance, this enormous crime, involving millions of victims, could not have taken place.

The „Deutsche Reichsbahn“ logistical service provided the conveyance, with tens of thousands of trains, whose destinations were the concentration camps of every sort, as well as the facilities for killing the handicapped or the racially and politically persecuted.

Among these victims were more than a million small children and youth from all over Europe.

The full extent of the mass murder in concentration and death camps lies between a minimum of 5.29 million and a maximum of just over six million people.¹ The trains of the „Deutsche Reichsbahn“ and the enterprises in the occupied countries that were impressed into service carried several of these millions to their deaths.

Given this criminal complicity, it would not only have been preferable that the historical heirs of the „Deutsche Reichsbahn“ present a detailed report of what had taken place. Such a report would also be incontestable.

It is undeniable that all aspects of the assistance provided by the „Deutsche Reichsbahn“ must be exposed, to understand the bureaucratic mechanism behind the crime and, thereby, be able to prevent a renewal of the structural conditions that made mass murder possible.

Just as indisputable is the fact that a comprehensive clarification of the „Reichsbahn“ complicity would posthumously honor those, who had been transported to their deaths. What transpired during the rail transport, culminating in the liquidation of hundreds of thousands, remains obscure.² It is horrible to imagine that they vanished in transports of the „Deutsche Reichsbahn“ leading nowhere.

Buried in the historical obscurity enveloping the „Reichsbahn“ transports are not only its unidentifiable victims but its culprits as well. To know who they were, what they did, who had sought to prosecute them, to cover up for them or revoke their rightful sentences, is a prerequisite for thoroughly proscribing complicity in murder and will serve as a warning to those who seek to deny or cover up the crime.

¹ Wolfgang Benz (Hg.) Dimension des Völkermords. Die Zahl der jüdischen Opfer des Nationalsozialismus. München 1991. Wolfgang Benz, Barbara Distel (Hg.): Der Ort des Terrors. Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager. München 2005-2009. Wolfgang Benz, Barbara Distel (Hg.): Geschichte der Konzentrationslager 1933-1945. Berlin 2002

² After protracted research, the German Federal Archives, in Koblenz, published a memorial work that traces the „Reichsbahn“ deportations from the former German Reich, Belgium, France and the Netherlands. This represents but a portion of those the Nazi regime removed by force from all over Europe.

Yet 70 years after the mass deportations with the „Reichsbahn“ began, neither the ethical nor the material dimensions of this criminal complicity has been settled.

The former owner of the „Deutsche Reichsbahn“ successor enterprise in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) proved as incapable of assessing how many people, from all over Europe, had been deported by the „Deutsche Reichsbahn“, how much property they had been dispossessed and what damages resulted, as the legally recognized and historical heir in the Federal Republic of Germany.³ No genuine statistical data is available concerning the total receipts derived from these deportations with the „Reichsbahn“.

A May 15, 2008 federal government position statement⁴ is an example of the handling of the fate of the dead, the anguish of the few survivors and the contempt of their right to reach a settlement.

In answer to a parliamentary interpellation, the German government informed that it could not present data pertaining to the people deported by the „Deutsche Reichsbahn.“ Pertaining to the „Deutsche Reichsbahn“ receipts obtained through its complicity in mass murder, the German government sought to remain ambiguous in its answer.

The government replied literally:

“The German Government does not have any processed data on this.”

The government further admitted succinctly that, at no time, have the successor organizations of the „Deutsche Reichsbahn“ accorded compensation to the survivors of the „Reichsbahn“ deportations.

Literally:

“No payments were made by the Deutsche Bundesbahn to the Deutsche Reichsbahn‘ deportees.”⁵

³ After the war, the estate of the „Deutsche Reichsbahn“ located in the western zones became state property of the Federal Republic of Germany. From this estate the „Deutsche Bundesbahn“ was created. The estate in the eastern zones became state property of the German Democratic Republic, from which the GDR's „Deutsche Reichsbahn“ was created.

As formulated in the Unification Treaty of 1990, the Federal Republic of Germany took control of the GDR's „Deutsche Reichsbahn“ as a special estate without legal capacity and fused both railroad administrations into a single directorate in 1992.

Since 1994, the special estates, consolidated into the Federal Railroad Estate (Bundeseisenbahnvermögen) are under the authority of the Federal Ministry for Transport, Building and Urban Affairs in agreement with the Federal Ministry of Finances. The entrepreneurial sector of the Federal Railroad Estate was separated and run as the „Deutsche Bahn AG“ since 1994.

The Federal Republic of Germany is the legal heir of the „Reichsbahn“ estate and majority shareholder of its successor, the „Deutsche Bahn AG“. The technical authority is the German Ministry for Transport, Building and Urban Affairs.

⁴ Deutscher Bundestag, 16. Wahlperiode, Drucksache 16/9206 vom 15.05.2008. Entschädigungszahlungen der Deutschen Bundesbahn bzw. der Deutschen Bahn AG an NS-Opfer.

⁵ op. cit.

The German Government leaves open, whether it considers the criminal complicity of the „Deutsche Reichsbahn“ to be compensated by indirect payments. In fact, the receipts have yet to be reimbursed that were taken in by the „Deutsche Reichsbahn“ for the deportations.

Surprising enough is already the fact that for more than 70 years, German railroads and their owners have not found it necessary to organize a special exposition representing the suffering and to reach a material settlement for the deportation victims.⁶ Hardly acceptable, in this context, are the amounts flowing into the preparation of festivities for the 175th Anniversary of the German railroad industry, to be celebrated in 2010.⁷

Therefore, the „Train of Commemoration“ Association has decided to publish an expertise that calculates the receipts taken in by the „Deutsche Reichsbahn“ through its complicity in mass murder.

At the same time, we doubt that a precise calculation of the corresponding data is even possible. Deportation officials, in numerous cases, were able to cover their tracks, in other cases, the dossiers disappeared after the war and have never been found. The status of research is deficient.⁸

Other doubts involve the modest degree of scholarly qualifications represented by the „Train of Commemoration,“ a civil society association of volunteers. We would have preferred to have studied the missing data in cooperation with competent German and foreign university institutions, with federal and regional archives and not least in exchanges with historians of the „Deutsche Bahn AG“.

The problem with these ambitions is the enormous amount of time that would have elapsed before publication. This amount of time – more than 70 years after the actual crimes – is not always granted to the victims surviving the deportation nor to the families of those who died. There are but a few years remaining, where a settlement could be reached and material aid is still possible. Our immediate attention must be particularly focused on those frail survivors, who, as children and youth, were carried away with the „Reichsbahn.“

This is why it would be negligence, to further postpone a calculation of the deportation receipts and the commitments that grew out of them, because a final calculation has yet to be made. Even a preliminary calculation, in as much as it takes the lowest imaginable values as its starting point, can and must suffice.

⁶ The successor enterprise, the „Deutsche Bahn AG, has paid into the German business endowment fund only for the forced laborers kidnapped and exploited by the „Deutsche Reichsbahn“. The „Deutsche Bahn AG“ insists that this payment was made „without legal entitlement.“ The millions of deportation victims have been fully ignored.

⁷ The exact amounts earmarked for the festivities of the upcoming 175th anniversary of the German railroad by the „Deutsche Bahn AG,“ the federal government, the cities of Nuremberg and Fuerth are unknown. In 1985, the costs of the 150th Anniversary celebration came to about 20 million DM.

⁸ See page 35 of the Expertise.

The expertise being presented here, follows the guideline: being conscious of the tentativeness of the data and exercising extreme caution in the interpretation of the sources used.

We have arrived at the founded conclusion that the receipts made by the „Deutsche Reichsbahn“ for its deportation trips to forced labor, concentration and death camps, as well as its trips between these camps and similar transports, in the period between 1938 and 1945 have reached a current minimum value of

445 Million Euros.

This sum excludes interests and accrued compound interests. This sum is a minimum calculation. We do not exclude the possibility, and consider it a probability that a calculation taking all sources into consideration in its evaluation, would reach a result of more than a billion.

With the publication of this expertise, we hope to initiate a broad-based discussion both in Germany and abroad, on the responsibility of the historical heirs of the „Reichsbahn“ enterprise and its suppliers.

We are explicitly appealing to the „Deutsche Bahn AG,“ the state majority shareholder (the Federal Government of Germany) and any future shareholders of this logistics concern doing business around the world, to live up to its responsibility.

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