

F. Report on the congress

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REPORT ON THE CONGRESS

BERICHT ÜBER DEN VERLAUF DES KONGRESSES

COMPTE-RENDU DU CONGRÈS

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The ceremonial opening of the Congress took place on the morning of October 1st, 1936, to the stirring strains of an overture of Beethoven, in the Reichstag Assembly Hall of the Kroll Opera House. The proceedings were opened by the President of the Congress, Dr. Ing. *F. Todt*, Inspector General for German Roads, after which the members were greeted in the name of the German Reich government by the Reich and Prussian Minister of Transport, *Freiherr von Eltz-Rübenach*, and in the name of the International Association for Bridge and Structural Engineering by the President, Professor *Dr. Rohn*, and the vice-Presidents, *Sir Thomas Hudson Beare*, *Dr. Caffarelli*, *Dr. Klönne* and Inspector-General *Pigeaud*.

The working meetings were held from the afternoon of Thursday, October 1st, 1936, until the morning of Wednesday, October 7th, 1936, in accordance with the working programme already published. As the proceedings and their results will be dealt with at length under A and B in this Final Report of the Congress no further details of the individual meetings will be given here, but brief reference should be made to the admirable organisation of the working meetings for which credit is due to the German Organising Committee and particularly to the simultaneous telephonic translation of the various spoken contributions into the three official languages of the Association. The working meetings took place in the admirably equipped hall of the Physical Institute of the Technische Hochschule, where also the secretarial offices, reading rooms, post office and a refreshment room, etc. had been installed.

On the evening of Thursday, October 1st, the members were received by the State Commissioner for the City of Berlin in the marble hall of the Zoological Gardens. After a dinner offered by the City of Berlin, at which a number of speeches were made, some pleasing entertainments were offered by Berlin artistes.

On the evening of Friday, October 2nd, the members were guests of the Inspector General for German Roads and the Director General of the German State Railways in the hall of the Kroll Opera House, at a reception which the hosts had rendered the more agreeable by arranging for some excellent musical performances.

On the afternoon of Saturday, October 3rd, the members were offered the choice between a trip to the Wannsee with an inspection of the Reich sports ground, or to the Kalkberge to see the Reichsautobahn viaducts there.

For Sunday a day's excursion was arranged over the Berlin—Stettin Reichsautobahn to Niederfinow to inspect the ship elevating works, or alternatively a day's excursion to Potsdam to inspect Sanssouci and Potsdam itself. These visits were keenly supported and proved highly instructive to those who took part.

On the evening of Monday, October 5th, the German Reich Government extended an invitation to hear a magnificent festival performance of the *Rosenkavalier* at the German Opera House.

On the afternoon of Wednesday, October 7th, on conclusion of the working meeting, the closing meeting took place in the Reichstag Assembly Hall of the Kroll Opera House, under the chairmanship of the President of the Congress, Dr. Ing. *F. Todt*. In anticipation of this the conclusions established during the working meetings, and already printed, had been distributed to the members. In the course of the meeting these were read out by the General Secretaries, several members taking the opportunity to bring forward observations. It was decided to leave the acceptance of the final draft of the conclusions to the next meeting of the Permanent Committee. The President, Professor *Dr. Rohn*, in a closing speech, expressed his thanks to the Organising Committee for their exemplary organisation of the congress.

After the conclusion of the scientific portion of the congress at the Closing Meeting on October 7th at the Kroll Opera House, some 500 members left to take part in the visit of inspection through Dresden, Bayreuth and Munich.

The journey from Berlin to Dresden was made by special train on the morning of October 10th, participants being received at their hotels in time for a short rest before leaving by motor bus for a reception by the civic authorities in the Rathaus. In the beautiful ceremonial rooms of this new building the Oberbürgermeister, *Herr Zörner*, received the guests at a breakfast, greeting them in very kindly terms on this first day entertainment and recreation after a busy time.

He expressed himself as follows:

“You are now about to see the works of olden times as well as those of the Third Reich, and you will perceive how in a brief space of time, with limited means, we have changed the new urban developments on the banks of the Elbe to something well worth visiting. Your technically trained eye will notice the eight fine bridges over the Elbe, old and new which now connect the old town with the new. Just as these bridges complete the picture of the town, so has Dresden for centuries formed a bridge to all the world beyond, and we have made it our object to offer a hearty welcome to every visitor from abroad who crosses that bridge into Germany.”

The President, *Dr. Rohn*, expressed his thanks to the Oberbürgermeister for these kind words of greeting, and his regret that so short a time was allowed them for their visit to Dresden, that world famous centre of art and music set in a garden city. It was well known, he said, how closely the Oberbürgermeister himself had been associated with the recent developments of the city. He praised the hospitality of Dresden and referred to its fine bridges of symbols of co-operation between the peoples. Especial thanks, he said, were due also to the Technische Hochschule and the Academy of Art.

Lively conversations rapidly developed around the festive tables where technical men from all countries were brought together on their human side. New acquaintances were made and old ones confirmed.

After the reception, which was followed by a walk through the Reich Garden Exhibition, some of the guests took part in a journey round the town ending

at the Luisenhof, while another party visited the bridges of the Reichsautobahn across the Elbe and at Siebenlehn.

In the evening the members met once more at the State Opera House, to see the operetta „Die Fledermaus“ in a brilliant performance to which the Congress had been invited by the Saxon Ministry of State.

On the Friday the journey was resumed in motor buses towards Bayreuth, the President of the Congress, Inspector-General *Todt*, taking part in order personally to act as guide to the guests over this section of the road works. Each participant in the journey was handed a guide book in three languages containing illustrations of the most notable structures in this section.

Starting from the inner town and crossing the Elbe bridge, the Dresden-Neustadt entrance to the Dresden—Chemnitz Reichsautobahn was reached, and the motor road was followed thence in a rapid run as far as the Wilsdruff entrance where, after crossing the Saubachtal bridge, 216 m in length, the Autobahn was left behind and the journey continued by the Reich highway N° 173 through pleasant valleys and narrow defiles in villages via Freiberg—Chemnitz to the Chemnitz Nord exit of the Chemnitz—Meerane Reichsautobahn — a change which marked a striking contrast with the old country roads.

In the industrial town of Hohenstein—Ernstthal the Reichsautobahn was again abandoned for the run through the Göltzschtal where the members were able to admire one of the most notable monuments of stone bridge construction dating from the early days of railways. South of Schleiz the train of buses reached the Berlin—Munich Reichsautobahn and began the most beautiful part of the journey, 70 km in length, over the Autobahn between Schleiz and Bayreuth. Here the Reichsautobahn had been opened to traffic only a few days before: stretching across the green hillside in two white strips it exemplified strikingly how the Reichsautobahnen, those great roads of the Fuhrer, merge themselves into the general rhythm of the countryside, crossing the valleys by bold structures and leaving the densely populated districts at a distance. Through a delightful landscape full of beautiful changing views and extensive forests of the Eastern Frankenwald the journey continued to Bayreuth. The mighty bridge across the Saale near Lehesten, constructed entirely of granite masonry, forms part of the Autobahn, and a visit to this by groups of the guests was combined with welcome refreshment in pleasantly furnished dining-rooms of the Autobahn. At the beginning of the descent to Bayreuth stands yet another large structure, the plate web girder bridge of Rohrsreuth. Leaving the motor road at Berneck, whence a good idea of the further work still in hand could be obtained, Bayreuth was reached about 4 o'clock.

A tour around the city of Richard Wagner led past the concert hall to the home of German culture. The harmony between the Weihehalle and the statue of the German Mother made a striking impression. The tour continued towards the Margravian Opera House, a fine example of the baroque style of architecture, and then to the Ludwig Siebert hall. In the meantime the Hungarian delegation accompanied by Inspector-General *Dr. Todt* paid a visit to the grave of Franz Liszt, to lay a wreath in silent thought. In the *Ludwig Siebert* Hall the Oberbürgermeister, *Dr. Schlumprecht*, addressed words of greeting to the guests, expressing his regret that time would not permit a visit to all the architectural

beauties of the Gau centre. But even the hasty impressions which they had already gathered must suffice to convey that Bayreuth, known all over the world as the town of Richard Wagner, is at the same time one of the most delightful of German cities by reason of its architectural monuments to the heyday of Margravian times. The Oberbürgermeister went on to comment on the existence in Bayreuth of many proud and notable monuments to constructive and cultural development of the Third Reich, worthily and typically sustaining the high cultural tradition of the place. The special charm of Bayreuth lay in the fact that, with all its quietness, it is no small somnolent provincial town which has to rub the sleep out of its eyes at the beginning of the Festivals: on the contrary it has been able to share fully and vigorously in the throbbing new life of our times. He joined his hearty welcome offered in the name both of the Gau leadership and of the City, with a wish that this first visit, unhappily so short, might yet offer them an inducement to return soon again as welcome guests of the city of the Richard Wagner Festivals. In the name of the guests, the French Vice-President of the International Association, *M. Pigeaud*, Inspecteur Général des Ponts et Chaussées, warmly expressed his thanks in the following terms:

“It falls to me now to reply to the words of greeting which we have just heard, and some of which we have already seen written up on our way. In the name of the Congress, I should like once more to thank our kind hosts who have received us everywhere with such thoughtfulness and overflowing kindness.

“The task which has been laid upon me is an easy and a pleasant one, appropriate to this time of our relaxation when work, though not actually forbidden by our President, can neither be demanded of us nor particularly recommended.

“When considering whether I was correctly interpreting the unanimous feelings of our colleagues of the International Congress I did not resort to that experimental method which they like to use and with which they are familiar in their own researches: I thought that such a method would, in this case, be inapplicable, particularly when a much better and more certain method was available — I mean the method of Descartes the basis of which is dependence on the selfevident. Thus it is obvious that our feelings cannot be other than feelings of gratitude for the magnificent reception which has everywhere been offered us, and particularly for the facilities which are now enabling us to visit the many great works which we encounter at every step in our journey; yet again, for the willingness and kindness with which we are being afforded this comprehensive view of the economy and the very character of this great country. To know it well is to appreciate it the better. To appreciate it better can only mean to love it more widely and more deeply.

“Outwardly it would appear that we are concerned only with a very limited field of that economy, namely bridges, buildings and other large structures. But it is obvious to how great an extent this field marches with that of industry and transport, without which no national economy would be able to function. Bridges — many bridges — are necessary for railways: they are needed for roads, especially for the great new roads, which you

call the Autobahnen, that vie with nature amid the beautiful landscape. We have already seen a great number of fine structures: We are to see yet others without exhausting the long list in the hands of our President, *Dr. Todt*; and I should like also to recall how yesterday, in Dresden, we saw a splendid series of both old and new bridges, all of which alike left upon us an impression of the power of art and an enlarged understanding of its meaning.

“For indeed, in the part of Germany which we are now visiting, our spirit stands exposed to higher influences — the influences of art.

“Engineers pride themselves on not being intensive either to the charms of beautiful landscape or to a feeling for great architecture. All these things we have seen on our way here, and now the mathematics which we cultivate with Pythagoras is to guide our entrance to the spiritual ways of music.

“It was an extraordinary feeling we experienced yesterday in the great Opera House of Dresden. So many memories from the field of art were awakened within us. Thoughts of Richard Wagner made yesterday evening a prelude to to-day’s visit to the City of Bayreuth, rendered so famous through him, in which we have now been so cordially received.

“Bayreuth has become the symbol and temple of music. From all parts of the world pilgrims flock here in their multitudes. Here the nations become united in music.

“To this thought of a spiritual comradeship, a thought which is very dear to all of us, there is nothing more for me to add. But allow me to believe and to say it was a mark of peculiar attention and thoughtfulness that has led to our being brought to Bayreuth at this time — we who are members of the Congress for steel and concrete — that we might have the opportunity of uniting for a short time under the sway of music which is one of the greatest expressions of harmony, and is a symbol of that harmony which prevails among ourselves.

“For this thoughtfulness on their part, and for everything else that they have done, we are profoundly grateful to the German authorities, and we trust that this gratitude of ours, however inadequately expressed, may be accepted in the spirit in which it is offered.”

Once more the buses stood ready outside for departure to the railway station. The journey was continued to Munich by two special trains in which dinner was taken. So, thanks to the excellent organisation, the extensive day’s programme of travelling was completed without fatigue to the participants.

Saturday was devoted to a visit of inspection of the Munich—Siegsdorf Reichsautobahn, with a continuation to Berchtesgaden. At 9 a. m., in the Hofgarten of Munich, the journey was begun, both Presidents — Professor *Dr. Rohn* of Zürich and Inspector-General *Dr. Todt* — taking part, the latter in his capacity of Chairman of the Reichsautobahnen Company, and also Herr *Rudolphi*, a director of that company. Every guest was given a guide in three languages, and numerous well informed conductors and interpreters were present to draw attention to the sights to be seen on the way. An excellent opportunity was thus afforded for learning more of the attainments of bridge and road construction

in the new Germany. Numerous bridge works, especially the Mangfall bridge and the Bergen viaduct of the Autobahn, the Pfannloch bridge and the Saale bridge on the German Alpine road, were the subject of special admiration, and at the same time the beauties of the Alpine country of Upper Bavaria left an unforgettable impression upon those taking part. The journey ended with a lunch taken in common in Berchtesgaden at the invitation of the German Reichsbahn, and the return journey to Munich was made in the afternoon by special trains.

In the evening the Bavarian Ministry of State and the civic authorities of the capital arranged a reception in the Deutsches Theater.

The final note of the Congress was struck on Sunday, October 11th, 1936, with the ceremonial closing meeting in the Congress room of the Deutsches Museum, followed, in the afternoon by a visit to the city of Munich. The notable sights of the town were seen in an omnibus tour, and the monumental buildings around the Königliche Platz attracted special attention. The helpfulness of the Reich Treasurer of the National Socialist German People's Party, Reichsleiter *Schwarz*, made it possible to pay a visit to the interior of the new administrative buildings of the party, and the tour ended with a visit to the exhibition, "The Adolf Hitler Roads in Art", held in the Exhibition Park.

The splendidly organised arrangements for the Congress in Germany left an unforgettable impression on all who took part and contributed to draw yet closer the international bonds uniting the members of the Association.