

East Germany: The Stasi and De-Stasification

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Shortly after Mikhail Gorbachev was installed as secretary general of the Soviet Union's Communist Party in the spring of 1985, he began to pursue his liberalization policies of glasnost and perestroika. The impact was felt almost immediately within the ruling Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED), the Communist Party of the East German Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR). Gorbachev's policies gave new hope for political, economic, and social renewal to those disenchanted with the gerontological Stalinist leadership of Erich Honecker and his sycophants.¹

A new wind was blowing from the East, generated by the "great teacher"—the Soviet Union. In line with the USSR's change of course, both Moscow's German-language propaganda magazine, *Sputnik*, and its weekly newspaper, *Neue Zeit*, reprinted Gorbachev's speeches and editorialized on the necessity for reforms of the socialist system. For East Germany's leaders, however, they became hostile publications and were banned despite protests emanating from Moscow. Nonetheless, they presaged a major change: For the first time since the founding of the DDR in 1949, the restlessness of Party members and much of the citizenry could not be blamed on the capitalist enemy of the proletariat.

Until the mid-1980s, opposition to the regime was largely underground, although hundreds of thousands of burghers spent time in penitentiaries for publicly voicing their discontent. The repression began immediately after the end of World War II, carried out by Soviet security services and German Communist Party veterans (both those who had been in exile in the Soviet Union and those that had survived Nazi imprisonment). Thousands of people were arrested and shipped off to the infamous former Nazi concentration camps of Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald. Initially, the inhabitants of East Germany shrugged off the wave of arrests, believing the victims to be only former Nazi officials or war criminals. Then, in

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spring 1946, the Soviets ordered the fusion of two archenemies, the German Communist Party (the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*, or KPD) and the German Social Democratic Party (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, or SPD).

Outwardly, the creation of the new party, the SED, appeared to proceed smoothly. In reality, however, thousands of rank-and-file socialists opposed to the union were thrown into prisons or concentration camps. They were joined by people who had been denounced for making anticommunist or anti-Soviet remarks, hundreds of them as young as fourteen.²

On August 16, 1947, the Soviet Military Administration (SMA) ordered the creation of the first postwar German political police. Named *Kommissariat 5* (K-5), it was formally attached to the criminal investigation department of the *Volks-polizei* (the People's Police, or VOPO). In reality, however, it operated independently under Soviet supervision; the subterfuge was necessary because the rules of the Allied Control Commission for Germany forbade the reestablishment of a German political police. Wilhelm Zaisser, a veteran German operative for Soviet military intelligence (GRU) and a former commander of the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War, was named as its head. Erich Mielke, another long-time Communist agent of the Soviet security services, became Zaisser's deputy.

During its early years, the K-5 arrested citizens and turned them over to the Soviet security organs for trial by Soviet military tribunals. In most cases, the proceedings lasted no more than a few minutes, often resulting in sentences of twenty-five years in a Soviet labor camp or a high security penitentiary in East Germany.³ Less than a year later, Erich Mielke was detailed to create another secret police bearing the innocuous name of *Deutsche Wirtschaftskommission*, the German Economic Commission. It was charged with guarding confiscated property against "misuse and sabotage," as well as with the investigation of "economic crimes."⁴ In the first year after the war, 1.6 million people left the Soviet zone, creating a serious shortage of skilled workers and specialists.⁵ Consequently, protection of the economy, including pursuit of East Germans escaping to the West, became a major secret police function.

Creation of the Ministry of State Security

The German Democratic Republic was created in October 1949, with a government consisting of a *Ministerrat*, or ministerial council. Its members also belonged to the Communist Party's twenty-one-member Politburo and the Central Committee (ZK). In an effort to demonstrate that the DDR was ruled by a parliamentary democracy, a provisional *Volkskammer* (People's Chamber) was installed. It was purely a rubber-stamp body, however—all laws created by the Politburo were passed by the *Volkskammer* without dissent, and subsequently promulgated by the *Ministerrat*.⁶

On January 14, 1950, the Soviet Military Administration ceded all judicial functions to their German minions and informed the government that all Soviet "internment" camps had been closed. In the five years following the end of World War II, the Soviets and their vassals had arrested between 170,000 and 180,000 Germans. Some 160,000 Germans had passed through the concentration camps—

of these, about 65,000 had died, 36,000 had been shipped to gulags in the Soviet Union, and another 46,000 were freed.⁷ The rest were turned over to East German authorities to continue serving the sentences handed down by military tribunals. Less than a month later, parliament rubber-stamped a two-paragraph proposal creating the Ministry for State Security (MfS).⁸ Thus, the Stasi was born.

Wilhelm Zaisser was appointed minister and given a seat on the Politburo and membership in the Central Committee. The Economic Commission was integrated into the MfS and its head, Erich Mielke, was appointed state secretary and deputy to Zaisser. Mielke was also accorded membership in the Central Committee.

The ministry's initial mandate was limited to internal security—the suppression of political dissent, counter-espionage, and sabotage. The foreign espionage service, formed in 1951 under the cover of the Institute for Economic Scientific Research, was administratively attached to the MfS in 1953 as Department XV. Its headquarters was in an East Berlin suburb and more or less operated independently. This was very distressing to Mielke, who at one point accused the service and its director, Markus Wolf, of being “ideological subversives who underestimated the dangers of western infiltration.”⁹

The ruthless pursuit of *diversanten*, or subversives—who could count on long and harsh incarceration, confiscation of private property, and endemic shortages of consumer goods—drove more and more East Germans to vote with their feet, heading for West Germany. Despite the repressive efforts of the Stasi, the burgher's derogatory name for the MfS, discontent among workers over increased work quotas—imposed without a corresponding wage hike—reached the breaking point on June 16, 1953. Probably heartened by the death of Soviet dictator Iosif Stalin three months earlier, nearly one hundred construction workers gathered at Berlin's Stalinallee for a protest demonstration before starting work.

Word spread rapidly to other construction sites in East Berlin, and the first open rebellion was underway. Hundreds of workers marched on the House of Ministries, the seat of the government, and chanted their protests for five hours. Cajoling by a minister was met with derisive jeers. People's Police riot squads were called out but made no move against the protesters, who called for a general strike. The next day, some one hundred thousand workers marched through East Berlin; about four hundred thousand took to the streets in 304 other cities and towns. In twenty-four towns, the people stormed prisons and freed between two thousand and three thousand inmates serving time for political offenses.¹⁰ Stasi officers and the VOPO were massed but, despite bloody street battles, were unable to restore order. Rioting workers overran police stations and sacked government offices throughout the DDR. Two Soviet armored divisions accompanied by infantry and MVD Internal Troops were called out to reinforce Stasi agents and the People's Police. Drum-head courts handed down death sentences that were carried out on the spot.

Intervention by the Soviet army subsequently broke the back of the revolt within twenty-four hours. Stasi flying squads swept through the country. Provisional prison camps were set up to hold the thousands of Stasi victims, and nearly fifteen hundred persons were sentenced to long prison terms. A terse announcement by Stasi Deputy Minister Mielke on June 24 revealed that one

Stasi officer, nineteen demonstrators, and two bystanders had been killed during the uprising. (Mielke did not say how many were victims of official lynching.) The number of wounded was given as 191 policemen, 126 demonstrators, and 61 bystanders.

By the end of 1953, calm had returned to the streets. About sixty thousand persons were languishing in DDR prisons.¹¹ Defections to the West continued at a high rate, however. Of the 331,390 people who fled in 1953, some 8,000 were members of the *Kasernierte Volkspolizei*, the barracked VOPO units that served as the cadre of the future East German army. A total of 2,718 members and candidates of the SED, the ruling party, also numbered among the escapees.¹² The “shield and sword” of the Party, as the Ministry for State Security described itself, had suffered its first major failure.

Not only the East German hierarchy sought a scapegoat. Lavrenti Beria, head of the Ministerstvo Vnudrennikh Del (MVD), the Soviet Ministry for Internal Affairs, flew to Berlin and demanded to know why his most important outpost had failed to prevent the uprising.¹³ Beria replaced several hundred MVD officers, including Major General Ivan Fadeykin, the *rezident* for the DDR. The MfS, however, remained largely untouched, save for a number of dismissals and arrests in the provinces.

Turmoil within the Communist Party and the government persisted. Minister of Justice Max Fechner declared that “illegal arrests” had been made and stated that belonging to a strike council or being suspected of serving as a ringleader was insufficient for arrest and conviction. In response, Stasi Deputy Minister Mielke personally arrested Fechner. Convicted as an “enemy of the Party and the state,” Fechner spent three years in the notorious Bautzen penitentiary. Nicknamed the “Yellow Peril” for its yellow paint, the building housed political prisoners under the most inhuman conditions.

The Stasi Chastised

Shortly after his return to Moscow from Berlin, MVD Chief Beria was arrested, charged with plotting against the new post-Stalin leadership, and shot. Meanwhile, in East Berlin, a Party commission continued its search for scapegoats by hunting down plotters—real and imagined—against the leadership. Deputy Stasi Minister Mielke, either encouraged by Beria’s arrest or acting on direct orders from Moscow, used the Stasi’s failure to maintain order to conspire against his boss, Wilhelm Zaisser. He told the Party commission investigating conspiracies against the DDR that Zaisser was advocating a change in the hierarchy. Mielke also accused Zaisser of calling for a rapprochement with West Germany because “he believed the Soviet Union would abandon the DDR.”¹⁴ What Zaisser had really said was that “it is the highest duty of a communist to remain always loyal to the Soviet Union, in good times, and during bad days as well . . . even if the Soviet Union abandons the DDR tomorrow, you must remain loyal.”¹⁵

The Party chose to believe Mielke, however. Zaisser, a Party supporter all his life, was stripped of his job and kicked out of the Politburo, the Central

Committee, and the Party. Mielke must have expected to be rewarded for his loyalty to the Soviet Union and to the Party with promotion to minister. Instead, the Politburo chastised the secret police ministry by downgrading and subordinating it administratively to the Ministry of Interior under direct Party control. The ministry was led by Ernst Wollweber, an old GRU saboteur known in the West as a “miserable creature with the brain of an evil scientist.”¹⁶

The Stasi Reborn and Mielke’s Intrigue

Wollweber and Mielke made an excellent team—for a while. Mielke worked feverishly to establish a network of secret informants who would eventually penetrate every facet of life in the DDR. This enabled the Stasi to spot and eradicate opposition before it could threaten the stability of the state. At the same time, the Stasi scored significant successes against western espionage operations.

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The Party rewarded its “shield and sword” in 1955 by restoring it to a full ministry

headed by Wollweber, who also advanced to membership on the Central Committee. Mielke remained as his deputy with the rank of state secretary.

Over the next two years, Party chief Walter Ulbricht had numerous disputes with his security minister. He was particularly disturbed by Wollweber, who stubbornly placed greater emphasis on hunting “foreign spies” instead of strengthening his corps of *Spitzel*, those people pejoratively dubbed Stasi snitches. Acutely attuned to the art of intrigue and backstabbing, Mielke met with Ulbricht and accused Wollweber of “ideological subversion.” As evidence, Mielke cited his chief’s contacts with high-ranking members of West Germany’s Social Democratic Party, who were at that time exploring a modus vivendi with the DDR.¹⁷ Ulbricht already knew that yet another faction opposed to his policies had formed within the Politburo and the Central Committee. The new opposition was led by Politburo member Karl Schirdewan, and Wollweber had taken his side.

On November 1, 1957, Wollweber resigned as Minister for State Security, citing ill health.¹⁸ Mielke was appointed Stasi minister the same day and immediately set about restructuring the MfS into a mirror image of the Soviet KGB. He established military ranks; Mielke himself took the rank of major general. Markus Wolf’s espionage service was renamed the *Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung* (HVA), the Main Administration for Reconnaissance, and moved into the MfS compound. Though Wolf was also made a major general and deputy minister, Mielke now had complete control of the HVA. He had managed to bring all of his Chekists, as he liked to call his Stasi crew, under one roof.

Repression Unabated—The Wall Goes Up

Using trumped-up charges of economic crimes or “political offenses” (such as listening to a western radio station, with “evidence” supplied by Stasi informers), the regime ordered the confiscation of middle-class commercial properties throughout the DDR. Along the Baltic coast more than six hundred hotels, boarding houses, and restaurants became the property of the state. More than four hundred homeowners were arrested and sentenced to prison terms. Hundreds fled to the West.¹⁹ These government-sanctioned robberies were followed by the collectivization of all farms, a move enforced by officers of the Ministry for State Security. As a result, farmers joined the tens of thousands who fled the “workers and peasants state,” as the Party called its realm. By August 13, 1961, 3.5 million had fled, mainly using the only relatively safe escape route through Berlin, which was still under the control of the wartime allies. But during the summer, the repression and shortage of consumer goods again reached a fever pitch, with thousands fleeing into the western part of the city. During the three days preceding August 13, more than fifty-six hundred people sought refuge in West Berlin—just in the nick of time.²⁰

The previous morning, Stasi Chief Mielke had informed his division chiefs of the Politburo’s decision to cut all traffic between East and West Berlin at midnight. The Stasi’s task was to man all strategic road crossings and guard against defectors from the police and border guard units of the *Nationale Volksarmee* (NVA), the National Peoples Army, which choked off the sector border. Mielke threatened anyone who leaked word of the plans with the firing squad.²¹ Mielke’s threat, and the total isolation of all troops the moment the order for dividing Berlin was issued, achieved absolute secrecy. It was not until a few minutes after midnight that West Berlin police spotted communist units stringing barbed wire along the border. There were no major incidents.

Within a year a concrete, eight-foot-high wall had replaced the barbed wire. East Germany had become a giant prison. Those still trying to get out risked being blown to bits by landmines and automatic artillery devices along the western border. Border guards had orders to fire on anyone trying to scale the wall. By the time the DDR collapsed, more than 900 persons had been killed and many more seriously wounded. Despite the incredible obstacles facing them, however, 461,000 persons managed to get to the West; most defected while on private and official trips,²² but 30,000 actually managed to slip across the border. Another 70,000 landed in prisons for trying.²³

A new internal Party crisis, which captured the attention of Mielke and his Stasi, began to develop in the 1970s as a result of West German Chancellor Willy Brandt’s *Ostpolitik*. The social democrat was seeking a rapprochement with Eastern Europe, particularly with the Soviet Union and the DDR, under the motto “cooperation, not confrontation.” Ulbricht, the all-powerful SED general secretary and head of state, saw this as a chance to save his economically feeble country. He favored the establishment of a German Confederation. Ever suspicious, Soviet Premier Aleksei N. Kosygin, at a Moscow meeting, warned Ulbricht that Brandt’s policies, like those of NATO, were “aimed at the entire Socialist

Camp.”²⁴ Ulbricht ignored Moscow, maintaining that trade relations needed to be strengthened with West Germany to bolster his own economy.

Soviet Communist Party Secretary General Leonid Brezhnev summoned Erich Honecker, a DDR Politburo member since 1958, for a discussion in the Kremlin about removing the obstreperous seventy-seven-year-old Ulbricht from power. Honecker, then secretary for security affairs, a position that controlled the Ministry for State Security and the National Defense Council, was a vital Soviet ally. Brezhnev told Honecker to take the initiative in ousting Ulbricht. “We will react to any moves on Walter’s part regarding unity of leadership and the Party,” Brezhnev said. “I tell you very openly that it will not be possible to undertake any moves against you and other comrades of the Politburo. After all, we have our troops there with you.”²⁵

On Honecker’s return to Berlin, he briefed Mielke on his encounter with Brezhnev, knowing that the Stasi chief’s support would be essential for the successful overthrow of the Party leader. During the remainder of 1970, Honecker built up support within the Politburo and the Central Committee. The ZK sessions of December 9–11 were marked by a series of highly acrimonious debates between Ulbricht and Honecker, a spectacle that the ZK’s 160 full members and 60 candidates from throughout East Germany had not expected. Meanwhile, Stasi officers, handpicked by Mielke, intensified their surveillance of the population and of Party functionaries in particular. By mid-April 1971, they reported that the population was no more restive than usual. More important, the Stasi had acquired the names of diehard Ulbricht supporters in the ZK.²⁶

The night before the May 3, 1971, Sixteenth Plenary Session of the Central Committee, Mielke assigned his most trusted minions to a variety of delicate tasks. A detail of Stasi officers was posted at the entrance to the meeting hall, checking the credentials of participants. They compared the bearers’ names with the list of Ulbricht supporters, and anyone on the list was not admitted. Ulbricht’s regular bodyguards were replaced by two Mielke confidants, whose assignment was to keep Ulbricht away from his office, where he had a direct telephone link to the commander of the National People’s Army. (Mielke feared that if Ulbricht realized that he was about to be dethroned, he might become irrational enough to call out the Army, and since he was chairman of the National Defense Committee, the military would have followed his orders.)

After picking up an unsuspecting Ulbricht at his home, the Stasi men drove him to the State Council in downtown Berlin. However, instead of escorting him to the meeting hall, they took the protesting old man for a long walk along the River Spree, which ran behind the building. After the bodyguards received an all clear over their portable radio, they took Ulbricht to the session. There he was informed that Honecker had been elected secretary general of the Party, first secretary of the ZK, and chairman of the National Defense Council. Ulbricht was “promoted” to chairman of the State Council, a ceremonial office devoid of any power.²⁷

For his efforts, Mielke was awarded a seat in the Politburo and promoted to the rank of four-star army general, assuring him a career as the longest serving

secret police chief of the Eastern Bloc. Paul Verner, Communist Party member and Spanish Civil War veteran, became the Politburo's secretary for security affairs and, consequently, Mielke's compatriot in the political oppression machine.

Growth of the Stasi

The precursor of the MfS, the *Kommissariat 5*, was set up shortly after World War II with 601 operatives.²⁸ When Mielke took over the MfS in 1957, its ranks had swelled to 11,938. By 1973, the ministry had grown to 52,707 persons, including its praetorian guard, the *Wachregiment Feliks Dzerzhinsky*—named after the founder of the first Soviet secret police Cheka. The Helsinki Conference of Security and Cooperation (CSCE) held in 1975 provided a new internal security dilemma for the DDR leadership. As a signatory, the DDR agreed to respect human rights and the freedom of movement of the people. In practice, the leadership ignored its pledge and the population began to stir once again, with tens of thousands deluging the government with requests for permission to leave the country. All requests were sent to the Stasi in baskets where they lay, most unanswered and filed away, as evidence that the petitioners were potential enemies of the state.

As a direct response to the new unrest, Mielke ordered the accelerated recruitment of officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs). At final tally, the Stasi stood at 102,000 officers and NCOs, including 11,000 members of the Dzerzhinsky Regiment.²⁹ At that point, the MfS had been organized into the following *Hauptabteilungen* (HA), or main directorates:

HA I—Security of the National People's Army and Border Troops

HA II—Counterespionage, control of foreign embassies, journalists, internal MfS security, central responsibility for foreigners, special political events

HA III—Electronic surveillance

HA VI—Passport control, surveillance of border crossings for wanted persons, tourism security, control of hotels

HA VII—Responsible for security of departments under the Ministry of Interior (such as the People's Police)

HA VIII—Investigations, surveillance, control of transit routes

HA IX—Internal investigations organ of the MfS, collaboration with judicial branches

HA XVIII—Security of the national economy, agriculture, trade fairs

HA XIX—Security of traffic and communications system

HA XX—Security of the government, parties, organizations and churches, sports and youth groups, arts and cultural institutions, central responsibility for combating political underground movements

HA XXII—International antiterror counterintelligence and special troops for combating demonstrations

The two unnumbered main directorates included: HA Cadre, responsible for schooling, personnel, discipline, and education, and the HA Personal, which

provided protection for the Party leadership, security, and maintenance of Party property. The foreign espionage directorate was carried out as *Hauptverwaltung Aufklaerung* (HVA). Not included in *Hauptabteilungen* were the following departments:

ZAIG (Zentrale Arbeitsgruppe Auswertung und Information—Central Evaluation and Information Working Group)—Collection, evaluation, and analysis of information for decision making, preparation of situation reports and recommendations for the Party and MfS leadership

Abteilung X—International connection and collaboration with Eastern European security organizations

Abteilung XI—Central cipher service of the DDR

Abteilung XII—Central registry and archive

Abteilung XIII—Central computer center

Abteilung XIV—MfS prisons

Abteilung XVII—Border crossing permit offices in West Berlin

Abteilung 26—Telephone control and wiretapping

MfS Legal Department

Juristische Hochschule des MfS (College of Justice)—Continued education for MfS officers

Fachschule Gransee (Special School Gransee)—Operational basic training for MfS members

Zentraler Medizinischer Dienst in MfS—Central MfS medical service

Institute fuer Fremdsprachenausbildung—Foreign language training

Arbeitsgruppe des Ministers (AGM, Ministerial Working Group)—Mobilization, internments, special forces

Arbeitsgruppe des Ministers 5 (AGM 5)—Rangers, diversion operatives, and sharpshooters for special operations of the minister

Abteilung M—Postal control

Abteilung Finanzen—Finance department

Zentrale Koordinierungsgruppe (ZKG, Central Coordinating Group)—Combating defections and emigration

Verwaltung Rueckwaertige Dienste (support services)—Construction of MfS buildings

Zentraler Operationsstab (Central Operations Staff)—Planning and directing central MfS operations

Abteilung E—Passport and document forgery, construction of containers with secret compartments for transporting secret material by espionage agents

Abteilung Bewaffnung, Chemische Dienste—Armaments and chemical warfare

A number of directorates and departments, such as domestic counterintelligence (HA II), investigations (HA IX), prisons, and the praetorian guard regiments, as well as all the heads of the fifteen district Stasi commands, reported directly to MfS Minister Mielke.³⁰ Supervising the other twenty-three directorates and

departments were his deputies, Colonel Generals Gerhard Neiber and Rudi Mittag, and Lieutenant General Wolfgang Schwanitz. Colonel General Markus Wolf headed the foreign espionage directorate until his retirement in 1986, after which Lieutenant General Werner Grossmann led the HVA.

Although the MfS had primary responsibility for domestic security, it is necessary to view the entire law enforcement and the military as quasi-Stasi auxiliaries. In 1990, when the DDR collapsed, their compositions were as follows:

Military	175,000
Border troops	45,000
People's Police (regular)	75,000
Barracked (riot) People's Police	18,000
Transport police	9,000
Customs service	10,000
Customs investigations	400 ³¹

In addition to regular military and law enforcement units, the regime maintained the so-called *Kampfgruppen*, a uniformed workers militia. In 1989, its membership stood at four hundred thousand members equipped with light and heavy infantry weapons, light anti-aircraft guns, and armored personnel carriers. Subordinated to the Ministry of Defense, the *Kampfgruppen* augmented regular troops and police in suppressing civil unrest. Together with the regular army and police, the *Kampfgruppen* were deployed when the Berlin Wall went up in August 1963.

The MfS had officers assigned to each of the above groups, either overtly or as covert operatives known as *Offiziere im Besonderen Einsatz* (officers on special assignment, or OIBE). Counterintelligence within the military was solely a Stasi function. Military intelligence was organized as *Verwaltung Aufklaerung* (VA) and served as an integral part of the DDR Defense Ministry (although the MfS had OIBEs within the VA as an internal security measure). In addition, the MfS—particularly the domestic counterintelligence directorate HA II—had saturated all law enforcement and military units with *Informelle Mitarbeiter* (IMs), unofficial collaborators.

Heading Toward Oblivion

By the early 1960s, the MfS had smashed resistance groups that had been organized by West Berlin anti-Communists that had been operating since 1948. Through infiltration with IMs, the Stasi eradicated groups like the SPD *Ostbuero* networks, the *Kampfgruppe gegen Unmenschlichkeit* (KgU, Battle Group Against Inhumanity), and the *Untersuchungsausschuss freier Juristen* (UfJ, Investigative Council of Free Jurists).³² Thousands of opponents of communist tyranny were imprisoned. Dozens were executed for espionage or sabotage after having been convicted in show trials. Others were kidnapped in West Berlin and turned over to the Soviets for trial. One such abductee, Dr. Walther Linse, a lawyer and head of the UfJ economics section, was subsequently shot on December 15, 1953, at Butyrka prison in Moscow.³³ Both the KgU and UfJ resistance groups, although initially financed by

private donations, were eventually supported by the U.S. Army Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) and later by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).³⁴

In 1963, the government began a ransom project. Though designed chiefly to earn hard currency, this program was also intended to reduce the population of political prisoners and make room for new ones that could be ransomed. These operations were under total MfS control, and persons convicted of espionage or sabotage generally were exchanged for spies captured in the West. DDR emissaries contacted private businessmen in West Berlin, proposing the release of prisoners to West Germany in exchange for a ransom. The West German government, eager to ease the plight of the prisoners, agreed. Between 1963 and 1989, West Germany paid 5 billion deutschemark (nearly \$3 billion) to the communist regime for the release of thirty-four thousand prisoners.³⁵

Despite the exchanges and additional periodic amnesties, there were seldom fewer than thirty thousand prisoners behind bars at any time between 1949 and 1989. The figures varied from year to

year: in 1953 there were about sixty thousand prisoners; in 1955 some forty-seven thousand; in 1960 about twenty-three thousand; and in 1947 some forty-eight thousand political inmates. The lowest point was reached in 1987, when one of the amnesties reduced the prisoner population to around five thousand. But soon after, the prisons filled again—in 1989 they had swelled to twenty-seven thousand.³⁶

So-called *Friedensgottesdienste*, worship services for peace, had been held sporadically and quietly in various Lutheran churches throughout East Germany since the late 1970s. In reality, these were disguised antiregime protest meetings, but since informers had infiltrated virtually all of the church groups, the Stasi was able to keep tabs on dissidents. Occasionally, the Stasi made arrests to prevent the opposition from getting out of hand.

Encouraged by Mikhail Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika policies, a group comprised of regime opponents and people wishing to emigrate issued a public demand in January 1988 that the government adhere to the "freedom for those who think differently" proclamation of Rosa Luxemburg in 1918.³⁷ The Stasi reacted with the arrest, imprisonment, and expulsion from East Germany of many dissidents.³⁸ In response, the dissidents became more brazen, holding more vocal solidarity meetings and demonstrations outside the courthouse where the trials of their compatriots were being held. Stasi officers arrested dozens, but the regime was obviously running scared. Instead of creating further unrest by launching new trials, it offered the dissidents exit visas that were accepted.

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The resulting calm lasted for about a year. In January 1989, the Party called for a *Kampfdemonstration*, a battle demonstration, on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of Rosa Luxemburg's death, with a huge procession of the faithful to her grave in Berlin. This time the Stasi was prepared; hundreds of officers mingled with the marchers and video surveillance cameras were placed at strategic locations. According to the subsequent report of the MfS, two women attempted to join the marchers and unfurl a large banner bearing the words *perestroika* and *glasnost*. At another point, a man carried a large placard with the portrait of Gorbachev, below which he had drawn the image of a sputnik in red. Both the women and the man were arrested and there were no further incidents. Through its massive use of Stasi agents, the regime had proved its ability to squash protests before they could escalate.³⁹

In the Saxonian city of Leipzig, some ninety miles southwest of Berlin, however, about two hundred people gathered to hear a man calling for a silent protest march. The group then distributed flyers that the Stasi described as "hate leaflets." As a result, fifty-three persons were arrested.⁴⁰ From then on, the political climate deteriorated rapidly.

On June 29, 1987, MfS Chief Erich Mielke made a secret speech to his highest-ranking officers. He warned them that "hostile opposing forces and groups have already achieved a measure of power and are using all methods to achieve a change in the balance of power."⁴¹ Mielke compared the situation with that in China two months earlier, when Chinese troops had opened fire on protesting students in Tiananmen Square, killing hundreds. Mielke said the situation in the DDR was comparable and needed to be countered with "all means and methods." Citing the resoluteness of the PRC, Mielke lauded the fact that "the Chinese leadership was able to smother the protest before the situation got out of hand."⁴²

Shortly before Mielke made his speech, the Hungarian government, which was undergoing its own transformation toward greater personal liberties, had made the first dent in the Iron Curtain. The barbed wire fences at its border were dismantled and guards were reduced to a minimum. Hundreds of East Germans vacationing in Hungary decided not to return home and headed for Austria, although the official opening of the border was not announced until August. By early September, thousands traveled through Czechoslovakia to Hungary and stampeded to the West.

Prodded by the Stasi chief, the Politburo persuaded the Czech government to close its borders to East Germans. Trapped, some twenty-five hundred sought asylum in the West German embassy in Prague, turning the embassy garden into a tent city. The Bonn government then persuaded the Czech government to allow the refugees to leave. Erich Honecker, the DDR head of state, announced on September 29 that he would honor a request from the "Czechoslovakian Comrades" and let the refugees leave for West Germany aboard a special train. When the train stopped at the East German city of Dresden on its westward journey, thousands of citizens tried to enter the main railroad station. They, too, wanted to defect. Mielke's elite Stasi units, as well as police riot squads, went into action; hundreds were clubbed into submission, thrown onto army trucks, and taken to detention camps.

While the regime was wrestling with the emigration problem, protest marches erupted throughout the country. The burghers of Leipzig had become particularly resolute and fearless despite brutal beatings from Stasi goons and police. Beginning in early September, between 2,000 and 3,000 marched through the center of the city every Monday evening carrying lit candles and gathering for prayers in front of the Nikolai church. Except for shouts for democratic reforms and demands for freedom to travel, these marches were peaceful, and their ranks swelled by thousands every consecutive Monday. In Berlin, Mielke told Stasi commanders of his plan to form special squads to attack the demonstrators, split them into three groups and arrest their leaders.⁴³ Paratrooper units assembled outside the city, to serve as reinforcements should they be needed. The country was dangerously close to civil war.

Despite the growing unrest, the regime “celebrated” the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the DDR with a huge, pompous ceremony in Berlin on October 7 while tens of thousands jeered outside the ornate State Council building. Police cordons were useless; when Stasi Minister Mielke drove up to meet with Lieutenant General Guenter Kratsch, chief of the domestic counterintelligence directorate, he screamed at police: “Club those pigs into submission!”⁴⁴ The police ignored Mielke’s rant.

Soviet President Gorbachev attended the ceremony as the guest of honor. He was already angry with his East German allies for stubbornly ignoring his glasnost and perestroika policies and for banning the sale of Soviet publications that the DDR had labeled “subversive.” Now, he saw thousands of screaming demonstrators, many shouting “Gorby help us!”

Before leaving for Berlin, Gorbachev had received a top-secret analysis prepared for the KGB by MfS Colonel Rainer Wiegand of his own initiative and at great personal risk. “If Mielke had found out, I would have been finished,” Wiegand said later, drawing a finger across his throat. Wiegand described the near chaotic situation throughout the DDR and warned the Soviet leader not to be taken in by “Potemkin villages.” Thus, Gorbachev pointedly remarked in an impromptu speech before East German functionaries that “life will punish those who arrive too late.”

Gorbachev, who had his own problems with internal security, was not inclined to prop up a dying regime and risk his improving relations with the West, especially the United States and West Germany. He let it be known that the 380,000-strong group of Soviet forces in Germany would be kept in their barracks and not interfere as they had in the 1953 uprising.⁴⁵

Erich Honecker ignored the Soviet leader’s warning and was stripped of his positions as secretary general of the Party and head of state eleven days later. Egon Krenz, the Politburo member charged with supervision of the MfS and a longtime ally of Mielke, assumed Honecker’s posts. This changed nothing, however, even though Krenz tried to ingratiate himself with the people by claiming that he had prevented civil war on October 9 by countermanding Honecker’s order that special troops and police use firearms against some two hundred thousand demonstrators in Leipzig.

This time, the protesters carried signs demanding free elections, which ten years earlier would have been punished with at least ten years of hard labor. Encouraged by police inaction, demonstrators stretched large banners reading "No Violence!" across the entrance to the imposing Stasi district headquarters in downtown Leipzig. As demonstrations continued in Leipzig and in Berlin, passionate public debates took place between protesters and politicians. These were aggressively reported by the Western news media, which played a decisive role in forcing the Party hierarchy to its knees. Events signaling a total collapse moved rapidly. On November 7, the entire Council of Ministers resigned. Nonetheless, Mielke continued as acting minister.

Despite the disarray of the internal security directorates of the Stasi toward the end of October, the HVA continued its espionage activities in the West, albeit not to the same extent as before the crisis. At the end of December, it was still able to obtain a secret North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) analysis of the situation in East Germany for the DDR leadership.⁴⁶ HVA Chief Lieutenant General Werner Grossmann, who had replaced the retiring Wolf in 1987, realized the inevitability of talks with the government and dissidents over the future of the HVA. Colonel Heinz Busch, the HVA's chief military analyst, was picked as the representative to the talks, which were scheduled to begin in early December.

On November 9, the Politburo surrendered to citizen demands and issued a statement allowing unhindered travel to the West. Guenther Schabowski, the Berlin district Party secretary, read the statement before television cameras at a news conference that evening. While still on live camera, he was asked when the rule would take effect. He answered, "Immediately." Within hours, thousands of people were streaming toward the border checkpoints at the Berlin Wall. Hapless border guards had received no instructions. Shortly after 11:00 p.m., Captain Bruno Nevyhosteny took matters into his own hands and ordered the gates opened. The Berlin Wall was breached forever.

Sensing the imminent collapse of their totalitarian government, people from all walks of life banded together throughout the country to form *Buergerkommittees*, or citizens committees. Their initial task was to negotiate with Party and Stasi officials for a peaceful resolution to the crisis. Fear of future violence was justified unless the Stasi was disbanded. In a top secret October report to the Party leadership, Mielke said groups of dissidents had repeatedly attempted to "provoke" MfS at their various offices into taking "uncontrollable measures." They shouted "Burn the house down!" "Stasi pigs get out!" "Beat them to death!" or "The knives have been sharpened and the ropes are ready!"

On November 13, Mielke was summoned to appear before the Chamber of People's Deputies, the rubber-stamp parliament, to deliver an analysis of the security situation. As he summarized the events and claimed his Stasi was still solidly in control, deputies began to hoot and whistle in derision. Mielke was totally unprepared for this opposition; never before had anyone dared to raise a voice against him. He stuttered and squirmed and finally raised his arms like an evangelist. "I love every one of you . . . but I really do love you all," he shouted, his face grief-stricken and pale. Even his most staunch supporters burst into

howling laughter. The entire drama was recorded and shown on television. Mielke was finished.

Hans Modrow, the first district secretary of the Party in Dresden, who had worked hand-in-glove with the Stasi in putting down the riots in early October, was chosen as Premier. When he introduced his new cabinet on November 13, Mielke was no longer part of it.

Still, there was no question that something needed to be done about the hated Stasi. On November 15, the Stasi leadership, now headed by Deputy Minister and Lieutenant-General Wolfgang Schwanz, decided that the Ministry of State Security should be renamed as the *Amt fuer Nationale Sicherheit* (AFNS), or Office for National Security. It was to function as a state secretariat directly subordinate to the premier. Modrow announced the restructuring of the Stasi two days later.

As the Christmas season approached, the situation on the streets was relatively calm, mainly because the opening of the Berlin Wall had released the accumulated pressure that

had been building in the streets. People were able to visit the western paradise where the government handed every East German a “welcoming gift” of one hundred marks with which they could buy, among other “luxuries,” bananas, which many had never tasted. The Party and government, meanwhile, were trying to reconstitute themselves along democratic lines while holding fast to Marxist-Leninist dogma. Egon Krenz was unable to come to grips with the situation and on December 3, the Party ousted him as general secretary.

The turmoil at the top made the people even more defiant. On the evening of December 4, Stasi Colonel Artur Wenzel was stopped by demonstrators as he was leaving an office building in East Berlin carrying an attaché case. Demonstrators opened the case and found 740,000 West marks (roughly \$435,000) and 150,000 unconvertible East marks. Wenzel, a member of the Stasi directorate responsible for countering economic espionage in the electronic industry and a case officer for a number of Stasi agents involved in circumventing the Western embargo on the export of strategic goods to the Eastern Bloc, was turned over to police. He claimed that the money belonged to Western businessmen who had left it as security in connection with future clandestine transactions. Two days after his arrest, however, Wenzel was found dead in his jail cell. Suicide by hanging was ruled the official cause of death.

In the provinces, meanwhile, members of citizens committees posted at Stasi buildings noticed an unusual amount of thick smoke belching out of chimneys. They guessed, correctly, that incriminating documents were being destroyed. General Schwanz, with the consent of Premier Modrow, had issued the order to

“During the night of December 4 and 5, hundreds converged on the Stasi district offices in Rostock, Dresden, Leipzig, Erfurt, Gera, Suhl, Halle, and East Berlin.”

destroy all files, video, and audiotapes. The people's reaction was massive; during the night of December 4 and 5, hundreds converged on the Stasi district offices in Rostock, Dresden, Leipzig, Erfurt, Gera, Suhl, Halle, and East Berlin. They pounded on the doors and demanded access. Though the Stasi had established fortifications—in Halle, officers had even set up thirty-one machineguns to mow down intruders—they nonetheless capitulated quickly.

A particularly detailed and poignant description by an anonymous author of the fateful night in the city of Rostock was made part of the protocol of the Independent Investigatory Council.⁴⁷ Representative of the occurrences in other cities, it read:

It all began with a telephone call at 8:00 p.m.: "Could you come to the August-Bebel-Strasse to relieve us. Our people have already been standing here since 3:00 p.m. at all entrances of the Stasi complex. We want to prevent further destruction of files and are already negotiating. Bring something to eat. Call other people. Hurry up!"

My wife and I look at each other. "We are going there." We prepare tea and sandwiches, call friends and acquaintances, answer their questions. "Come along, we meet at the main entrance." We arrive at 9:00 p.m. At the main entrance there are many people—60 to 80—among them many acquaintances. Stretched above the door is a banner reading "Security for Our Files." We are informed that negotiations are taking place with Major General Mittag. Taking part are Provincial [Lutheran Church] Superintendent Dr. Wiebering and Attorney Vormelker. Others to join the talks were Colonels Birkholz and Lorenz from the People's Police district office, District Chief Prosecutor Mueller, and Prosecutor Wiggers. The participation of the police and the prosecutors is our first success because they had been urged to do so by the demonstrators. After hesitating for some time, they finally agreed to come. The suggestion by the head of the district Stasi office to talk with ten people, made at the main entrance at about 8:00 p.m., had been rejected. Instead, the first demands were made, among them that the district office be turned over to the People's Police.

We are standing beneath the cold illumination of the entrance lights, the video cameras behind the lights make one think briefly: "Who is sitting behind the monitors?" Groups of people leave the main entrance and head for the other entrances and for the gate of the nearby prison where people are held for investigation. The sentry hut is dark. We can hardly make out the guards. We are standing amid blinding floodlights.

At another Stasi building, many people stand before a gray, iron gate. Here, too, bright lights. Students are singing a song. I remember the refrain: "Stasischergen was habt ihr zu verbergen . . ." [Stasi thugs what do you have to hide.] Here, too, many acquaintances, many young people who pour hot tea and hand out sandwiches and cakes. I have an ambiguous feeling about the situation. Almost carefree behavior directly in front of the gate which divides us from the Stasi people, the anonymous power, the giant complex which stands in the middle of the city like a foreign body that has grown steadily over the years piece by piece, building upon building, guarded by gates, video cameras and walls. Facades of buildings one can't go near, fear instilling, just the name August-Bebel-Strasse is enough to make one shudder. In passing by the place in earlier times I always had a funny feeling in the pit of my stomach. We learn that a group of ten to fifteen persons had been permitted inside at about 9:00 p.m., including people from the Neue Forum,⁴⁸ Dietlind Gueer, Axel Peters, Dr. Ohf, Wolfram Vormelker, and Pastor Fred Mahlburg from the citizens council. Three demands are on the table:

- Allow citizens of the town inside as controllers

- Turn over of the complex to the People's Police and sealing off all rooms by the prosecutor's office
- Establish an Independent Investigatory Council

Negotiators appear at short intervals at the entrances to inform the people of the progress inside. The pressure at the entrances is growing. At first, a few isolated yells. "We want to get inside," then chanting in unison. The door of the sentry hut opens. Axel Peters appears, announcing that technicians are needed to check out rooms in the basement. I squeeze through the crowd toward the door, a friend is also there. We are taken through the sentry hut past two guards. "Wait at the gate. You will be picked up." I am standing with ten people in the dark courtyard. The eyes have to get used to the total darkness. I see the contours of the yard and two groups of people in battle dress, fully equipped, helmets on their heads or hanging from belts, ten to thirty persons. Suddenly, I am scared.

Outside the gate the yelling and chanting becomes louder. "We want inside," louder and louder. Hands appear at the top of the wall, heads appear, they want to get inside no matter what. If someone flips his lid . . . The lamps at the gate bathe the scene in a ghostly light. The helmeted groups in the dark . . . if someone loses his nerve . . . just one shot. I am sick with fear. Seconds later the powerful voice of Axel Peters. "People, get off the wall, it doesn't bring us anything." Bodies and hands disappear. Relief! I feel how the relaxation of tension sweeps through the darkened yard. One can hear whispering and see movement among the two armed groups. Thank God! A quick prayer, a quick prayer of thanks.

We are taken inside the building. The large foyer is filling quickly with people who are brought inside from other entrances. Familiar and strange faces and suddenly I realize to my horror that there are also Stasi men in civilian clothes inside the building. How many Stasi men are already among us? No one knows. Distrust spreads. We are looking for familiar faces. Small groups are formed and so, out of chaos, we create Stasi-free groups. Now what? Fulfill the demands that the building be vacated, stop the destruction of files, seal up everything, close up everything and secure the building. Where is the police? We learn that thirty men are on the way. They are to secure the building. The Stasi building Waldeck [a safe house], which is outside the city, also must be secured. We heard that files were taken there just this afternoon. Thirty from our side are on their way.

Seal up rooms and safes. But how? None of us have ever sealed up anything. And where to get sealing wax? Rummaging through desks we find some. But we have no seals. Paper is cut into strips, signed by our people and placed beneath the wax. The prosecutors approve. Several groups are formed and assigned to various tasks. One group is charged with keeping an eye on the "tenants." I spot a group of physicians, among which was also my wife. They are preparing to examine the inmates of prison next door. We embrace. So far so good. I return to my group.

It is after midnight. Securing the Stasi headquarters of the Rostock district continues, unplanned, without a prepared concept, hectic, spontaneous, but rigorously. Everyone does his best. We are observing General Mittag, a small man in his early sixties. I notice his erect bearing, his poker face, only his moving cheek muscles betray that this man is under great tension. He is surrounded by his staff, they speak in short sentences, telephones ring, conversations take place sotto voce. We grow suspicious. Is there something afoot against us? Should we stop them? What is now the right thing to do? First, timid conversations with Stasi men are held, questions are asked, but one can grasp with both hands the distrust existing on both sides. We are standing in the office of the chief, wood-panelled, a large desk, a large conference

table, built-ins, upholstered easy chairs. Dietlind Gueer says: "Come Gerhard, let's sit down, we are the people." We sink into the deep chairs. Near the desk stands the general, alone. Wonder what he is thinking. I realize how exhausted I am. What is happening here? Five days ago, on Thursday, we stood in front of this sinister building. Now we are sitting in the center of Stasi power, there stands Major General Mittag big as life. It is not a dream. Or is it?

New information perks me up. The policemen, about thirty of them, are here Finally! They are standing in the foyer, a bit perplexed, many of them are probably in this place for the first time as well. What is happening here? We explain. Some appear distant, but most are cooperative. A few even seem to grow a few centimeters as if to say "Finally we are going against this 'Organ,' which also had the police always under its thumb." They pat down Stasi men who want to leave the building, first timidly, but soon resolutely. We are steadily getting new reports of catastrophes. They are still working in a building next door! On the second floor is the communications center. Our people can't get inside. They have barricaded themselves. And on and on it goes without a pause.

The work inside the communication center is a special threat to us. What are they doing in there? We need to cut the power. Can't do that, say leading Stasi officers. We demand that the place be opened. The center is telephoned. We are on our way. The deputy commander accompanies us. We are walking through dimly lit hallways, turn corners, climb steps; it is like a labyrinth. Finally, we are there. A steel door. Restricted area, says our state guide. We ring the bell and are permitted to enter. A long hallway, to the left and right rooms crammed with communications equipment. Questions are asked and answered tersely. Are they telling us the truth? Distrust, fear, everything has to be turned off. We fight over every piece of equipment. Decisions are made, then rejected. The tempers are getting hotter, the demands tougher. We are again talking to the commander and finally we work out a compromise. Only the top-secret government communications circuit will remain open, attended to by two technicians from the Neue Forum. Everything else is turned off. The entire Stasi net for the district of Rostock is now dead.

In the meantime, the first men have returned from the Waldeck safehouse. Axel Peters flings a charred file cover at the feet of General Mittag. It was found in the furnace room. In other rooms they found sacks of shredded files, definite proof of willful destruction. District prosecutor Mueller is urged to detain the general. He resisted until the urging became a demand. Finally, he said to Mittag: "I hereby detain you." We thought we had achieved something, but we did not know what "detention" meant. We found out . . . brief questioning and release. How close relations are between the MfS general and the prosecutor becomes evident from a short exchange of words before both left the building. Mittag: "Do we go in your (using the familiar address) car or in mine?" Mueller: "I came here on foot." Mittag: "Then we go in my vehicle, I still have my driver standing by." The detainee and the detainer, they cannot deny their common past which they spent in the same boat. Similar close ties seem to exist between the police chief of staff Lieutenant Colonel Zander and Major General Mittag. Their parting is warm, nearly festive, and it becomes apparent the police officer's demeanor is that of a subordinate. Those observations make one think and distrust is growing again. About 6:00 a.m. we have completed our tasks. Entire floors have been sealed. We gather again in the foyer. The medical people write a protocol, saying the prisoners they examined are in good shape, none had been mistreated. It is becoming quiet in the building. The Stasi men are gone. The police are manning all entrances. We trust them—we have to. Outside it is still dark. It is 6:15 on Tuesday, December 12, 1989. My wife and I almost simultaneous sigh with relief and I take a deep breath.

In Rostock, as well as other cities, no serious incidents occurred, despite demands here and there that Stasi men be hanged. In Dresden, irate demonstrators kicked the local Stasi chief, Major General Horst Boehm, in the buttocks. Later, Boehm and two fellow district chiefs, Major Generals Gerhard Lange of Suhl and Peter Koch of Neubrandenburg, committed suicide.

The day after the takeover of Stasi regional offices, Egon Krenz resigned his posts as head of state and chairman of the National Defense Council. Manfred Gerlach became his successor. The same day, former Stasi Chief Erich Mielke, under investigation for high treason and unconstitutionally ordering nationwide surveillance of telecommunications and mail, was jailed. Honecker, the former Party chief and head of state, escaped police detection. He was in a hospital undergoing cancer surgery.

In mid-December, functionaries of the Communist Socialist Unity Party (SED) renamed it Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) and described it as a Marxist socialist party with a democratic face. The following day, Party and government functionaries in Berlin began negotiations, which became known as the "Roundtable," over the future of the DDR with representatives of churches and dissident groups. Roundtables were also established in important provincial cities. The first demand of the democratic forces was the dissolution of the Office for National Security, the renamed Stasi. That same evening, Premier Modrow issued orders to destroy all Stasi files still locked in the Berlin headquarters, which had not yet been breached by dissidents.

Prior to joining the Roundtable, HVA Colonel Busch and a small group of staff officers met to discuss actions that they felt needed to be taken in the "interest of an effective intelligence service in a new DDR."⁴⁹ They presented four demands to Grossmann:

1. Organizational and physical separation of the foreign intelligence service from the discredited MfS
2. Invitation of leading representatives of the citizens committees and other democratic organizations to the headquarters of the HVA to inform them in total candor about the foreign intelligence service of the DDR and to hear the views of the HVA leadership regarding a democratic intelligence service
3. Official contacts assuming leadership of the Federal Intelligence Service of the Federal Republic (West Germany) to establish a relationship between the two services in view of the new realities in Germany
4. Cessation of all operations against the Federal Republic

The HVA leadership, headed by Grossmann, reacted harshly to this "initiative," saying it represented an attack on the *Klassenposition* of the foreign intelligence service and domestic counterintelligence. Busch was accused of engineering a "flagrant" breach of agreements with DDR allies, mainly the Soviet Union. Grossmann forbade the distribution of the paper. He ordered the internal HVA security service to investigate whether others were behind Busch's action and surveillance of the colonel and his colleagues.

On December 14, Premier Modrow decided, without consulting the "Roundtable," to abolish the Office for National Security. At the same time, he decreed

the formation of a *Verfassungsschutz*, Office for the Protection of the Constitution, as well as a separate intelligence organization. The former, without police powers and modeled after its West German counterpart, would handle counterespionage and surveillance of antidemocratic groups. Heinz Engelhardt, former Stasi district chief at Frankfurt on the Oder, was named as its head. Werner Grossmann, for his part, remained the head of the new foreign intelligence service. The Rostock Roundtable ruled against the *Verfassungsschutz* on December 27. Five days into 1990, the provincial Roundtables demanded the abolition of the AfNS, and on January 8 the central Roundtable in Berlin followed suit.

Also on January 8, Colonel Manfred Eschberger, formerly of the Stasi's internal investigations directorate and now a designated deputy to the *Verfassungsschutz* chief, visited Colonel Busch. Eschberger told Busch that he had been ordered to compare notes on their respective testimonies before the upcoming Roundtable on January 15. Busch refused, citing no orders from his superiors for such a discussion. Eschberger then began making small talk, telling Busch about conditions within the notorious Rummelsburg Stasi prison. Although there was no reason to do so, Eschberger repeatedly talked about the death of Colonel Wenzel, emphasizing that "of course, the death was not by hanging but by gunshot."⁵⁰ Busch, who had already heard that Wenzel had been shot in his cell, recognized the veiled threat and concluded that his now overt opposition to the continued existence of the Stasi in any form, including the HVA, had riled the powers that be. His participation in the Roundtable talks, however, had already been announced and could not be changed. He tried to reach General Grossmann without success. Meanwhile, the government decided on January 12 to postpone the creation of the AfNS and the *Verfassungsschutz* until after the first free election, scheduled for March 18, 1990.

On January 13, Busch's colleagues warned him that the leadership was "playing a double game" and urged him to be vigilant to avoid meeting an end similar to that of Colonel Wenzel. He again tried to contact Grossmann and failed, but he did speak with Colonel Ralph-Peter Devaux, who announced that he was running the HVA on Grossmann's orders. Devaux told Busch, who was to attend the Roundtable the following morning, to answer any questions in generalities and, if necessary, to plead ignorance. Under no circumstances was he to reveal the positions of the leadership in political and professional areas. Busch railed against such "destructive orientation" but was told he could count on being arrested "right in the meeting hall" and taken to Keiblerstrasse—the same jail in which Wenzel died.

That evening, Busch received a telephone call from Colonel Eschberger, who demanded that he not go the Roundtable the next morning but first come to an apartment in the Pankow district for another talk. Eschberger threatened dire consequences if Busch disobeyed the order. Busch did attend the Roundtable meeting on Monday, January 15, and afterwards sought the protection of West German authorities. He was flown immediately to Munich and put under the protection of the *Bundesnachrichtendienst*, the federal intelligence service. His was the second defection of a high-ranking MfS officer. Two weeks earlier,

Colonel Rainer Wiegand of the domestic counterintelligence directorate fled to West Germany with two large suitcases full of highly sensitive Stasi documents.

In the early evening of January 15, while Busch was on his way to his safe haven in the West, tens of thousands of Berliners assembled before the massive gate of Stasi headquarters in the Lichtenberg district. They demanded access, chanting, hurling rocks against the gate, and ignoring those with signs pleading “no violence.” It did not take long for the small detachment of police to open the gate. The crowd surged through and headed for the various buildings, smashing doors and windows and systematically sacking the offices. They carted away files and stuffed their pockets with souvenirs. When the crowd discovered the generals’ mess, they gorged on delicacies that had been available only in hard currency shops and drank the Stasi’s champagne and French cognac. At the urging of citizens committee leaders, the crowd began to disperse around 8:00 p.m. and police and prosecutors began to seal safes and offices.

The first free parliamentary elections in East Germany were held on March 18, 1990. The conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) scored a decisive victory and its leader, Lothar de Maizière was elected as Prime Minister.⁵¹ On May 16, the parliament voted to abolish the Ministry for State Security and its successor, the Office for National Security. All 102,000 full-time Stasi and non-commissioned officers were discharged. Although West German politicians were pressing for unification, many East Germans, including dissidents, sought the continued existence of the DDR, albeit as a democratic state. But at the same time, the country was economically bankrupt and the population was clamoring for a stable, convertible currency. After lengthy negotiations, the West German government agreed on a rate of exchange, commencing July 1, of one West German mark for one worthless East German mark. The push for reunification continued, though Britain and France, fearing the creation of an economic colossus in the heart of Europe, were originally opposed to the idea. Pressed by the United States, however, they eventually dropped their objections.

West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl negotiated with Soviet President Gorbachev, who gave his blessing and agreed to withdraw Soviet troops from East Germany by 1994. Reunification became a *fait accompli* on October 3, 1990. An important provision of the unification treaty hammered out between the de Maizière and Kohl governments dealt with the pursuit of crimes. They agreed that all offenses that were punishable under DDR law, but condoned by a corrupt state, could be prosecuted.

The Aftermath

Restructuring the security and law enforcement organizations in the eastern part of Germany began immediately after reunification. Internal security was assumed by the *Landesaemter fuer Verfassungsschutz* (LfV), the provincial offices for the protection of the constitution. Its leadership consisted of West German officials from Bonn’s Ministry of the Interior. The staff was recruited from West German organizations such as the *Bundesgrenzschutz*, the federal border police. General law enforcement was reorganized along West German lines (i.e., subordinate to

community and provincial governments with West German officials in leading positions). Former People's Police officers were generally absorbed if vetting showed they had not served as unofficial Stasi collaborators (IMs). The same was true for the customs service. All border controls were taken over by the *Bundesgrenzschutz*.

The judiciary was placed under the supervision of West German judges and prosecutors. Members of the former DDR judiciary were vetted, and those found to have committed human rights violations were discharged or prosecuted. Prosecutors and judges involved in extraordinarily high sentences for purely political offenses were charged with perversion of justice. Those found guilty received relatively mild sentences, no more than two years' imprisonment, in most cases suspended.

Treason charges were brought against a number of high-ranking Stasi officers, including Markus Wolf, the former foreign espionage chief (who was found guilty and sentenced to six years in prison). The German Supreme Court set all sentences aside, however, ruling that Wolf and others had been active only in East Germany under the existing laws of the DDR. Wolf would be reindicted on charges of ordering a 1955 kidnapping, a crime that was also punishable under DDR law, and given a two-year suspended sentence in 1997.

West Germans were stunned by the incredibly large number of their brethren that had spied for the communist DDR regime. Most had spied for money, but some spied out of ideological motives, and others because of grudges against their superiors. Every West German ministry, including the chancellor's office, the federal intelligence service, and the counterespionage agency, as well as the police forces and the military, had been penetrated. Hundreds of Wolf's agents operating in West Germany were brought to trial. Many were fingered by MfS defectors. Sentences ranged from one to sixteen years. According to the Prosecutor General's office, about six thousand espionage investigations were conducted between 1990 and 1994. The bulk were disposed of with mild sentences, and hundreds were dismissed because of the age or health of the accused. About one hundred thirty cases were still awaiting adjudication in 1997 but probably will not be tried because the statute of limitation for espionage is five years.

Erich Mielke, the former Stasi chief, was indicted in 1991 on charges of murdering two Berlin police officers while a young marauding Communist thug in 1931 (other felony charges were set aside because of ill health). He was found guilty in October 1993, at age eighty-two, and sentenced to six years in prison. He served 1,904 days behind bars and was released in 1995. His bank account of more than 300,000 marks (about \$187,500) was confiscated. Like all Stasi retirees, Mielke is now forced to live on a basic pension of 802 marks (about \$512) a month, a rate set by the unified government as a form of punishment for having committed crimes against the people.

Perhaps the most shameful activity of the Stasi, besides the political oppression that resulted in the imprisonment of hundreds of thousands, was its collaboration with international terrorism.⁵² The MfS provided a safe haven and material assistance to killers such as Ilych Ramirez Sanchez, better known as "Carlos the Jackal," as well as the notorious Abu Nidal and the mastermind of the 1972

Munich Olympic Games massacre, Abu Daoud. The Stasi also trained members of the German anarchist Red Army Faction (RAF), who subsequently wreaked havoc in West Germany. RAF members who left the fold were granted asylum in East Germany and placed under Stasi protection. Only one person, former Lieutenant Colonel Helmut Voigt, was tried—and sentenced to four years in prison—for his complicity in the 1983 bombing of the Maison de France French cultural center that was masterminded by Carlos the Jackal. Charges against five other high-ranking Stasi officers were dropped after the statute of limitations expired.

The Reverend Joachim Gauck, an East German Lutheran Minister, was appointed by the Bonn Government in 1991 as its special representative for safeguarding and maintaining the Stasi archives.⁵³ The archives were enormous. If stood upright, they would stretch 121 miles, and analysis of the roughly six million files was projected to take years. Thousands of files, particularly those dealing with espionage, had been shredded when the Stasi headquarters was stormed. Only a small fraction, about two hundred thousand pages, had been reconstructed by mid-1997. In addition to these papers, the archive housed 37.5 million index cards containing the codes and clear names of hundreds of thousands of Stasi informers. Reverend Gauck's budget grew from an initial 24.5 million marks, about \$15 million at a \$1.60 exchange rate, to \$137 million in 1997 and his staff swelled to thirty-one hundred.

Under the so-called Stasi Files Law, passed in 1991, German citizens have gained the right to inspect their files. By 1997, 3.4 million people had taken advantage of this ability. The results have been devastating. There have been countless civil suits initiated when victims uncovered the names of those who had denounced and betrayed them, and many families and friendships were destroyed. Occasionally, politicians, especially left-wing social democrats and members of the PDS, demanded the closing of the files. Reverend Gauck vehemently opposed closing them and has been successful in keeping them open as of this writing.

As the files reveal even more details of the inhuman dictatorship, investigations have been launched into suspected fraud, embezzlement, and murder committed by former MfS officers and former Party and government officials. Especially active is the Berlin Central Investigations Group of Government Criminality, led by veteran Police Director Manfred Kittlaus, a former head of the West Berlin criminal investigations department. Kittlaus's major task in 1998 was the investigation of wrongful deaths, including 73 murders, 30 attempted murders, 583 cases of manslaughter, 2,938 instances of attempted manslaughter, and 425 suspicious deaths. Of the 73 murders, 22 were classified as contract killings.⁵⁴ According to Kittlaus, "The old Stasi connections [to these crimes] continue to worry us. We still find them in familiar collaboration with West German criminals, in agricultural businesses and industry as well as in the service industry. A few, particularly pensioners, probably have come to grips with their fate."

Trials of former Stasi officers and government officials continued until the end of 1999, but rarely did the courts hand down sentences more severe than a couple of years probation. Then the statute of limitations on all crimes except

murder expired. The statute had been extended by the Bonn parliament, which had cited special circumstances that had prevented earlier prosecution. The Central Investigations Group probing governmental criminality was disbanded in December 2000.

In the meantime, the German Supreme Court ruled the “punishment” pension cap for former Stasi officers was unconstitutional. Pensions were raised 30 percent to an average of DM 1,700 (\$777), and those officers with forty years of service received back payments of DM 40,000 (\$18,297).

Erich Mielke, the former Stasi chief and convicted murderer, died on May 21, 2000, at the ripe old age of ninety-two. Had his funeral been held while the Communists were in power, a sea of flags would have dominated the ceremony. The Party newspaper *Neues Deutschland* would have mourned him with several pages of a pompous obituary. Instead, the paper devoted merely thirty-six lines to his death.

But several diehard comrades attended the funeral. Former General Gerhard Neiber, the ruthless Stasi deputy minister (who was deeply involved in sponsoring international terrorists), bowed tearfully before Mielke’s grave. General Willy Opitz, former head of the secret police school, raised his right arm and defiantly made the fist of the Communist salute as he eulogized his former boss as an “anti-fascist, a Communist, and internationalist who felt obligated to uphold the ideals that allowed the people to live and work with dignity and social security.” Next to the wreaths from functionaries of the KPD, the Communist Party of Germany, lay one with a ribbon saying: “From the friends and veterans of the KGB.”

Sixteen months after the funeral, the people of Berlin chose a new city government in an election that stunned many citizens who remembered the 1948 Soviet blockade, the building of the Berlin Wall, and the killing of East Germans who tried to escape to the West. The PDS, the successor party of the Communist SED, won 28 percent citywide and an incredible 48 percent in the former East Berlin.

Harald Strunz, chairman of the Association of Victims of Stalinism, said that the vote in the East denotes unprincipled behavior as well as the failure of the democratic parties to vigorously attack the PDS. Both Strunz and Hermann Kreutzer, co-chairman of the social democratic Kurt-Schumacher Society, lamented the failure of the German government to ban the successor to the Communist Party and confiscate its property. “We miss the Western Allies, especially the Americans, who would have done it,” said Strunz. Kreutzer, who had been imprisoned for more than seven years in the notoriously brutal Bautzen penitentiary without having been tried for allegedly making anti-Soviet remarks, was particularly harsh on his German brethren. “If the Allies had not banned the Nazi Party and all its subsidiary organizations, I think the Nazis would have gotten 40 percent to 50 percent in the 1946 local elections and in the 1949 general election. It took a long time for them to see the light.”

NOTES

1. Honecker had replaced Walter Ulbricht on May 3, 1971, in a coup ordered by the Soviet leadership and engineered by Erich Mielke, who by that time had advanced to Stasi

chief. Moscow had become increasingly disturbed by the obstreperous behavior of Ulbricht, who was favoring establishment of a German confederation that he felt could save his economically feeble state. This did not jibe with the Kremlin's quest for a Marxist world revolution.

2. Gerhard Finn, *Die Politischen Haeflinge der Sowjetzone 1945–1959* (Pfaffenhofen: Ilm Verlag, 1960).

3. *Ibid.*

4. Karl Wilhelm Fricke, *Die DDR Staatssicherheit: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik* (Koeln: 1984).

5. Statistics from the Bonn government's Ministry for All-German Affairs.

6. Later, *Volkskammer* delegates were chosen in sham elections. To maintain the myth of "democratic diversity" of the GDR, the government, with Soviet approval, allowed the formation of what became known as *Blockparteien*—Bloc Parties such as the Christian Democratic Union, the Liberal Democratic Party, etc. Though outwardly independent, they were under total control of the Communists and its functionaries were bribed into submission with privileges equal to SED bosses. Prior to general and local elections, all parties submitted a slate of candidates, none of whom ever lost.

7. Finn, *Die Politischen Haeflinge der Sowjetzone*. The Friedrich Ebert Foundation of the West German Social Democratic Party reported in 1994 that between 1945 and 1950 some four hundred social democrats had lost their lives either through execution or death in Soviet GULAGs or had simply disappeared. More than five thousand were imprisoned, two hundred of them were sentenced to ten thousand years.

8. Fricke, *Die DDR Staatssicherheit*.

9. Conversation in 1993 with former Colonel Dr. Heinz Busch, who was Wolf's chief military analyst.

10. Unless otherwise indicated, all figures regarding the revolt were released in April 1993 by the Institute of All-German Affairs in Berlin.

11. Joachim Gauck and Ehrhart Neubert, *Die Aufarbeitung des Sozialismus in the DDR. Anhang zu: Das Schwarzbuch des Kommunismus* (Munich: Piper Verlag, 1998). Translation from Stephane Courtois, Nicolas Werth, Jean-Louis Panne, Karel Bartosek, and Jean-Louis Margolin with collaborators Remi Kauffer, Oierre Rigouolot, Pascal Fontaine, Yves Santamaria, Sylvain Boulouque, *Le livre noir du communisme*. (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1997).

12. Statistics from the Institute for All-German Affairs, Berlin, April 1993.

13. Conversation in 1991 in Munich with Rainer Wiegand, former MfS counterintelligence colonel.

14. Conversations in 1975 with the late Gitta Bauer, journalist for the Springer Foreign News Service. Mrs. Bauer had been married to Leo Bauer, a veteran Communist who was arrested in 1950 and sent to a Soviet Gulag. Gitta Bauer was also imprisoned for eight years by the MfS, first at Bautzen and later the Waldheim women's prison. After her release she became an ardent anti-Communist. She said she had gotten the information on Mielke's intrigue from her husband after his release from prison. Leo Bauer settled in West Germany where he eventually became an intimate of Willy Brandt, the Social Democratic Party leader.

15. Nadja Stulz-Herrnstadt, *Das Herrnstadt-Dokument* (Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 1990).

16. Since his return from Soviet exile in 1945, Wollweber had not held any known secret police posts, serving instead in various capacities in the Ministry for Transport. Immediately prior to being named state security chief, he was head of the State Secretariat for Sea Transport. In that post he used his expertise in blowing up ships acquired in neutral Sweden during World War II by establishing a special course at the DDR's merchant marine school. From each graduating class of two hundred, twenty men were selected for training with explosives, how to sabotage engines and navigational instruments, and how to transmit secret messages. Although there was suspicion that Wollweber's

pupils committed various acts of sabotage aboard western merchant and naval vessels in 1953, no firm evidence was ever unearthed. The news magazine *Der Spiegel* reported in 1971 that an agent of General Reinhard Gehlen's West German espionage organization had infiltrated the Wollweber school. Soon after his reports reached general headquarters at Pullach near Munich, a series of shipping incidents occurred which "bore Wollweber's signature." The *Empress of Canada* burned in Liverpool harbor on January 25, 1953, and within the same month there were fires aboard the *Queen Elizabeth* and the *Queen Mary*. Sabotage was also discovered aboard the British aircraft carriers *Warrior*, *Triumph*, and *Indomitable* as well as aboard several cruisers, destroyers, and submarines.

17. Markus Wolf, former MfS colonel general and head of Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung, the foreign espionage department, in a 1990 article in *Stern* magazine.

18. Wollweber and Schirdewan were expelled from the Politburo, the Central Committee, and the Party. Wollweber died in 1967.

19. Gauck and Neubert, *Die Aufarbeitung*.

20. Statistics from the Institute of All-German Affairs, Berlin.

21. Interview in 1991 with former Colonel Rainer Wiegand, a counterintelligence officer who was in charge of a special task force charged with surveillance of all foreigners residing or visiting the DDR.

22. Private travel to the West was rarely permitted except for pensioners over the age of sixty-two for women and sixty-five for men if they had not held sensitive government or industry positions.

23. Gauck and Neubert, *Die Aufarbeitung*.

24. Peter Przybylski, *Tatort Politburo* (Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 1992).

25. Notes, in author's possession, of Rainer Wiegand, former colonel in the Stasi's counterintelligence department.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*

28. All figures supplied by the Berlin office of the *Bundesbeauftragte fuer die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*.

29. Archive of the former Ministry for State Security.

30. District commanders were also under the political control of the respective SED district first secretaries.

31. Figures supplied in 1998 by Berlin State Police Director Manfred Kittlaus, director of the central department for investigation of government criminality and crimes committed during the unification Germany, such as fraud and theft of former DDR government property.

32. John O. Koehler, *Stasi—The Untold Story of the East German Secret Police* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999). The UfJ actually was the brainchild of Soviet MGB Major General Nikolai I. Melnikov, who in 1949 recruited a former Nazi as the front man. Melnikov's objective was to ferret out anti-communists serving in the Soviet Zone's judiciary.

33. Linse was kidnapped on July 8, 1952. The protocols of his interrogations and the Soviet trial records are in my possession.

34. Koehler, *Stasi*.

35. Interview in 1992, with Guenther Buch, leading historian of the Institute for All-German Affairs in Berlin.

36. Gauck and Neubert, *Die Aufarbeitung*.

37. Rosa Luxemburg, a German communist revolutionary, wrote a paper critical of the Bolshevik's totalitarian rule, saying that "freedom is always the freedom of those who think differently." She was shot and killed when arrested in 1919 for her role in the communist uprising of 1918.

38. Stefan Wolle, "Der Weg in den Zusammenbruch. Die DDR vom Januar bis zum Oktober, 1989." In *Geschichte—Politik—Gesellschaft*. (Bonn: Publ. von Eckard Jesse and Armin Mitter, 1992).

39. *Ibid.*

40. Ibid.

41. Interview in 1991 with former MfS Colonel Rainer Wiegand who, as head of a counterintelligence directorate special task force, was privy to all of the most secret Stasi directives and analyses on internal security.

42. Ibid.

43. Interview in 1991 with former MfS Colonel Rainer Wiegand.

44. Interview in 1991, on condition of anonymity, with the driver of a high East German official who witnessed the scene.

45. Interview in 1991 with former MfS Colonel Rainer Wiegand.

46. Report, in author's possession, written in 1997 by Dr. Heinz Busch, former HVA colonel and chief of military analysis.

47. Arbeitsberichte ueber die Aufloesung der Rostocker Bezirksverwaltung des Ministeriums fuer Staatssicherheit. Herausgegeben von Unabhaengigen Untersuchungsausschuss Rostock. 1990

48. An early dissident group that later became a political party.

49. Position paper of Dr. Busch in author's possession.

50. Ibid.

51. After reunification, de Maizière was rewarded with the deputy leadership of Chancellor Kohl's Christian Democratic Party. To the consternation of the Bonn government, Stasi files appeared that showed that de Maizière, a lawyer, had been a Stasi informant for years, operating under the cover name "Cerny." He was forced to resign.

52. All details on involvement with terrorists are contained in Stasi documents in my possession or were provided in numerous interviews with former Stasi Colonel Rainer Wiegand.

53. All details on the Stasi archives were obtained in interviews with Reverend Gauck or his assistants.

54. Interview in 1998 with Director Kittlaus.