

Piero Puricelli, Fritz Todt and the Autobahn

Fritz Todt (1891-1942) climbs the career ladder in the Third Reich as Inspector General of Roads. He worships Hitler and in propaganda calls the German autobahns "roads of the Führer." The car-only roads are to connect cities, according to HAFRABA (Hamburg-Frankfurt-Basel) - a proud enterprise in the Reich, codified by a law in June 1933. The law to reduce unemployment does the rest. In 1935, 15,000 people were working on 22 highway construction sites, and by 1937 the figure had risen to 130,000 - actually a small proportion when there were 6 million unemployed. Fritz Todt completes his studies; from 1925 to 1933 he is an engineer at Sager & Woerner. From 1938, the company receives orders for the Atlantic Wall and defense installations on the Channel Islands via the Todt organization.



Sager & Woerner merged with the Schörghuber Group and Heilmann & Littmann Bau AG in 1980 to form Heilit + Woerner Bau AG; this was taken over by Walter Thosti Boswau and merged to form Walter Bau in 2000. Insolvency followed in 2005. Parts were taken over by Strabag and renamed Heilit+Woerner Bau GmbH. In 2014 the renaming to Strabag Grossprojekte GmbH follows.



Registered letter of Puricelli SA Milan to Borgo Palazzo province of Bergamo.

Germany's pioneering role in the "invention" and construction of the autobahn is disputed by Senator Piero Puricelli (1883-1951). He is a building contractor, friend of the Duce Benito Mussolini, and in the 1920s builds the "Autostrade dei Laghi" from Milan to the upper Italian lakes near Varese and Como. The road is free of intersections, a separation of the directional lanes takes place later.

In 1937, Todt receives a manuscript by Kurt Gustav Kaftan entitled "Autostrassen in Europa" (Motor Roads in Europe), in which Kaftan mentions Piero Puricelli as the inventor of freeways. It is translated into Italian and sent to Puricelli. He and Todt are outraged by the manuscript and both quarrel by letter about their and their leaders' authorship of the freeways. Todt reprimands Kaftan: "The Reichsautobahnen, as we are building them now, are not to be considered as prepared by 'HAFRABA', but solely as 'Adolf Hitler's roads'".

Kaftan considers Puricelli's plans to be half-baked, since plans for the expansion of motorways in northern Europe received only a peripheral dedication in his manuscript, and Todt says "it remains impossible, however, to present them as if the German motorways had been the realization of a Puricellian project. Puricelli is also involved in the Hafraba and says: "The European road network has been designed by me alone according to the wishes of the representatives of the individual states [...]. But I cannot allow that the idea, my intellectual property, is taken away from me or denied." Both get into each other's hair in writing and want to refer the matter to Hitler and Mussolini respectively; only with great difficulty can the quarrel parties be calmed down and dissuaded from this idea by Willy Hof (1880-1956),



Even though Hitler increasingly promoted the construction of the autobahn and exploited it for propaganda purposes (postal stationery from Pforzheim to Heilbronn dated November 20, 1936), the first autobahn was not built by Hitler, but in 1932 - pushed forward by Cologne Mayor Conrad Adenauer - between Cologne and Bonn (today's A555). Finally classified as a freeway in 1958, the A555 is appreciated by Bonn government officials living in Cologne as a fast route to work, thus earning its nickname: "diplomatic racetrack".

industrialist and transport planner: "If I may give you some very, very good advice, try to get along directly with Mr. Puricelli. If he goes to the Duce, and he does, if the lousy Kaftan writing is not changed or withdrawn, I guarantee you there will be a direct complaint to the Führer..." Todt and Puricelli get closer again, the dispute is settled. Todt invites Puricelli to Berlin in 1938 for the fifth anniversary of the transfer of power to Hitler. Puricelli declines and says that he hopes to be able to come to Berlin in the next few months "...with best regards your Puricelli". "

The aforementioned correspondence is accessible in the Federal Archives (R 4601/1107) since 2016.

Literature:

https://web.archive.org/web/20160328125941/https://www.bundesarchiv.de/oeffentlichkeitsarbeit/bilder_dokumente/01234/index-0.html.de