

The Will of the Führer? Financing Construction for the 1936 Olympics

Introduction

On 19 June 1936, the Reich Interior Ministry's (RIM) Hans Pfundtner sat down with Otto Kriegk of the *Berliner illustrierte Nachtausgabe*, one of Berlin's most popular newspapers, to discuss the vast new structures that had been built for the Olympic Games.¹ There were few more knowledgeable about the subject. The RIM was the government agency chiefly responsible for organising the Games – Kriegk even referred to it as the 'Olympic Ministry' – and Pfundtner, its most senior civil servant, had supervised the operation personally from summer 1933. Not only had he ensured the timely construction of the Reich Sports Field, which incorporated the Olympic Stadium and most of the other sporting facilities, but he had overseen the city's preparations for the world's largest sporting spectacle. Some forty days before the opening ceremony, the readers of the *Berliner illustrierte Nachtausgabe* could not have wished for anyone better to explain the complexities of their city's ambitious project.

Instead, they were served up what had by then become the common explanation for all and anything that was popular in Nazi Germany: the will of the Führer. Recalling the day Hitler first visited the Olympic site, 5 October 1933, when only 'scrubby grass on sandy earth' lay before him, Pfundtner recounted how 'The Führer ordered the construction of buildings for the Games that reflect the dignity of the Olympic idea and the honour of the German people'. He even suggested that Hitler came up with the plan for the Reich Sports Field there on the spot, much to the amazement of those accompanying him. As for the money, Pfundtner was unwilling to reveal the amount or where it came from. 'I am often asked about numbers', he told Kriegk, 'and I always say that one cannot state in figures what we have achieved ... In

¹ Copy of Otto Kriegk interview with Hans Pfundtner, 19 June 1936, BArch B R 1501/5613. On the *Berliner illustrierte Nachtausgabe*, see K. Schilling, *Das zerstörte Erbe. Berliner Zeitungen der Weimarer Republik im Portrait* (Norderstedt, 2011), 169.

both the design and erection of the structures, our main concern was to do justice to the spirit and will expressed by the Führer when the plans were conceived'. Hitler, in other words, had essentially willed the Reich Sports Field and the money to pay for it into existence.

Whether they believed it or not, readers of the paper will have been familiar with this sort of narrative. Eminent legal scholars like Ernst Rudolf Huber styled Hitler as the source of all authority in Nazi Germany, even suggesting that 'there is only one lawgiver in the German Reich and that is the Führer himself'; while the propaganda machine that gave Hitler sole credit for the regime's successes cultivated an image of an omnipotent all-controlling dictator. The cult built around Hitler during the Third Reich encouraged people to believe that the will of the Führer had taken the place of government and that it accounted for almost anything that was popular in Nazi Germany. Indeed, '[t]he public works and employment creation programmes', of which the Stadium and the Reich Sports Field were parts, 'were [among] the most effective Nazi propaganda themes, and here too all credit in the first instance went to Hitler, "who has set the mighty work programme in the Reich underway"'.² Of course, this has been disproved by decades of research, which has highlighted instead the complex government apparatus that implemented Hitler's will. Yet despite such scholarly consensus little has been written about how that apparatus organised the Olympic Games. As a result, an important part of the propaganda myth remains largely intact.

On the question of how the 1936 Olympic Games and the Reich Sports Field were financed, the literature is surprisingly scant. Specialist scholarship has been hampered, or blinkered, by the sources it has used and the questions it has asked. For those writing from the early 1970s to the 1990s, much of the relevant material (in particular the files of the RIM) was scattered

² E.R. Huber, *Verfassungsrecht des Großdeutschen Reichs* (Hamburg, 1941), 194, cited in P. Longerich, trans. J. Noakes and L. Sharpe, *Hitler. A Life*, (Oxford 2019), 500. See also M. Jürgens, *Staat und Reich bei Ernst Rudolf Huber. Sein Leben und Werk bis 1945 aus rechtsgeschichtlicher Perspektive* (Frankfurt am Main, 2005), 205-208. On the propaganda image of Hitler see I. Kershaw, *The Hitler Myth. Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford, 2001), 62.

across different archives, in both East and West Germany. Yet despite improved accessibility over the last thirty years, research has failed to probe the topic appropriately. Those specifically examining the preparations for the Games have tended to focus on the archival material left behind by the Organisation Committee. Although this was founded in early 1933 with the broad task of ‘preparing and implementing’ the Games, it was relieved of all responsibility for construction as early as the summer of 1933, from which point the RIM, under Pfundtner, took control. Others who have looked at the RIM files have done so only to inform their chosen topics, e.g. the Olympic village or Berlin finance policy since 1871.³ The broader literature has not fared better. Studies of the Stadium itself say little on the matter, research on Nazi architecture even less, and although sports historians have commented more, they too have stopped short of a full analysis. Anton Rippon’s unfounded claim that ‘the problem of financing the Games had been largely solved through the “generous cooperation of the authorities”’ is typical. David Clay Large, in his popular book, *Nazi Games*, merely adds a brief description of Hitler’s personal intervention in the messy debates over who was going to pay for the Reich Sports Field – though without examining the debates themselves – and an inaccurate estimate of the overall costs.⁴ While such works do not, of course, confirm the propaganda image Pfundtner offered to the *Berliner illustrierte Nachtausgabe*, they do little to challenge it either.

³ H. Bernett, *Sportpolitik Im Dritten Reich* (Stuttgart, 1971); H.J. Teichler, ‘Die Olympischen Spiele Berlin 1936. Eine Bilanz nach 60 Jahren’, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, xxix (July 1996), 13-22.; J. Titel, ‘Die Vorbereitung der Olympischen Spiele in Berlin 1936. Organisation und Politik’, in Landesarchiv Berlin (ed.) *Berlin in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Berlin, 1993), 124,132; K. Stöckel, *Berlin im olympischen Rausch. Die Organisation der olympischen Spiele* (Hamburg, 2009); E. Hübner, *Das Olympische Dorf von 1936. Planung, Bau und Nutzungsgeschichte* (Paderborn, 2015), 33-55; Harald Engler, *Die Finanzierung der Reichshauptstadt* (Berlin, 2004), 369-76.

⁴ B. Hettlage, *Olympiastadion Berlin* (Berlin, 2006); T. Schmidt, *Das Berliner Olympia Stadion und seine Geschichte* (Berlin, 1983); T. Schmidt, ‘Olympiastadien der Neuzeit. Entwicklungslinien einer Bauaufgabe des 20. Jahrhunderts’, in ICOMOS Nationalkomitee der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (ed.) *Sport-Stätten-Kultur. Historische Sportanlagen und Denkmalpflege* (Munich, 2002), 21-28; M. Donath, *Architektur in Berlin 1933-1945. Ein Stadtführer* (Berlin, 2007); M. Donath, ‘Städtebau und Architektur’, in M. Wildt and C. Kreuzmüller (eds.) *Berlin 1933-1945. Stadt und Gesellschaft im Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin, 2013), 229-44.; A. Rippon, *Hitler’s Olympics. The Story of the 1936 Nazi Games* (Barnsley, 2012), 32; D. Clay Large, *Nazi Games. The Olympics of 1936* (London, 2007), 64, 152-6.

This essay – based mainly, though not exclusively, on the RIM files – will show that the common view of Hitler’s decision to patronise the Games and fund their construction through the German state is highly reductive. Debates over who should pay for what and where the money should come from, which had been present from the moment Berlin’s bid was first mooted, did not end there and then. The process of funding the Reich Sports Field remained a convoluted administrative process involving different individuals and agencies, all of whom wanted to profit from construction without taking responsibility for it. What lay behind the ‘the will of the Führer’, in other words, was emblematic of how administration functioned under National Socialism, under the Weimar Republic, and other systems of government, as different agencies pursued multiple and overlapping mandates, sometimes even hindering construction in the process.⁵

Thus, the essay both complements and challenges existing interpretations of the Nazi regime and how it functioned. Indeed, it reaffirms understandings of the Third Reich as a ‘polycracy’ of competing agencies and departments rather than a totalitarian monolith. For despite the RIM taking control of finance and construction early on, its plans were resisted by other interest groups from the outset. On the other hand, Ian Kershaw’s famous ‘working towards the Führer’ paradigm tells us little about why the government bureaucracy executed Hitler’s will in this instance.⁶ For one, bureaucrats and bureaucracies pursued their own interests even when they ran counter to Hitler’s express wishes. More importantly, however, even those that were directly responsible for implementing those wishes – namely the RIM – did not have to ‘interpret’ Hitler’s will on the basis of some internalised understanding of what that was, which is the crux of Kershaw’s argument. Hitler certainly did not have to intervene in every act of

⁵ M. Geyer, ‘The State in National Socialist Germany’, in C. Bright and S. Harding (eds.) *State Making and Social Movements. Essays in History and Theory* (Ann Arbor, 1984), 194-7.

⁶ Peter Hüttenberger, ‘Nationalsozialistische Polykratie’, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 2, 4 (1976), 417-442. I. Kershaw, “‘Working Towards the Führer’. Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship’, *Contemporary European History*, 2, 2 (1993), 103-18.

government to see his will executed – that much is true. But this was one instance in which he did, with Pfundtner and his underlings responding accordingly.

The aim of the essay, therefore, is not to provide a new interpretation of how government functioned in Nazi Germany, but rather to unpick what lay behind the myth of the ‘will of the Führer’. Yet, in doing so it will also address two further shortcomings in the literature: first, an imprecision over the motivation for Hitler’s intervention in October 1933; and second, unsubstantiated claims about the sums Germany invested in hosting the Games. Indeed, although it has still not been possible to locate the elusive final amount paid, by presenting the bill for construction – the single largest cost associated with them – the essay will show that the estimates that appear in much of the literature are grossly overinflated.

Berlin’s Bid to Host the Olympics and the Problems of Finance

It is important to remember that the regime played no role in bringing the Olympics to Berlin. As with Nazism itself, the Games of 1936 were a by-product of the First World War. Had it not been for the hostilities, in fact, the city would have hosted the 1916 Olympics awarded to it in 1912 and almost certainly not have done so again in 1936.⁷ But the earlier work of the country’s leading sports functionaries – Carl Diem, erstwhile journalist turned professional sports administrator, and Theodor Lewald, a civil servant in the RIM and early patron of the German Olympic movement – did not prove in vain.⁸ In the 1920s, neither man abandoned the idea that the Games should one day come to Berlin, even when the International Olympic Committee (IOC) banned Germany for allegedly starting the War.⁹ Too much work had gone

⁷ R. Naul, ‘Willibald Gebhardt, Carl Diem und die Anfänge des olympischen Sports in Deutschland’, in M. Krüger (ed.) *Olympische Spiele. Bilanz und Perspektiven im 21. Jahrhundert* (Münster, 2001), 84.

⁸ M. M. Künzel, ‘Berlin 1936’, in J. R. Gold and M. M. Gold (eds.) *Olympic Cities. City Agendas, Planning and the World’s Games, 1896-2012* (New York, 2007), 180. On Diem, see F. Becker, *Den Sport gestalten. Carl Diems Leben*, 4 vols. (2nd edn, Rhein-Ruhr, 2013). On Lewald, see A. Krüger, *Theodor Lewald. Sportführer ins Dritte Reich* (Berlin, 1975).

⁹ L.O. Welander, ‘Sweden: Business as Usual’, in A. Krüger and W. Murray (eds) *The Nazi Olympics. Sport, Politics, and Appeasement in the 1930s* (Urbana and Chicago, 2003), 163-4.

into preparing the capital for 1916, and when Lewald was elected onto the IOC in 1925, he began pushing the idea that it was ready to host again.¹⁰

In reality, though, Berlin was far from ready. In 1927, Lewald had to press the mayor, Gustav Böß, for assurances that the city would be willing to do undertake all necessary steps should a bid be made on its behalf. He had two main concerns. The first was the German Stadium. Erected for the 1916 event, it was no longer fit for purpose, Lewald argued, and would need to be considerably expanded. Paris had put up a new stadium for 1924 in the Bois de Boulogne, and the trend for bigger and better facilities would continue in subsequent Games. And second, there was the German Sport Forum, a large training facility adjacent to the Stadium on which work had stopped due to a lack of funds. This would have to be completed, albeit with only modest modifications. Taken together, Lewald wrote, these ‘would form an almost ideal site for all Olympic competitions’.¹¹ To focus the mayor’s mind further, Lewald mentioned that Berlin’s application to host the 1930 German Competitive Games (*Deutsche Kampfspiele*, a national event that had run every four years since 1922 in lieu of the Olympics) would be rejected unless the work was started. It was not, and the *Kampfspiele* went to Breslau.

As this illustrates, Berlin remained ill prepared to host the Olympics and disinclined to invest in them several years after Lewald started to lobby on its behalf. Indeed, with none of the work yet underway by early 1929, Lewald implored Böß at least to provide a model that could be presented to the IOC as evidence of the city’s good intent. He also pointed to the growing support for rival bids from Cologne and Frankfurt (which had built stadia in 1923 and 1925 respectively), stressing that both cities, in stark contrast to Berlin, were basically set to go.¹² Even the media began asking if Berlin was worth the effort, wondering if Diem and Lewald

¹⁰ Titel, ‘Die Vorbereitung’, 117-18.

¹¹ Letter from Lewald to Gustav Böß, undated, BArch B R 8077/210. Coming after the German Olympic Committee’s January 1927 decision to bid on behalf of Berlin for the 1936 Games and before the April 1927 IOC meeting in Monaco, there is reason to believe that the letter was sent around that time.

¹² Letters from Lewald to Gustav Böß, 25 Feb and July 1929, BArch B R 8077/210; letter from Lewald to Arthur Scholtz (who replaced Böß as Berlin’s Mayor), undated, *ibid.*

might not be better off getting behind Cologne instead. However much the pair wanted to recreate the cancelled event of 1916, Berlin simply did not have the money.¹³ At this early stage, the estimated costs of construction ranged from RM10m to RM15m – excluding the purchase or lease of the Grunewald site on which the existing structures stood –, whereas extending the new stadium in Cologne would have come to just RM2m.¹⁴ Even that seemed too much for some. People close to Diem wondered if Germany should be applying at all, given the dire state of the country's finances.¹⁵

Lewald and Diem were not for turning, however. And in May 1931, their perseverance and blind optimism paid off as Berlin's bid was accepted by the IOC.¹⁶ Most of the fifteen rival bids had already been abandoned by this stage, with only Rome and Barcelona still in contention on the eve of the IOC session where the decision was announced. In the weeks beforehand, Lewald had taken what was then the unusual step of writing to each IOC member personally, imploring them to vote for Berlin and assuring them, again, that Berlin would pay for the necessary work on the stadium.¹⁷ For this was about all the IOC demanded of host cities at the time. It 'made few provisions for the financial underwriting of the grand project' in the first seventy-five years of its existence.¹⁸ Its charter merely insisted that bids be backed by 'serious financial guarantees', while the official reports compiled by the national organising committees for the Games in 1928 and 1932 say little about IOC prescriptions regarding money or sporting facilities, which also seem to have been left to the host cities' discretion.¹⁹

¹³ Letter from the editor of *Der Mittag* to Carl Diem, 6 May 1930, *ibid.*

¹⁴ Letters from Carl Diem to Paul Albrecht, 27 June, 3 July 1930, *ibid.*

¹⁵ Letter from unknown to Carl Diem, 25 Feb. 1931, *ibid.*

¹⁶ Clay Large, *Nazi Games*, 51-2.

¹⁷ H. Bernett, 'Die Bewerbung deutscher Städte um die olympischen Spiele des Jahres 1936', *Stadion. Internationale Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Sports*, 11, 12 (1995/96), 220-21. Allen Guttman, *The Olympics. A History of the Modern Games* (Chicago, 2002), 53.

¹⁸ H. Preuss, *The Economics of Staging the Olympics. A Comparison of the Games 1972-2008* (Cheltenham, 2004), 14.

¹⁹ R.K. Barney, S.R. Wenn and S.G. Martyn, *Selling the Five Rings. The International Olympic Committee and the Rise of Olympic Commercialism* (Salt Lake City, 2002), xi. The Netherlands Olympic Committee, *Official Report of the Olympic Games of 1928 Celebrated at Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 1928). Olympiade Committee of

So it was Lewald's 'serious financial guarantee', along with his lobbying work, that ensured Berlin would finally host the Olympics twenty years later than originally planned. But where or how was still very far from clear. With funding for the extension of the Stadium and the Sport Forum still outstanding, the guarantee he gave the IOC was not his to give. There may have been an underlying assumption that Berlin would come up with the money, but its financial situation had worsened since the mid-1920s when the idea of applying was first suggested, and it was about to deteriorate further as the effects of the Wall Street crash and the 1931 banking crisis took hold.²⁰

In this context, Lewald and Diem began to cast their net widely. Lewald solicited financial support from industrial and business circles, at the same time courting Berlin's new mayor, Heinrich Sahn, whom he repeatedly invited to attend preparatory meetings.²¹ Diem, meanwhile, sought support from Germany's sporting organisations and public bodies.²² As late as June 1932, however, their efforts had come to nothing. Distraught, Lewald wrote to a correspondent: 'when we will begin the construction work for the 1936 Olympic Games, I dare not say; who can even predict when the necessary resources will be made available'.²³ The city appointed a special commissioner, Arthur Liebrecht, to deal precisely with the economic and financial issues connected with the Games, but by the end of the year there was no improvement in the situation.²⁴ And so, at a meeting of the German Olympic Committee on 11 November 1932, it was decided that an Organisation Committee should be formed and that its most pressing aim would be to approach national, state, and city authorities to pay for the Reich

the Games of Los Angeles, U.S.A., *The Games of the Olympiad Los Angeles 1932. Official Report* (Los Angeles, 1933).

²⁰ O. Büsch, *Berliner Demokratie 1919-1985. Berlin als Hauptstadt der Weimarer Republik 1919-1933* (Berlin, 1987), 80,95,227; T. Straumann, *1931. Debt, Crisis, and the Rise of Hitler* (Oxford, 2019).

²¹ Letter from Lewald to the President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 15 May 1931, BArch B R 8077/210. Letters from Lewald to Heinrich Sahn, 15, 20 May 1931, *ibid.*

²² Letter from Diem to German sports associations, 28 April 1932, *ibid.*

²³ Letter from Lewald to Hans Köpke, 4 June 1932, *ibid.*

²⁴ 'Berlins Olympia Kommissar', *Vossische Zeitung*, 27 Oct. 1932.

Sports Field.²⁵ Several months after the end of the 1932 Games, held in the cavernous Colosseum in Los Angeles,²⁶ Berlin had nowhere to host the next ones.

Seeking Financial Support from the Nazi Regime

Inaugurated on 24 January 1933, the Organisation Committee for the XI Olympic Games (OC) took up its work at a time of immense upheaval.²⁷ The chancellorship of Kurt von Schleicher was coming to an end, after just over three weeks, and as the month drew to a close, he was replaced by Adolf Hitler. The OC could have had few grounds for optimism. Before coming to power, the Nazi movement had been openly hostile to the Olympic idea, seeing it as an “expression of an individualistic-democratic conception of sport”, and as an “artificial, mechanical construct”.²⁸ Lewald and Diem came under personal attack. Together they were said to represent ‘the “bourgeois-internationalist” sport of the Weimar Republic’, while as individuals they were the subjected to Nazi anti-Semitism: Lewald because of his Jewish heritage, and Diem because he fraternised with Jewish people.²⁹ Lewald was even forced to give up his role as chairman of the Reich Committee for Physical Education because Nazi racial theory deemed him a ‘half-Jew’, and eventually, as was typical in the Third Reich, his OC was stripped of many of its responsibilities as well. These were transferred to new Committees for Construction, Finance, and Art among other things.³⁰ Nevertheless, due to their standing in international sporting circles, not least with the IOC, Lewald, Diem and their OC

²⁵ Organisation Committee Memorandum, 12 December 1932, BArch B R 8077/223.

²⁶ B. Siegel, *Dreamers and Schemers. How an Improbable Bid for the 1932 Olympics Transformed Los Angeles from Dusty Outpost to Global Metropolis* (Oakland, CA, 2019).

²⁷ Stöckel, *Berlin im olympischen Rausch*, 7.

²⁸ Cited in Teichler, ‘Die Olympischen Spiele Berlin 1936’, 16.

²⁹ Titel, ‘Die Vorbereitung’, 115. On the personal attacks on both men, see M. Krüger, *Einführung in die Geschichte der Leibeserziehung und des Sports. Teil 3: Leibesübungen im 20. Jahrhundert. Sport für alle* (Schorndorf, 2005), 141; K. Lennartz, ‘Reinhard Appel und Carl Diems Rede am 18. März 1945’, in M. Krüger (ed.) *Erinnerungskultur im Sport. Vom kritischen Umgang mit Carl Diem, Sepp Herberger und anderen Größen des deutschen Sports* (Berlin, 2014), 228.

³⁰ Minutes of the meeting on the establishment of a Construction Committee, 18 Dec. 1933, BArch B R 1501/5609; letter from Pfundtner to Lewald, 26 May 1934, BArch B R 1501/5610; letter from Pfundtner to the President of the Reich Chamber of Visual Arts, Sept. 1934, BArch B R 1501/5611.

retained certain responsibilities for organising the Games, Lewald as OC President, Diem as General Secretary.³¹

Still, once the new government was in place Lewald, as an experienced former civil servant, used whatever influence he had to solicit support from various state bodies. Indeed, as early as 6 February 1933, after numerous requests, the aging president, Paul von Hindenburg, promised to serve as patron for the Games.³² What this meant in practice was not altogether clear. A meeting with representatives of the Reich Finance Ministry (RFM) later that month seemed to suggest it counted for very little, with Lewald's request for RM7.5m to extend the Stadium and Sport Forum being flatly rejected by Alfred Olscher, a senior civil servant, who told the OC chief that the city of Berlin was responsible for funding construction and that the Reich could not help on account of its precarious finances.³³ So on 6 March Lewald sent a letter to Heinrich Lammers, the head of the Reich Chancellery who controlled access to Hitler, asking that he and the Berlin mayor be allowed to meet the new Chancellor to convey to him the importance of the Olympics and to offer him the presidency of a soon-to-be-established honorary German Olympic Committee. Perhaps to get his foot in the door, Lewald made no mention of money. But it was clearly discussed at the meeting that took place ten days later, for not only did Hitler offer his enthusiastic support for the project, Lewald also came away with a promise that the Reich – that is the German state – would guarantee a loan of RM6m to cover the costs of construction.³⁴

According to Diem, Lewald was elated.³⁵ But in effect not much had changed. Hitler had promised that the state would guarantee a *loan*, but it was still not clear on whose behalf. While the Stadium was now certain to be built, someone or somebody would need to step up and pay

³¹ D. Herz and A. Altmann, 'Berlin 1936', in J. E. Findling and K. D. Pelle (eds.) *Historical Dictionary of the Modern Olympic Movement* (Westport, Connecticut, 1996), 87.

³² Bernett, *Sportpolitik*, 39.

³³ Hübner, *Das Olympische Dorf*, 38.

³⁴ Bernett, *Sportpolitik*, 39.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 40.

for it by servicing the loan. The situation remained unresolved into the summer of 1933, by which time the RIM had taken over all issues relating to the financing of the Games.³⁶ And as the single biggest cost associated with them, construction was no longer the responsibility of Lewald, Diem and the OC, but rather the RIM's energetic secretary of state, Hans Pfundtner.

In many respects, Pfundtner was a typical Prussian civil servant. A trained lawyer, he worked in various regional courts before entering the Prussian customs administration in 1909. Like so many of his generation, even among civil servants, his life and career were interrupted by the First World War, during which he was severely wounded at the battle of Tannenberg. Released from the army before the war's end, he transferred from the Prussian to the Reich administration in 1917, serving first in the RIM and then in the Economics Ministry. But he resigned in 1925, even forgoing his claim to a pension, after refusing to swear allegiance to the Weimar constitution, and spent the rest of the Weimar Republic working as a lawyer and notary in Berlin. The sources suggest that Pfundtner's disdain for the Republic was informed by a more general commitment to right-wing causes. He was a member of the German National Party (DNVP) from 1919 until 1932, after which he joined the Nazi Party. He also belonged to gentlemen's clubs like the Berlin Club and the National Club, where conservative elites and nostalgic monarchists met, and the Berlin National Club of 1919, where Pfundtner is known to have given platforms to far-right figures like Joseph Goebbels.³⁷ He was thus a fitting choice to serve as State Secretary under the new Interior Minister, Wilhelm Frick, combining both the

³⁶ Krüger, *Theodor Lewald*, 62.

³⁷ J. Lilla, *Der preußische Staatsrat 1921-1933: Ein biographisches Handbuch. Mit einer Dokumentation der im "Dritten Reich" berufenen Staatsräte* (Düsseldorf, 2005), 121. On Pfundtner's membership of the gentlemen's clubs see the 1926 Berlin Club Membership List, BArch B RY 56/14, and C. Browning, 'The Government Experts', in H. Friedlander and S. Milton (eds.) *The Holocaust: Ideology, Bureaucracy and Genocide* (New York, 1980), 185. Information on the Berlin Club can be found in Ariane Knackmuß, *'Willkommen im Club? Die Geschichte des Clubs von Berlin und das Schicksal seiner jüdischen Mitglieder im Nationalsozialismus'* (Berlin, 2007). On the Berlin National Club of 1919 and Pfundtner's role in it see Gerhard Schulz, 'Der "Nationale Klub von 1919" zu Berlin. Zum Politischen Zerfall einer Gesellschaft', in W. Berges and H. Herzfeld (eds.) *Jahrbuch für die Geschichte Mittel- und Ostdeutschlands*, (Berlin, 1962), 216-25.

technical proficiency and experience necessary to run a government department with the ideological reliability leading Nazis were looking for.

On assuming responsibility for construction for the Games, it was the former rather than the latter that Pfundtner had to draw upon. Hitler may have promised to support the project, but in the summer of 1933 the regime had yet to throw its weight behind it the way it would later that year. Initially, Pfundtner saw it as his task to complete Lewald and Diem's modest plans to extend the Stadium and the Sport Forum and to adhere to a strict parsimony in doing so. He even promised representatives of the RFM that the plan would be re-evaluated to see if further savings could be made.³⁸ As for who or what would fund the project, different proposals were floated throughout the summer. But in August the RIM, in consultation with the RFM and the Prussian state authorities, decided that the Reich would cover the costs of the Sport Forum, while Berlin would pay for the Stadium and the repair and extension of the roads and streets surrounding the whole area.³⁹ Moreover, anything not recouped by the revenue generated – from ticket sales etc. – was to be added to Berlin's balance sheet.⁴⁰ Not much had changed, therefore, since Lewald began lobbying eight years earlier; Berlin was still expected to carry the bulk of the costs.

The justification for this in 1933 was the same as it had been in 1925: since Berlin would benefit most from the Olympics, it was only fair that it should pay for them. The problem, however, was that the city authorities remained reluctant to do so and repeatedly refused to put up the money. In their correspondence with the RIM, they cited the site's complicated ownership structure as the reason for their reluctance. The land on which the Stadium stood, they explained, belonged to Prussia and was subject to a long-term lease by the Berlin Horse Racing Association, who in turn had their Grunewald racing track there. In that sense, the city

³⁸ Minutes of a meeting between representatives of the RIM and the RFM, 6 July 1933, BArch B R 1501/5608.

³⁹ Minutes of the meeting concerning the financing the 1936 Olympic Games, 16 Aug. 1933, *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Engler, *Die Finanzierung der Reichshauptstadt*, 369-70.

could never be said to own the Stadium unless the site were transferred to it. Proprietorship of the site, therefore, became a precondition for Berlin's funding of the Stadium. But there were other factors too. For one, there was a campaign by Hans von Tschammer und Osten, the Reich Sport Führer, to ensure he had the final say on the use of the Stadium after the Games, a clause he tried to have inserted into the contract that would guarantee Berlin's ownership. And then, of course, there was the problem that had hindered Berlin's support for the project since the start: money. The effects of the economic recovery had not yet taken hold in the capital by the summer of 1933, and although the plan devised by Pfundtner and the RFM envisioned furnishing the city authorities with a loan of 4,000,000 marks to fund the Stadium, that loan would still have to be repaid.⁴¹

For all of these reasons, Berlin had yet to commit by late September 1933, by which stage Pfundtner was anxious for work to begin. Indeed, with the renovations of the Sport Forum already underway after the injection of Reich money, he accused Berlin's mayor of deliberately delaying the project in the hope the Reich would foot the bill, a charge Sahn vehemently denied.⁴² But had this indeed been Sahn's wish, it was granted in early October. After visiting the site, Hitler was dismayed by the lack of progress and not only insisted the Reich fund the Stadium as well as the Sport Forum but later promised it would be built anew, insisting that plans to extend the 1916 Stadium be abandoned.⁴³ Having demanded a new plan for the entire Reich Sports Field by the middle of the month, he approved the construction of a 100,000-seat Stadium, 'the largest structure of its kind to date', and of a massive open-air theatre next to it.⁴⁴ In a very short space of time, the German state had become the principal financial backer for

⁴¹ Minutes of the meeting concerning the financing the 1936 Olympic Games, 16 Aug. 1933, BArch B R 1501/5608. On Tschammer's efforts to control how the stadium was used in the future, see Letter from von Tschammer und Osten to Pfundtner, 9 Sept. 1933, *ibid.*

⁴² Minutes of the meeting concerning the financing the 1936 Olympic Games, 30 Sept. 1933, *ibid.*

⁴³ Engler, *Die Finanzierung der Reichshauptstadt*, 368-370; Clay Large, *Nazi Games*, 152; T. Friedrich, trans. S. Spencer *Hitler's Berlin. Abused City*, (New Haven, Con. 2012), 346-7.

⁴⁴ Hübner, *Das Olympische Dorf*, 47; D. Clay Large, *Berlin* (New York, 2000), 293.

Olympic construction. Lewald, again, was elated. Less than three years before the opening ceremony, he could be certain at last that Berlin would be able to host the Games.⁴⁵

Understanding Hitler's Intervention

Given the Nazis' general disdain for the Olympic idea, Hitler's generosity is surprising. There is no single explanation for it and – as with many personal and political decisions – the reason is best sought in a range of issues, pressures and potentialities weighing upon him at the time.

Contemporary sources suggest that in this instance ideology played only a limited role in Hitler's decision making and that his intervention was informed by more practical considerations. At a meeting in the Reich Chancellery on 10 October, for example, he justified it in foreign policy terms, telling those present that

Germany finds itself in a most difficult and adverse foreign policy situation, it must [therefore] try to win over world opinion through [a display of its] great cultural achievements. In this regard, it is fortunate that the 1936 Olympic Games... are taking place. If we are to invite the world's nations to such an event, then they must be shown the cultural achievements of the new Germany... To that end, we must have in Berlin an enormous site that will allow it to host such a modern gathering.⁴⁶

Why Germany found itself in a difficult foreign policy position was not mentioned. The fact that Hitler withdrew Germany from the international disarmament conference four days after the Chancellery meeting, and from the League of Nations a week after that, certainly did not help. Indeed, Hitler likely saw sporting diplomacy as one way of improving Germany's international standing. But the negative coverage of Nazi anti-Jewish policies in the foreign press also posed a problem, as did the anti-German protests that emerged as a result. The concentration camps, too, and Nazi violence more broadly received similar negative coverage abroad, while there emerged in the United States a campaign to stop the American team from

⁴⁵ Letter from Lewald to Pfundtner, 5 Oct. 1933, BArch B R 1501/5608.

⁴⁶ Cited in *ibid*, 63; and Hübner, *Das Olympische Dorf*, 47.

participating in the Games. With diplomatic pressure increasing throughout 1933, it is thus not surprising that Hitler came to see the Olympics as a public relations opportunity, and that the Stadium became a priority as a result.⁴⁷

Another apparent reason for Hitler's intervention was Germany's depleted currency reserves. Indeed, he would tell friends during the war that the 'Olympic Games were a unique opportunity for us to obtain foreign currency', estimating that they brought in half a billion.⁴⁸ When Hitler became Chancellor in January 1933, Germany held the equivalent of RM800m in reserve, enough for no more than two months of imports. But by the summer, foreign debt repayments had reduced that amount by half, and by early 1934 reserves were so low that 'Germans travelling abroad were restricted to a foreign exchange ration of no more than 50 Reichsmarks per month'. Monthly allocations of foreign currency for importers were also reduced, which threatened lay-offs and resulted in food shortages and increased prices. Popular discontent spread as a result.⁴⁹ It thus seems plausible that there was at least some truth to Hitler's wartime ramblings.

Another, related reason the Nazi leader gave for his interest in the Olympics concerned the employment situation in Germany. With the economy still reeling from the Great Depression, the number of unemployed exceeded 6 million when Hitler became Chancellor, and it quickly became his aim to right the wrongs of previous governments by getting Germans back to work.⁵⁰ His preferred means to this end were construction and mass infrastructure projects, and

⁴⁷ A.J.P Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (London, 1981), 102-6. E. Conze, N. Frei, P. Hayes and M. Zimmermann, *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit. Deutsche Diplomaten im Dritten Reich und in der Bundesrepublik* (Munich: Karl Blessing Verlag, 2010), 25-27. On foreign reactions to Nazi anti-Jewish policies, see S. Friedländer, *The Years of Persecution. Nazi Germany and the Jews 1933-1939* (London, 2007), 19-26. On negative reactions to Nazi violence more broadly, see N. Wachsmann, *KL. A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps* (London, 2016), 70-73. On the emergence of the US boycott movement see M. Gottlieb, 'The American Controversy Over the Olympic Games', *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, 61, 3 (March 1972), 186-189.

⁴⁸ H. Picker (ed.) *Hitlers Tischgespräche im Führerhauptquartier 1941-42* (Bonn, 1951), 135.

⁴⁹ A. Tooze, *Wages of Destruction. The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (London, 2007), 51, 69-72; R. Evans, *The Third Reich in Power. How the Nazis won over the Hearts and Minds of a Nation* (London, 2006), 355.

⁵⁰ I. Kershaw, *Hitler* (London, 2008), 261.

when he announced his support for the Reich Sports Field he justified it in precisely these terms, telling his subordinates that if there were millions unemployed ‘then work must be found for them’. He even stated that it was better to spend RM20m on construction than to keep paying out unemployment benefits.⁵¹

But other factors likely influenced Hitler too. Important among them was the ready availability of money in autumn 1933. The First and Second Laws to Reduce Unemployment, passed in June and September respectively, had put up a total of RM1.5 billion to fund construction and renovation projects across the country, and, as will be shown below, a sizable amount of what was ultimately spent on construction for the Games came from the Work Creation Programmes established by these laws. But the short-term credit used to support the scheme was structured in such a way that it needed to be spent within specific time frames (three-month periods renewable for up to five years). And with traditional sources of funding such as tax hikes and foreign loans all but ruled out, Hitler would have known that the Reich’s capacity to sponsor all or part of the Reich Sports Field was time-sensitive and that he needed to act fast.⁵²

More broadly, Nazi ambitions to rebuild parts of Berlin might also explain Hitler’s interest in Olympic construction. It is true that ‘comprehensive plans for the reorganisation of the city were first developed after Alfred Speer was appointed Inspector General of Construction for Berlin’ in 1937, but isolated projects like the extension of the Reichsbank were being considered as early as February 1933, while the search for an architect to design and build the monumental new Aviation Ministry also began the following year.⁵³ Besides, Hitler had

⁵¹ Record of Hitler’s visit to the Reich Sports Field, 5 Oct. 1933, BArch B R 1501/5608. See also Krüger, *Die Olympische Spiele*, 63.

⁵² D. Humann, “*Arbeitsschlacht*”. *Arbeitsschaffung und Propaganda in der NS-Zeit 1933-1939* (Göttingen, 2011), 73-87; M. Spoerer and J. Streb, *Neue deutsche Wirtschaftsgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 2013), 107-108; D. P. Silverman, *Hitler’s Economy. Nazi Work Creation Programs, 1933-1936* (Cambridge, Ma. and London, England, 1998), 29.

⁵³ Donath, ‘*Städtebau und Architektur*’, 229-30. On the search for an architect to design the Aviation Ministry, see E. Dittrich, *Ernst Sagebiel. Leben und Werk 1892-1970* (Berlin, 2005), 72-73.

revealed in *Mein Kampf* his disdain for modern cities and in particular for how they failed to reflect ‘greatness and distinction’ in the way their ancient or even medieval antecedents had.⁵⁴ So while his attitude towards Berlin was more ambivalent than is often assumed,⁵⁵ his plan to rebuild the city, whenever it emerged, suggests he found it lacking in what he called ‘monuments of pride’.⁵⁶ The Reich Sports Field, if nothing else, would surely serve as one such monument.

The sources, then, point to many different reasons why Hitler might have intervened in the debate over who should fund the Reich Sports Field and why he did so when. Any one or any combination of them could account for his willingness. But whatever motivated him, he had nothing to lose by his decision and much to gain by it. Insisting that the Reich fund the Stadium was not going to cause him much work personally. First as party leader and later as Chancellor, Hitler’s working style was chaotic. ‘[He] was incapable of systematic work and took no interest in it’, while his interest in domestic affairs dwindled not long after coming to power, his obsession with the ‘Jewish question’ notwithstanding.⁵⁷ He would take all the credit, of course, but organising the Games and finding the money to pay for them, as with so much else, would be delegated to the Reich bureaucracy. Like the Aediles who organised the Games in ancient Rome, the 1936 Olympics would simultaneously entertain the masses and prove Hitler’s ability to lead; though unlike the Aediles they would cost him neither time, money nor effort.

Tying Up Loose Ends

Inevitably, though, the Games did cost others time, money and effort. Hitler’s insistence that the Reich pay for the Stadium was not the magic bullet many hoped it would be, or that some historians consider it to have been. The money, for one, was not made available instantly, and

⁵⁴ A. Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Leipzig, 1933), 290-3.

⁵⁵ Friedrich, *Hitler’s Berlin*, 218-220.

⁵⁶ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 293.

⁵⁷ Kershaw, *Hitler*, 212, 322.

certainly not by Hitler himself. Instead, Pfundtner would have to engage in tedious negotiations with the RFM and the Office of Public Works to secure the Reich's share of it. Nor did the issues that had plagued the project up to that point simply disappear. Despite a consensus that Berlin should at least pay for the necessary repairs to the streets and roads surrounding the Reich Sports Field, the city authorities continued to drag their heels. And, finally, there was the thorny issue to resolve of who actually owned the site.

Unsurprisingly, Pfundtner remained committed to building the Stadium on a budget.⁵⁸ In 1933, Germany faced the same economic and financial constraints it had since the onset of the Great Depression. These ruled out the possibility of adding the expenditure to the Reich budget, that is paying for it through increased taxes or via a loan. During the early phase of his chancellorship, Hitler and the conservative financial experts in his cabinet were adamant there should be no reckless financing of government expenditures and were wholly committed to balanced budgets. It was only after 1935 that he felt free to spend imprudently.⁵⁹ When the Reich first took on responsibility for Olympic construction, its customary sources of funding were practically exhausted.

One of the very few options open to Pfundtner was the Work Creation Programme, mentioned above. With six million Germans unemployed, Hitler's government faced the same problem as those whose handling of the economic crisis his party had lambasted since 1930. Even before he became Chancellor, it was widely accepted in government circles that a public works program was needed, though crippling austerity and reduced access to capital markets during the Depression left many wondering how it might be funded. Under Kurt von Schleicher, the government experimented with credit creation techniques via so-called 'work creation bills', which effectively involved the Reichsbank printing money, to be handed out as

⁵⁸ Minutes of a meeting in the RIM, 18 Oct. 1933, BArch B R 1501/5608.

⁵⁹ Dan P. Silverman, *Hitler's Economy*, 28-31.

loans, which would be paid back in the future, either by taking out a long-term loan or, as was hoped, via increased taxation once the economy improved.⁶⁰ The RFM, in other words, guaranteed that this ‘new’ money would be repaid one way or another.

Hitler’s two Work Creation Programmes differed from Schleicher’s only in terms of the amount of credit they were willing to create. The first made RM1 billion available for public works, twice the amount envisioned by the Schleicher government, and the second delivered a further RM500m. Once Pfundtner negotiated a deal with the RFM and the Office of Public Works, it was agreed that the money to fund the Stadium, originally estimated at RM8.5m, could be drawn down from the Work Creation Programme. Money for the Sport Forum, on the other hand, presumably to spread out the costs, was to come from the so-called *Arbeitsspende*, a small tax on wages levied to provide additional revenue for work creation.⁶¹

With the Sport Forum costing an estimated RM6.5m, Pfundtner had managed to secure a total of RM15m for construction on the Reich Sports Field. But it was soon apparent that more was needed, with a further RM1m being requested to cover the costs of roadworks *inside* the Olympic site barely a month after the original sum had been secured.⁶² Aware that the state’s finances were already stretched, Pfundtner first tried to bypass the RFM, seeking out more work creation credits from the Office of Public Works and even asking the Inspector General for German Roadways, Fritz Todt, to cover the costs. But both refused, the former telling him that all additional expenditure would have to be defrayed by the Reich directly, that is, via the Reich budget.⁶³ This meant that further negotiations with the RFM’s penny pinchers were unavoidable, and relations between them and Pfundtner quickly soured because of the former’s

⁶⁰ Ibid, 28-29; Tooze, *Wages of Destruction*, 42-46.

⁶¹ Letter from the Office of Public Works to Pfundtner, 11 Oct. 1933, BArch B R 1501/5608; letter from Pfundtner to Reinhardt and the Finance Minister, 21 Oct. 1933, *ibid.* On the *Arbeitsspende*, see C. Schmitz-Berning, *Vokabular des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin, 2007), 54; Humann, “*Arbeitsschlacht*”, 89. On the sums created for work creation, see Silverman, *Hitler’s Economy*, 28-29; A. Bastisch, *Das Arbeitsbeschaffungsprogramm unter Hitler. Der Abbau der Massenarbeitslosigkeit im Dritten Reich von 1933-1936* (Hamburg, 2014), 36-38; U. Büttner, *Weimar. Die überforderte Republik* (Stuttgart, 2008), 489-50.

⁶² Internal RIM Memorandum, 14 Nov. 1933, BArch B R 1501/5608.

⁶³ Letter from Pfundtner to the Reich Minister of Finance, 16 Nov. 1933, *ibid.*

insistence that each and every cost be subjected to repeated scrutiny.⁶⁴ Moreover, the fact that the compensation owed to both Prussia and the Berlin Horse Racing Association for relinquishing their ownership claims on the site was not covered in the original cost outlay (more on which below) was another source of tension, as were the repeated discussions about who would pay for the architect, Werner March, and his construction engineers.⁶⁵

Much of this was to be expected, of course. Even Pfundtner's promises of strict parsimony were always going to be surpassed by those of the RFM, especially given the poor state of the Reich's finances. But there were other ways for the Reich to keep costs down, such as shifting some of them back onto Berlin. Historically, the city had paid for the bulk of its own infrastructure projects, making the Reich Sports Field something of an anomaly.⁶⁶ And as soon as the Reich became its main financial backer, Pfundtner in particular worked tirelessly to ensure that the capital at least contributed something towards construction. He, like others, was adamant that Berlin would benefit most from the Games and decided early on that it should cover the repair and extension of the road network surrounding the Reich Sports Field, as well as the parking lot near the Stadium.⁶⁷ When the idea was first floated in July 1933, it was estimated that this would cost around RM500k. But like the overall project, the costs spiralled, and by October Berlin was already being told to find twice that. A month later the total had gone up to RM4m.⁶⁸

Much to Pfundtner's annoyance, in negotiations with the Reich the city authorities forever disputed the amount and their ability to pay. Even after it became clear that Berlin would

⁶⁴ Letter from Pfundtner to Reinhardt, 23 Nov. 1933, *ibid*; letter from Pfundtner to the Reich Minister of Finance, 23 Feb. 1934, BArch B R 1501/5609.

⁶⁵ Memorandum of a meeting on between the representatives of the RFM and the RIM, 21 Nov. 1933, BArch B R 1501/5608; memorandum of a meeting on between the representatives of the RFM and the RIM, 8 March 1934, *ibid*; letter from Pfundtner to the Reich Finance Minister, 8 Feb. 1934, BArch B R 1501/5609.

⁶⁶ Engler, *Die Finanzierung der Reichshauptstadt*, 460-461.

⁶⁷ Minutes of the meeting of the Organisation Committee's Finance Sub-Committee, 10 July 1933, BArch B R 1501/5608.

⁶⁸ Minutes of the meeting of the Organisation Committee's Finance Sub-Committee, 10 July 1933, *ibid*; Internal RIM Memorandum, 24 Oct. 1933, *ibid*; internal RIM Memorandum, 14 Nov. 1933, *ibid*.

receive RM40m from the Work Creation Programme, they insisted the money was needed for other projects.⁶⁹ A revised cost estimate of between RM8m and RM9m for roadworks, predictably, was rejected for the same reason.⁷⁰ In particular, Berlin insisted that the portion of its work creation money on which Pfundtner had his eye was needed to construct air raid shelters, which were being demanded by Göring's Aviation Ministry, a telling insight into the regime's priorities one year after coming to power.⁷¹ But Pfundtner refused to take no for an answer and pursued a number of different strategies to force Berlin's hand. Indeed, alongside trying to solicit a private loan for the city from the Bayerische Gemeindebank, he approached the RFM's Fritz Reinhardt, who authored and oversaw the work creation schemes, to inquire if the money intended for air raid shelters could be used instead to fund the perimeter roads.⁷² He also contacted the Aviation Minister directly to ask if all or part of the air defence program in Berlin could be suspended temporarily. But again Göring refused.⁷³ The RFM, meanwhile, said that only RM1.87m of Berlin's work creation money could be made available to fund road works.⁷⁴

In the end, Berlin paid for the streets, bridges and parking lot surrounding the Olympic site, though not before trying to push this bill, too, onto the German state.⁷⁵ It used a loan of RM8m from the Office of Public Works, which had been negotiated on its behalf by Pfundtner,⁷⁶ who subsequently rejected requests from the city authorities for a share of the income from ticket sales to help cover the repayments.⁷⁷ The German state had borne the greatest financial burden, he told his colleagues in the RFM, and should therefore receive any profits accrued – a

⁶⁹ Minutes of the meeting of the Construction Committee, 26 Jan. 1934, BArch B R 1501/5609. minutes of the meeting of the Organisation Committee, 22 Jan. 1934, *ibid.*

⁷⁰ Internal RIM Memorandum, 12 March 1933, *ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Letter from Pfundtner to the Director of the Bayerische Gemeindebank, 26 March 34, *ibid.*; letter from Pfundtner to Fritz Reinhardt, 5 April 1934, *ibid.*

⁷³ Letter from Pfundtner to E. Milch, 19 April 1933, *ibid.*

⁷⁴ Letter from the RFM to the German Office of Public Works, 25 May 1934, BArch B R 1501/5610.

⁷⁵ Internal RIM Memorandum on the Street Construction Program, 20 April 1933, BArch B R 1501/5609.

⁷⁶ Letter from Pfundtner to Mayor Sahm, 10 April 1934, *ibid.*

⁷⁷ Memorandum on the meeting of the Olympic Games Finance Committee, 23 Jan. 1935, BArch B R 1501/5612.

reasonable enough stance on the face of it.⁷⁸ But Berlin's demands for a share of the profits from the Games were not only based on the money it spent on roads and bridges. It had also, in the end, contributed RM6.5m to the Stadium, a sizable sum that was taken from its share of the work creation money.⁷⁹ Indeed, this was the main reason given by Berlin's authorities for why they were unable to pay for road works, and it helps explain why they continuously dragged their heels right up until shortly before the Games began.⁸⁰ So while it is true to say that the host city was increasingly pushed aside after the Reich took on responsibility for construction,⁸¹ Pfundtner ensured that, ultimately, it at least covered some of the costs it had been avoiding since the idea emerged in the 1920s.

Securing the Reich's ownership of the land on which the Reich Sports Field was to be built also proved a difficult task for Pfundtner. As mentioned above, Berlin's original justification for not funding construction was the site's complicated ownership structure, with both the Berlin Horse Racing Association and the state of Prussia showing little interest in relinquishing their respective claims on the land. This did not change after the Reich assumed responsibility for construction, at least not straight away. The Horse Racing Association, for one, was reluctant because Berlin's premier racing track stood on the Grunewald site. It knew that even if the old German Stadium was to be extended, the track and surrounding stadium would have to be demolished and so rejected the idea from the moment it was floated.⁸² As for Prussia, it leased the site on which the racing track stood to the Horse Racing Association, and thus also stood to lose if the Reich became its owner. For the necessary works to be carried out on the Olympic site, therefore, the Reich first needed to negotiate compensation packages for both of these bodies.

⁷⁸ Ibid; Minutes of a meeting in the RFM, 30-31 Oct. 1935, *ibid*.

⁷⁹ Minutes of a meeting in the RIM, 12 March 1934, *ibid*.

⁸⁰ Minutes of a meeting in the RIM, 30 Oct. 1933, BArch B R 1501/5608; letter from Pfundtner to Julius Lippert and Heinrich Sahn, 20 June 1936, BArch B R 1501/5613.

⁸¹ Engler, *Die Finanzierung der Reichshauptstadt*, 371.

⁸² 'Berlin als nächste Olympia Stadt', *Vossische Zeitung*, 27 Oct. 1932.

Preliminary negotiations, ongoing since 1929, had been largely unsuccessful.⁸³ Nor was either party entirely moved by Hitler's apparent interest in the project, with both demanding considerable indemnities for their respective losses. Prussia, for example, requested an exchange for Reich lands in Pomerania and Silesia or, failing that, a sum of RM6.5m in cash. This would have increased the estimated costs of RM15m by over forty percent.⁸⁴ It did not seem to matter that Hitler's long-time satrap Hermann Göring was Prussia's new Minister President; if the Reich wanted to build on Prussian land, then Prussia was adamant it should be recompensed. As for the Horse Racing Association, its representatives continued to resist the Reich's efforts to seize the Grunewald site, and not only because it had invested huge sums in the track. Its projections for future earnings were based on the idea of drawing large crowds to race meetings near the city centre, and with the only other tracks that serviced the capital – Hoppegarten and Karlshorst – situated on its outskirts, a significant drop in the number of spectators, and therefore revenues, was to be expected.⁸⁵ Pfundtner soon received news, however, that the Association was willing to relinquish its lease in return for RM2.75m in compensation and a guarantee that the Reich assume liability for all of its outstanding contracts, including those of employees – a sum that would have taken the estimated total costs for construction to nearly RM24m, and which even Franz von Papen, Hitler's Vice Chancellor and a known horse racing enthusiast, thought excessive.⁸⁶

But these were just the opening bids in a barter. With Pfundtner committed to frugality, he was never likely to buy at the prices on offer. Any hopes he had of negotiating a land swap with Prussia were dashed by the Reich Agriculture Ministry: Walther Darré, the Minister and

⁸³ Letter from Lewald to Adolf Schick, 28 Jan. 1929, BArch B R 8077/210.

⁸⁴ The actual amount listed is 3,000,000 marks in cash. This must be a misprint, however, seen as throughout the negotiations Göring wanted 5 marks per square meter, which for a 130-hectare site amounts to 6,500,000. Internal RIM Memorandum, 9 Oct. 1933, BArch B R 1501/5608. This is confirmed in the RIM memorandum from 14 Nov. 1933, *ibid.*

⁸⁵ RIM Memorandum on the meeting with representatives of the Berlin Horse Racing Association, 11 Oct. 1933, *ibid.*

⁸⁶ Letter from the President of the Berlin Horse Racing Association to the RIM, 17 Oct. 1933, *ibid.*; RIM Memorandum, 24 Oct. 1933, *ibid.*

another of Hitler's confidants, was unwilling to hand over the much more valuable land sought after by Göring in Pomerania and Silesia,⁸⁷ while the RM5 per square meter being demanded by Göring for the Grunewald site as an alternative was also out of the question. Pfundtner wanted to pay no more than RM75pf per square meter, or just under RM1m in total; later, he even tried to drive Göring down to RM50pf per square meter.⁸⁸ Nor did he give in to the Horse Racing Association's demands. While he requested their asking price of RM2.75m from the RFM, he promised that this would be haggled down in the negotiations.⁸⁹ And when consulting with the Association directly, he offered a maximum of RM2m, though in reality it was likely to be around RM1.75 given how the payment was to be structured.⁹⁰ Needless to say, its board members rejected the offer. With no end of the debate in sight, Pfundtner became increasingly perturbed by Prussia and the Horse Racing Association's apparent obstinance.⁹¹

As 1933 drew to a close, however, both suddenly caved in. Thanks to the personal intervention of Wilhelm Frick, Göring and the Prussian Finance Ministry agreed in December to accept a payment of RM1m for the Grunewald site. It may ultimately have taken another year to conclude the sale, but Pfundtner's doggedness had finally paid off.⁹² Certain aspects of the Reich's deal with the Horse Racing Association also took time to resolve, particularly those relating to the contracts for which the Reich was now liable.⁹³ But it too relented around the same time as Prussia. Probably because Prussia yielded, the association in fact accepted Pfundtner's offer of RM1.75m in December, RM1m less than what it had originally asked

⁸⁷ Internal RIM Memorandum, 28 Oct. 1933, *ibid.*

⁸⁸ Memorandum of the meeting between Pfundtner and Walter von Keudell, 28 Oct. 1933, *ibid.*; letter from Pfundtner to Göring, 16 Nov. 1933, *ibid.*

⁸⁹ Letter from Pfundtner to Fritz Reinhardt, 21 Oct. 1933, *ibid.*

⁹⁰ RIM Memorandum on the meeting with representatives of the Berlin Horse Racing Association, 11 Nov. 1933, *ibid.*

⁹¹ Letter from Pfundtner to the Reich Finance Minister, 23 Nov. 1933, *ibid.*

⁹² Letter from Wilhelm Frick to Johannes Popitz, 6 Dec. 1933, *ibid.*; letter from Pfundtner to the Prussian Construction and Finance Administration, 13 Feb. 1935, BArch B R 1501/5612.

⁹³ Correspondence between the Berlin Horse Racing Association and the RIM, Jan. and Feb. 1934, BArch B R 1501/5609.

for.⁹⁴ Four years after negotiations first began, and two years before the Games were due to be held, the complex issues surrounding the ownership of Reich Sports Field had been resolved. The German state now owned the land on which it was about to construct the most ambitious sporting arena in the world.

The Bill for Construction

But how much did that arena end up costing? When added together, what was the bill for the Olympic Stadium, the Sport Forum, the roadworks surrounding the Reich Sports Field, and the compensation for Prussia and the Berlin Horse Racing Association? The final analysis in the RIM files, from June 1935, puts the cost of construction at RM26.55m – RM11.55m more than originally budgeted.⁹⁵ But this does not include the RM2.75m in compensation for Prussia and the Horse Racing Association, or the RM8m for roadworks paid by Berlin. Taking these into account brings the total to RM37.3m – a figure broadly in line with the one presented in the Official Report compiled by the Organisation Committee after the Games.⁹⁶

No source showing the total cost of the Games has been found, but this has not stopped historians speculating. The figure given for the Stadium in the Official Report, and verified by the sources used in this essay, however, calls into doubt the sums that are often mentioned. David Clay Large, Richard Overy, Mario Leis and Jürgen Trimborn, for example, have all suggested that the Games cost somewhere in the region of RM100m overall.⁹⁷ But, given that the Reich Sports Field, the single largest cost associated with them, cost just over RM37m, this seems wide of the mark. For Clay Large's and Trimborn's calculations to work, all other costs

⁹⁴ Internal RIM Memorandum, Dec. 1933, *ibid.*

⁹⁵ Letter from Reinhardt to Frick, including cost estimate, 4 June 1935, BArch B R 1501/5612. The sum given is actually 27,000,000, but 450,000 was for the construction of the rowing faculties in Berlin's Grünau, which did not belong to the Reich Sport Field.

⁹⁶ The figure offered in the official report was 36,000,000. See Organisationskommittee für die XI Olympiade Berlin 1936 E.V., *The XIth Olympic Games Berlin, 1936. Official Report, Volume I* (Berlin, 1937), 67.

⁹⁷ Clay Large, *Nazi Games*, 156; R. Overy, *The Third Reich. A Chronicle* (New York, 2010), 239; M. Leis, *Leni Riefenstahl* (Hamburg, 2009); J. Trimborn, trans. E. McCown, *Leni Riefenstahl. A Life* (New York, 2008), 132.

associated with the Games – such as decorating the city, publicity, the official film, and the construction of minor sporting venues such as the Deutschlandhalle (which hosted wrestling and boxing) and the rowing and sailing facilities in Grünau and Kiel – would have to have come to almost double the amount of the Reich Sports Field. This is highly unlikely. Construction was, and generally is, the single largest cost associated with hosting the Olympics. The next time the honour fell to a German city, in Munich in 1972, nearly three quarters of the total budget went on the stadium and infrastructure.⁹⁸ Frank Zarnowski, in his study of the costs of each Olympics between 1896 and 1996, has proffered the more modest sum for Berlin of roughly RM77m.⁹⁹ But as a source he cites Richard Mandell's 1972 book, *The Nazi Olympics*, which says almost nothing about how the Games were financed. In fact, Zarnowski seems to be misquoting Hitler, who stated falsely during the war that the Stadium alone cost RM77m.¹⁰⁰

It is not entirely clear why scholars continuously inflate the cost of the Games. Most of the works surveyed here offer no citation to back up the claim, referring instead to apparently elusive estimates of up to and above RM100m. Those that do, refer to two *New York Times* articles from 1936 by Arthur Daley, who wrote, without naming a source, that the Games cost RM100m, while Daley's colleague, Frederick Birchall, also repeated this sum, which was obviously doing the rounds in American newsrooms.¹⁰¹ Might this be the original source many scholars have unquestioningly run with? Perhaps. But we suspect that the reason they have done so relates to underlying and often untested assumptions about the Games' importance for

⁹⁸ K. Schiller and C. Young, *The 1972 Munich Olympics and the Making of Modern Germany* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2010), 226.

⁹⁹ C. F. Zarnowski, 'A Look at the Costs', *Journal of Olympic History*, 1, 1 (Summer 1992), 26. Zarnowski has the sum at 217 Mill 1982 Dollars, which is roughly RM 77, 330,000.

¹⁰⁰ Picker (ed.) *Tischgespräche*, 141.

¹⁰¹ A figure of \$30m, which was roughly RM100m in 1936, is stated in A. J. Daley, 'Great Sport Plant Provided by Reich', *New York Times* (26 July 1936), which is cited in B.J. Keys, *Globalizing Sport. National Rivalry and International Community in the 1930s* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2013), 142, fn 31. A.J. Daley repeated that figure in '\$40,000,000 Spent on Gigantic Event', *New York Times* (27 December 1936), which is cited in F. Bohlen, *Die XI. Olympischen Spiele Berlin 1936. Instrument der innen- und aussenpolitischen Propaganda und Systemsicherung des faschistischen Regimes* (Cologne, 1979), 112. F. Birchall, 'Tremendous Extent of Facilities for Olympics Realized Gradually', *New York Times* (4 August 1936).

the regime. For decades, ‘the Nazi Olympics’ have been considered one of Nazism’s signature ideological projects, a propaganda exercise for which neither resources nor money was spared. A round sum of roughly RM100m thus seems entirely plausible against this backdrop. Indeed, exaggerated inferences about Hitler’s central role in organising the Games are likely similarly explained. For despite knowing for decades that the Nazi regime was not a totalitarian monolith, images of the Führer’s omnipotence persist. Thanks to the work of Christiane Eisenberg, however, we now know that 1936 was not quite the political spectacle it is often said to have been, and that Hitler’s involvement, as this essay has also shown, was more circumscribed.¹⁰²

Conclusion

On 6 July 1935, just over a year before the opening ceremony, when almost everything had been paid for, Pfundtner announced to his colleagues in the RIM how they were going to allocate money from the so-called *Adolf Hitler Spende*. This Spende was donated by commercial and industrial circles and, according to its founding charter, was typically used to support the economic recovery.¹⁰³ In this instance, RM45k was earmarked for the sailors’ clubhouse in Kiel and RM6.75k for decking out different sporting sites. The Reich Sports Führer was to receive RM200k towards training the German Olympic team, on the condition that he exhausted all other sources of funding, and ‘the rest’ (just over RM300k) was to go on art and whatever else was needed for the venues.¹⁰⁴ This money - RM550k - was about the extent of Hitler’s financial commitment to the 1936 Olympics. As for his general involvement in their organisation, this was limited too: apart from his promise that the Reich would cover

¹⁰² Christiane Eisenberg, “*English Sports*” und deutsche Bürger. *Eine Gesellschaftsgeschichte 1800–1939* (Paderborn, 1999), 409-29.

¹⁰³ Letter from the Reichsband der deutschen Industrie members, 22 June 1933. Available at: http://webopac.hwwa.de/PresseMappe20E/Digiview_MID.cfm?mid=F045372 (accessed 13 May 2021).

¹⁰⁴ Internal RIM Memorandum, 6 July 1935, BArch B R 1501/5612.

the costs of the Reich Sport Field and the occasional interest he showed in models of it, there is little sign of any other engagement. When it came to the Olympics, the will of the Führer amounted to little more than a small number of timely interventions and an intermittent inquisitiveness about how construction was progressing.

Behind the so-called will of the Führer there lay a disorderly and at times confusing administrative process, without which the vast new structures of stone and concrete that still adorn Berlin's Olympic Park (as it is now known) could hardly have been built. To be sure, Hitler's intervention in October 1933 did guarantee that the necessary work on the Stadium and Sport Forum would be carried out, ending almost eight years of uncertainty. But the debates that had hindered construction up until that point did not simply evaporate. Money still had to be found, a financial contribution from Berlin secured, and compensation packages negotiated with parties that stood to lose out. Hitler's involvement, then, though crucial, was not as Pfundtner had portrayed it in his conversation with the *Berliner illustrierte Nachtausgabe*. Instead, this interview merely masked the routine processes and procedures that characterised modern administration before and since.

The literature on the Olympic Games has failed to grasp this. It has overlooked how construction for the Games was financed; ignored the all-important debates that ensured it eventually was; and, as a consequence, produced inflated estimates of how much it cost to host the event overall. As this essay has shown, when it came to the will of the Führer – even, or especially, for the world's largest sporting event – there was much more to it than met the eye.