

## THE STASI AND THE PARTY: FROM COORDINATION TO ALIENATION

**Jefferson Adams**

In early 1979, a bulky four-volume dissertation totaling 740 pages was completed at the Ministry for State Security (MfS) School of Law (Juristische Hochschule) in Potsdam-Eiche.<sup>1</sup> With subversive enemy activity as its main concern, it sought to show how the controls at the frontiers with the Federal Republic and West Berlin could be significantly strengthened. While diagrams were appended that depicted the physical barriers already firmly in place — the three-meter high hinterland fence, the two-meter high signal fence of barbed wire and steel mesh that triggered an alarm, the so-called death strip, the barrier ditch, and finally the three-meter high *Grenzwall* — the authors had a different focus.

Criticizing the conventional measures then being used, First Lieutenant Reckhard Härtel and Captain Jürgen Föhr urged greater variation, thoroughness, and agility in overseeing Border Troops (*Grenztruppen*), which at the time numbered roughly 38,000 men. What follows in their exposition is a dizzying labyrinth of human controls. They recommended that MfS officers in special deployment (*Offiziere im besonderen Einsatz*) needed to be carefully placed throughout the Border Troops, notably in the key command sections, to increase “Chekist” influence; that unofficial collaborators (*Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter* or IMs) — lauded as ever as the most valuable resource available — should be recruited in greater numbers among both the soldiers and non-commissioned officers (they would be active on both sides of the border); and that more public relations in all units of the Border Troops should be instituted. They also suggested that two auxiliary groups drawn from the population living near the frontier should be expanded: the Volunteer Helpers of the Border Troops (*Freiwillige Helfer der Grenztruppen*) — youths 18 years of age or older, unarmed and normally wearing uniforms without insignia but also capable of undercover work in civilian clothes; and the volunteer Helpers of the Border Reconnaissance (*Freiwillige Helfer der Grenzaufklärung*), which already counted roughly six per officer. Finally, they urged that all incidents needed to be reported to the relevant units of the MfS, even though their direct intervention might not be required. Such a multilayered system of controls and counter-controls recalls a passage in the novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* by the Franco-Czech

1 BStU, JHS 21878, vols. 1-4.

writer Milan Kundera. In explaining to Tereza the functions of the present-day secret police, the ambassador concludes by saying: “They need to trap people, to force them to collaborate and set other traps for other people, so that gradually they can turn the whole nation into a single organization of informers.”<sup>2</sup>

Typically, the relationship of the MfS to the East German citizenry is conveyed simply in numerical terms — 91,000 full-time employees and 180,000 IMs for a population of 16 million. Yet as unsettling as such numbers are — no other state security force in history ever matched this per capita ratio — they convey primarily the breadth of surveillance, not its unusual depth and complexity. Likewise, it hardly suffices to assert that the security forces were merely a loyal servant of state socialism throughout East Germany’s existence. The MfS and the party interacted in myriad ways, many unknown at the time. It is true that various important aspects of this relationship await further research — the degree to which the Stasi used its resources to shape certain policies of the Socialist Unity Party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED), for example, or how the two institutions functioned on the regional and local levels. Still, it is possible to sketch how this relationship manifested itself in a manner distinctly at odds with the practices that had developed in the Western democracies. Above all, it is a tale of how four decades of fostering the closest coordination ultimately climaxed in a mood of deep resentment, even alienation.

One should note at the outset the strong sense of elitism that prevailed in the MfS. No other institution in the GDR could claim as high a level of party membership. Sample survey data for the year 1988, for example, reveal a quota between 83 and 87 percent with a large majority of the full-time staff having promptly joined the SED upon entering the MfS.<sup>3</sup> The first minister of state security, Wilhelm Zaisser, emphatically asserted this dual affiliation at a party conference in June 1952: “For us the number of staff members is identical to the number of party members. We have no one without a party membership. Everyone who works in the Ministry of State Security is an employee and, on the other hand, a party member.”<sup>4</sup> Even though Zaisser had to concede some exceptions that existed, the ultimate objective had been clearly set forth.

It is therefore not surprising that those barred from consideration for a position included former members of the Nazi Party, current members of the East German bloc parties, and anyone who had been

2 Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (New York, 1991), 163.

3 Jens Gieseke, *Die hauptamtlichen Mitarbeiter der Staatssicherheit. Personalstruktur und Lebenswelt 1950-1989/90* (Berlin, 2000), 423.

4 Cited by *ibid.*, 119. Zaisser also coined the phrase “comrades of the first category” (*Genossen erster Kategorie*) in reference to those under his command. *Ibid.*, 544.

on the German police force prior to 1945. Moreover, when disputes between party and Stasi officials arose, it was not uncommon for the MfS to take an even more zealous interpretation of party doctrine. This sense of elitism had two other main sources. One was the awareness that their origins as “Chekists” had a long lineage traceable to Felix Dzerzhinsky and the earliest days of the new Bolshevik regime;<sup>5</sup> the other derived from the GDR’s geographic position within the Warsaw Pact, which meant that the MfS was engaged in fighting the main enemy on the westernmost front.

The leaders of the party, however, took special pains to protect themselves after creating this new powerful ministry. Following the debacle of the MfS in combatting the Uprising of June 17, 1953, not only was Zaisser removed as minister for allegedly forming “an anti-party faction pursuing a defeatist policy calculated to undermine the unity of the party and advocating a slanderous platform designed to split the party leadership.”<sup>6</sup> The Security Commission of the SED Politbüro also forbade the Stasi to conduct surveillance (*operativ bearbeiten*) on members of the main party apparatus unless assistance had been requested regarding a suspected deviationist in its own ranks. The East German bloc parties, by contrast, enjoyed no such immunity, and the notion that an enemy of the SED was simultaneously an enemy of the state became a working axiom for the MfS.

Institutionally, the relationship between the party and the MfS operated both externally and internally. The top party authority was the Central Committee Secretary for Security Questions; its three occupants were successively Erich Honecker, Paul Verner, and Egon Krenz. Especially in the latter instances, the influence of this post was minimal. Verner and Krenz tended to rely primarily on the tier immediately below them in the hierarchy — the division dealing with the armed forces, and, in turn, the department with direct ties to the MfS. One of its main functions concerned the selection and appointment of top officials in the Stasi, although it had to consult with the Stasi’s own Department for Cadres and Training. Any recommendation in this complex procedural process was then subject to the approval of Erich Mielke, the longstanding head of the Stasi.

Within the MfS, an even more elaborate network existed under the rubric of the Party Organization. The principal SED unit was the Central Party Organization in the MfS. Accorded the status of a Party District Organization, it functioned according to directives issued by the Central Committee and, in 1989, possessed a staff of 159 full-time

5 In December 1917, at the request of V. I. Lenin, Felix Dzerzhinsky (1877–1926) formed the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-revolution and Sabotage, known to most Soviet citizens by its abbreviation Cheka. By 1954, this vast secret police apparatus had officially evolved into the KGB.

6 *Dokumente der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (East Berlin, 1954), 4:471.

employees. According to its last head, Horst Felber, it had “the task of clarifying the resolutions of the Central Committee and its Politbüro along with [providing] a general orientation for the work of the MfS, motivating and mobilizing the party members politically in solving their tasks, and overcoming the obstacles and deficiencies in the ranks by drawing upon the strength of the party.”<sup>7</sup>

Particularly significant was the pervasiveness of party organizations and party groups at every level: the regional, the district, and the object (or installation, such as a research institution or nuclear power plant). After all, roughly one half of the Stasi worked in locales outside East Berlin. The principal tasks for each of them were initially set forth in a 1954 Politbüro directive — a directive that remained generally unchanged over time. Among its main points were to provide training “in the uncompromising struggle against agents, spies, saboteurs, and all enemies of the workers’ and peasants’ power” and to become familiar “with the glorious revolutionary traditions of the German working class as well as the great combat experiences of the Soviet security organs.”<sup>8</sup> Also underscored was the importance of the “merciless struggle against opportunistic and divisive elements” within the ranks — meaning, specifically, appeasers, pacifists, and social democrats.

The directive noted eight fields of activity: cadre work; disciplinary action; party education; material needs such as housing and medical treatment; the arrangement of sports and culture activities (particularly through the Dynamo Sports Association); volunteer work outside of one’s job; the direction of the Free German Youth (Freie Deutsche Jugend) in the MfS; and internal party work.

Of these, the issue of discipline merits closer examination. In light of the secrecy inherent in undercover operations, Mielke, like his predecessors, adamantly insisted that no operational details be divulged should a disciplinary problem arise, even though the party might theoretically claim that it bore responsibility for all aspects of a person’s life. As he emphasized on more than one occasion, the MfS was by definition a “military-conspiratorial” organization and therefore had to severely limit what was known to outsiders.<sup>9</sup> Serious matters, therefore, were handled by the disciplinary arm of the Main Department for Cadres and Training. Nevertheless, the Party Organization was by no means inactive in this field. Generally, it operated like an early warning system, monitoring the slightest infractions, even in one’s private sphere, lest they grow to full-blown offenses.

7 Cited by Karl Wilhelm Fricke, *MfS intern. Macht, Strukturen, Auflösung der DDR Staatssicherheit. Analyse und Dokumentation* (Cologne, 1991).

8 Cited by Silke Schumann, “Die Parteiorganisation der SED im MfS 1950–1957,” in *Staatspartei und Staatssicherheit. Zum Verhältnis von SED und MfS*, ed. Siegfried Suckut and Walter Süß (Berlin, 1997), 115–16.

9 This issue surfaced in a number of other contexts. There was, for example, considerable debate in the early years about how much operational detail should be included in the party training manuals.

Excessive drinking, overdrawn bank accounts, tardy arrival at work, reckless driving, marital difficulties, and unruly children all came under the purview of the party. Both the number of disciplinary cases and dismissals from the MfS reached a high point in 1957 — 9 percent in each case — and then stabilized at under 5 percent following the construction of the Berlin Wall four years later. Also noteworthy was a new set of cadre rules issued in 1964. Political responsibilities headed the list: “unconditional loyalty to the German Democratic Republic and to the leadership of the Party of the working class” along with “unshakable loyalty to and friendship with the Soviet Union and other socialist states as well as the willingness to fight for the greater unity and integration of the socialist world order.”<sup>10</sup>

The Party Organization functioned not just as a disciplinary instrument. Meetings took place on a regular basis, providing basic grounding in Marxism-Leninism and a discussion of new party decisions. In true Leninist fashion — encouraged especially by Ernst Wollweber, Zaisser’s successor — the politics of the enemy also underwent careful scrutiny in order to determine how MfS operational work would be impacted. In addition, pre-determined elections were held. They had meaning inasmuch as gaining a higher office reflected the continued trust of one’s superiors and even the prospect of a promotion in one’s job with the MfS. Political education was further supplemented by the existence of the MfS’s own party school named after Robert Mühlporfte, an “activist of the first hour” and the earlier head of the Main Division of Cadres and Education. While most of the attendees came from the Berlin headquarters, regional workers went to the schools operated by their local SED units. Outstanding cadres were accorded the opportunity to go to “Karl Marx,” the main training school for party leaders, or even to the Soviet party school in Moscow, as was the case with Werner Großmann, the final head of the foreign intelligence division Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung (HV A).

The 1954 Politbüro directive, as noted earlier, laid particular stress on keeping alive the memory of the revolutionary past. This practice became known as *Traditionspflege* — the preservation of tradition — and was regarded as a crucial safeguard against enemy penetration of the Stasi. Under the rubric of security within its own ranks, the MfS, in its official dictionary, specifically called for “a greater emphasis on the preservation of tradition, conveying through individual Chekist examples the history, the role, and the importance of the MfS, and thereby stimulating pride in being a member of

<sup>10</sup> Cited by Gieseke, *Die hauptamtlichen Mitarbeiter*, 277.

the MfS, an organ of the dictatorship of the proletariat, venerated by the people and hated by the enemy.” The entry went on to note that “a position with the MfS should not be regarded as a routine job, even if a well-paying one. Rather, it is a calling by the party of the working class, one which needs to be re-energized on a daily basis.”<sup>11</sup>

Most studies of the MfS tend to ignore the concept of *Traditionspflege*, but it held considerable importance in fostering an esprit de corps and a deeper attachment to the party. In his memoirs, Markus Wolf, the long-serving head of the foreign intelligence division (HV A), noted how “personally enthralled” he was with the stories of Richard Sorge, Ruth Werner, Max Christiansen-Klausen, Harro Schulze-Boysen, and Arvid and Mildred Harnack — and later on with those of Wilhelm Zaisser, Ernst Wollweber, Richard Stahlmann and Robert Korb. As he put it, he “. . . saw the value of presenting them to our recruits as models for the role of spycraft in underpinning socialism.” Wolf further emphasized how this practice formed a major difference between the East bloc and the Western services such as the CIA and MI6. He found the latter group had a “rather dreary approach to their jobs and themselves”; they were “encouraged to see themselves not as glamorous or special in any way but rather as worker bees, gathering information for other far grander souls to process.” By contrast, the MfS “even had battle songs and a ministry choir avowing eternal loyalty to the Cause.”<sup>12</sup> Wolf then quoted from a stirring song — dating from the early days of the Cheka — that he had translated from Russian.

Another noteworthy musical piece was “In Praise of Illegal Work,” the composition having originated in Bertolt Brecht’s 1930 play *The Measures Taken*. It found a prominent place in early MfS anniversary celebrations. In the words of the control chorus:

Tenacity and secrecy are the links  
That bind the Party network against the  
Guns of the Capitalist world:  
To speak, but  
To conceal the speaker.  
To conquer, but  
To conceal the conqueror.  
To die, but  
To hide the dead.  
Who would not do great things for glory, but who

11 *Das Wörterbuch der Staatssicherheit: Definitionen zur “politisch-operativen Arbeit,”* ed. Siegfried Suckut (Berlin, 1996), 252.

12 Markus Wolf (with Ann McElvoy), *The Man Without a Face: The Autobiography of Communism’s Greatest Spymaster* (New York, 1997), 205–206.

Would do them for silence? . . .  
 Step forward  
 For one moment  
 Unknown and hidden faces, and receive  
 Our thanks!<sup>13</sup>

As the ranks of the MfS began to be filled with younger persons possessing scant knowledge of past struggles — firsthand or otherwise — this practice was deemed even more essential. Tradition cabinets filled with various memorabilia were strongly encouraged at every level. One study submitted to the MfS School of Law took note of a practice to increase the political resolve and hatred of the enemy among IMs about to be sent on Western missions: at the Frankfurt an der Oder district office, they were given a tour of the tradition cabinet on the premises.<sup>14</sup> There were forums with senior and retired officers, as well as excursions to important historical sites. The obligatory annual marathon of the Berlin regional office bore the name of Felix Dzerzhinsky.<sup>15</sup> *Traditionspflege* was also manifest in various ways in daily life, such as naming buildings and streets after important historical figures. In 1972, the Hans-und-Hilde-Coppi-Gymnasium was established, and a number of streets in Berlin-Lichtenberg, where the central office complex was located, were renamed after Harro and Libertas Schulze-Boysen, Wilhelm Guddorf, and John Sieg.<sup>16</sup>

A profusion of awards played a conspicuous role in the official life of the GDR, and this was certainly true in the MfS as well.<sup>17</sup> These decorations came in all sorts of shapes and sizes: orders, prizes, medallions, service and commemoration medals, anniversary medals, and financial awards. They could also be of foreign origin, the Soviet Union, Cuba, Vietnam, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria being among the most prominent countries represented. Incidentally, with few exceptions, there was no limit to the number of times a person could receive the same award. One consistent trend was apparent: the higher the rank, the greater the number of medals. For example, Major General Heinz Fielder, the head of Main Department VI (passport control) managed to accumulate seventy-five over the span of his career.

It is noteworthy that the MfS had only two awards that it could bestow. One was the Coworker of Outstanding Merit (Verdienter Mitarbeiter der Staatssicherheit), which was established in December 1969 to

13 Bertolt Brecht, *The Measures Taken and Other Lehrstücke* (London, 2001), 13–14.

14 BStU JHS MFVVS 160-298/73.

15 BStU JHS 2057.

16 All of these figures had ties to the Red Orchestra (Rote Kapelle), the German resistance group that also served as a Soviet spy network. During the war, they were arrested and executed by the Nazis with the exception of Sieg, who committed suicide in his prison cell.

17 See especially the meticulously catalogued and illustrated collection in two impressive volumes by Ralph Pickard: *Stasi Decorations and Memorabilia: A Collector's Guide* (Lorton, VA, 2007 [vol. 1] and 2012 [vol. 2]). The latter extensively covers both the MfS School of Law and the Felix Dzerzhinsky Guard Regiment.

recognize long and exemplary service or an unusually successful mission or operation. The other was the Dr.-Richard-Sorge Prize awarded by the MfS School of Law. A new service medal, the *Verdienstmedaille*, had been designed to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the MfS on February 8, 1990, but that festivity, of course, never came to pass. These awards visibly reinforced the interaction between the Stasi, the party, and other state institutions, thereby helping to curb any separatist tendencies on the part of the MfS.

When Mielke celebrated his sixtieth birthday on December 28, 1967, he received the following honors: Service Medal in Gold from the Customs Administration, the medal for outstanding accomplishment in socialist education in the Young Pioneer organization Ernst Thälmann, the service medal in gold from the German Railway, separate badges of honor in gold from the Gymnastics and Sport Federation and the German Soccer Association, and a badge of honor for outstanding accomplishment as a GDR huntsman.<sup>18</sup> A shrewd political operator, Mielke in turn bestowed honors on leading SED members — an act, however, that required the approval of both Honecker and the Division for Security Questions. In one documented instance, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the MfS, Mielke proposed that Werner Lamberz, the head of the Agitation Department in the secretariat, be awarded the “Medal for the Armed Brotherhood.” Yet Mielke had to settle for the lesser “Fighting Order for Service to the People and Country” due to Honecker’s ruling. In short, these medals — in an important sense — became a ubiquitous form of political currency and influence.

The intimate relationship fostered between the party elite and the MfS found further reinforcement in 1960 with the establishment of Forest Settlement Wandlitz (Waldsiedlung Wandlitz). Anxious to provide Politbüro members and candidate members with more centralized and spacious accommodations, the SED selected this idyllic wooded site northeast of Berlin and charged Erich Mielke with its manifold operations. In time, this self-contained compound came to comprise twenty-three relatively modest single-family residences along with a clubhouse/movie theater, a restaurant, a beauty salon, a tailor shop, a greenhouse, an indoor swimming pool, medical services, and an automobile repair facility. Most conspicuous of all was the so-called *Ladenkombinat* — a shopping emporium offering better quality East German goods as well as items acquired from abroad — all at attractive prices. Special orders from West German mail order catalogues — offering items such as ski clothing and video

18 Wilfriede Otto, *Erich Mielke. Biographie* (Berlin, 2000), 325–26. It is estimated that Mielke accumulated more than 200 East German civilian and military awards and honors along with many bestowed by other countries belonging to the Warsaw Pact. In early 1990, however, the former were revoked along with his honorary title “Hero of the GDR.”



recorders — were also fulfilled through the efforts of the working group “Kommerzielle Koodinierung” (Koko) under the leadership of Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski, the deputy minister of foreign trade, himself a Stasi officer in special deployment. In no known instance did Mielke ever refuse a request.<sup>19</sup>

Yet probably the greatest financial advantage for Politbüro members came from the low rents charged and the domestic help that was included. Immediately adjacent to the so-called *Innenring*, which housed the party elite, was the *Außenring*, where most of the personnel resided. Full party members had two persons assigned to their home, while the general secretary had up to four persons. Numbering roughly 600 during the period 1960-1989, these workers had been selected on the basis of strict security criteria and were officially deemed members of the MfS, specifically the Protection of Individuals (Personenschutz) Division, and ranged in rank from private to captain. Emphasizing the exacting standards required, Mielke once stated, “Among other things, the employees must constantly show a skilled and understanding demeanor along with a sensitivity to the specific wishes of the [state’s] leading representatives.”<sup>20</sup> He also admonished them to strictest secrecy. As added measures of security, members of the Felix Dzerzhinsky Guard Regiment patrolled the wall surrounding the property day and night, and, for the personnel living in the *Außenring*, there was but a single guarded point of entry into the *Innenring*.

Mielke’s influence extended into yet another related realm. The nearby weekend luxury dachas available to each Politbüro member likewise came under the auspices of the MfS. For example, Willi Stoph, the chairman of the Council of Ministers, was provided with a property containing five elaborate greenhouses — presumably on the advice of his doctors — while Hermann Axen, Honecker’s closest advisor on foreign affairs, had a spacious thatched-roof residence replete with a boathouse. Mielke himself possessed “Gasthaus Wolletz” near Angermünde — a vastly expanded hunting lodge that had come into the possession of the MfS under Wilhelm Zaisser in 1951. In its final form, Wolletz could accommodate not only the families of close associates of the minister but two dozen other party members or foreign dignitaries. The required personnel — such as cooks, waiters, and technicians — numbered sixty-two MfS workers. As game hunting was one of Mielke’s greatest passions, the most frequented events tended to be the various shooting parties scheduled throughout the year such as the *Bockanjagen* in May and the *Hubertusjagd* in November. Whereas scant social interaction

19 Klaus Bästlein, *Der Fall Mielke. Die Ermittlungen gegen den Minister für Staatssicherheit der DDR* (Baden-Baden, 2002), 66.

20 Cited by Thomas Grimm, *Das Politbüro Privat. Ulbricht, Honecker, Mielke & Co. aus der Sicht ihrer Angestellten* (Berlin, 2004), 10.

occurred among the families residing at Waldsiedlung Wandlitz, a quite different atmosphere prevailed at Wolletz, which more closely approximated Western standards of luxury. It is noteworthy, too, that Honecker counted himself an avid hunter, thus adding a further dimension to the close relationship between him and Mielke.<sup>21</sup>

Lastly, there was the concept of socialist competition as laid down by Lenin in a posthumous publication. Anxious to arouse what he considered the latent “organising talent” among workers and peasants in the new socialist state, Lenin had written,

Far from extinguishing competition, socialism, on the contrary, for the first time creates the opportunity for employing it on a really *wide* and on a really *mass* scale, for actually drawing the majority of toilers into an arena of such labor in which they can display their abilities, develop their capacities, reveal their talents, of which there is an untapped spring among the people, and which capitalism crushed, suppressed and strangled in thousands and millions. Now that a socialist government is in power, our task is to organise competition.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, the Soviet Union began to foster competition on a wide scale during the 1930s — a practice that was subsequently extended to the Eastern bloc states after the war. An essential component of industrial production, competition was designed to encourage workers to make an extra effort beyond their routine tasks with the socialist ideal held firmly in mind. As Ursula Sydow, a former editor at Aufbau publishing house, recalled, “Completely normal assignments at work were declared competitive assignments. It was nothing more than empty form, but it had to proceed according to this ritual, a ritual created by the party.”<sup>23</sup> State security found no exemption from this practice, either, as candidly recounted by Werner Stiller of the HV A in his autobiography:

Whereas its overuse had long ago made it a meaningless concept in industry and agriculture, the MfS acted as if it still had continuing relevance. Nearly half of all our party events had the topic of socialist competition on the agenda. That meant each of us had to make a “personal commitment” or face later reprisals. However deluded we knew this practice to be, no one ever conceded it openly.<sup>24</sup>

21 These hunting parties had a clearly defined code of etiquette. Mielke, for example, always permitted Honecker to shoot first, even when the prey was closer to him. In addition, one had to be mindful of not exceeding the kill of a higher-ranking official.

22 V. I. Lenin, “How to Organise Competition,” in *The Lenin Anthology*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York, 1975), 427. This article first appeared in *Pravda* in January 1929 on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of his death.

23 Cited in *The Wall in My Backyard: East German Women in Transition*, ed. Dinah Jane Dodds and Pam Allen-Thompson (Amherst, MA, 1994), 138.

24 Werner Stiller (with Jefferson Adams), *Beyond the Wall: Memoirs of an East and West German Spy* (Washington, 1992), 101-102.

The resilience of the Stasi and party relationship underwent its most severe test during the upheaval immediately preceding the demise of the GDR. Mielke had never ceased to affirm the primacy of the party — “State security will prove itself at all times to be a reliable shield and sharp sword of the party and of workers’ and peasants’ power”<sup>25</sup> — just as his confidential tête-à-tête with Honecker following the weekly Politbüro meetings on Tuesdays had become an established practice. But as major signs of discontent steadily mounted in the general population, distinct cracks in the Stasi-party axis began to appear.

This increasing discord was especially prevalent on the local level.<sup>26</sup> In Karl-Marx-Stadt (now Chemnitz), for example, the celebration of the GDR’s fortieth anniversary on October 7, 1989, was also the occasion of a silent protest march by approximately 1,500 citizens. Nearby Plauen saw dissidents assembling in twice the number. The regional MfS office decided to respond with force — a combination of nightsticks, water cannons, and low-flying helicopters — and more than 100 people were arrested in the two cities. The local SED, however, noted its regret that no preventive measures had been taken by the security forces and expressed its willingness to have discussions with the new political groups provided they adhered to nonviolent action. What irked the regional Stasi chief, Siegfried Gehlert, was the party’s inability to take an unequivocal stand, which placed the MfS in an untenable position. He would have simply banished all the protestors from the country rather than try to placate them as the party was attempting to do.

Defiant chants such as “Out with the Stasi” and “Stasi go to work” (*Stasi in die Produktion*) started to be heard, as the MfS, not the party, quickly became the focal point of widespread discontent. But to local state security officials, it was actually the SED’s inertia in grappling with the country’s severe problems that formed the root cause of the unrest. Since 1987, Gehlert had conveyed 120 memoranda about these issues — the overburdened environment, the restricted media policy, the increasing shortages of basic supplies and foodstuffs, and the general lack of vision for the country’s future — but neither the party nor the bureaucracy had taken heed. For its part, the SED leadership appeared reluctant to defend the security forces publicly and even questioned whether the MfS had kept them fully informed about the mood of the country. Although at this point one Stasi report explicitly referred to a “breach of trust,” both institutions knew that an open break would put each of them in greater jeopardy.

25 Cited by Karl Wilhelm Fricke, “Das MfS als Instrument der SED am Beispiel politischer Strafprozesse,” in *Staatspartei und Staatssicherheit. Zum Verhältnis von SED und MfS*, ed. Siegfried Suckut and Walter Süß (Berlin, 1997), 200.

26 See especially Holger Horsch, “Hat nicht wenigstens die Stasi die Stimmung im Lande gekannt?” *MfS und SED im Bezirk Karl-Marx-Stadt* (Berlin, 1997).

Having to confront forces of dissent face-to-face had a strong impact on many Stasi officers and raised fundamental questions about the correctness of party doctrine. Until then, the enemy had been largely couched in formulaic expressions such as “hostile-negative persons” (*feindlich-negative Personen*) and described secondhand in IM reports. But now hearing grievances that seemed all too immediate and understandable, these officers found it hard to endorse Mielke’s ironclad conviction that domestic unrest could be traced exclusively to the enemies of socialism abroad. As one former major assigned to counterintelligence later remarked, “Then came the mid-1980s when those persons dissatisfied with the GDR were classified as [members of the] political underground. An enemy category was created where there was none. That led to making mountains out of molehills. . . . The MfS should be reproached for doing things that no longer conformed to the stated regulations.”<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, an increasingly critical tone could be detected in the vital reports assembled by the Central Assessment and Information Group (Zentrale Auswertungs- und Informationsgruppe [ZAIG]) and forwarded to Mielke. In trying to explain the reasons for the mass emigration of GDR citizens, for instance, ZAIG specifically cited the failure of the SED to address the worsening domestic situation.

The rancor that had developed between the SED and the MfS finally came into full public view in late January 1990 following the official dissolution of the security forces. In a statement to the Central Round Table, Egon Krenz, having resigned the previous month as Honecker’s immediate successor, described the Stasi as

...increasingly a state within a state, screened off from the outside world and even exercising control over members of the party. In violation of democratic principles, questions of state security and the specific operational work of the Ministry of State Security were essentially discussed and decided by the head of the National Defense Council and the Minister of State Security, the sole exceptions being cadre appointments and investments.<sup>28</sup>

27 Udo M. in *Stasi*protokolle: *Gespräche mit ehemaligen Mitarbeitern des “Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit” der DDR*, ed. Gisela Karau (Frankfurt am Main, 1992), 17.

28 Cited by Jens Gieseke, *Der Mielke-Konzern. Die Geschichte der Stasi 1945–1990* (Munich, 2006), 94.

For many, the fact that Krenz had also served as the former Central Committee Secretary for Security Questions seemed to raise serious questions about his own competence. Honecker, for his part, while

acknowledging his high admiration for the work of the ministry and its responsible personnel, nevertheless agreed with Krenz's characterization. Specifically, it was Mielke who had used the Stasi as his own power base. Honecker had completely depended upon Mielke but the Stasi chief had withheld important information and kept him in the dark regarding the innermost operation of the security apparatus.

Not surprisingly, Mielke categorically rejected such accusations. While awaiting trial in 1992, he stated in his defense:

The picture of the sword and shield of the party is not an idealized construct. The MfS was subordinate to the party to the very end . . . Honecker knew the number of full-time employees. He received the figures for the disarmament talks in Vienna. It is possible that he did not know the precise number of unofficial collaborators. Fundamentally, though, the full extent of the ministry's activities was known to him. It was such that when something happened in the country that evoked criticism of the general secretary, then state security was blamed for not having reported it beforehand . . . An independent existence was never the case. The MfS was no state in a state.<sup>29</sup>

Reinforcing Mielke's assertion was the final head of the HV A, Werner Großmann. As he wrote in his memoirs,

No one in the party and state leadership, neither during Honecker's tenure nor afterwards during that of [Hans] Modrow [the GDR's interim premier prior to reunification], is willing to call a spade a spade. The MfS acted according to political orders. It is no state within a state, rather an instrument of power for the ruling party, its sword and shield just as Mielke often stressed.<sup>30</sup>

On balance, while the MfS could pose as a powerful lobbyist on certain issues, it never outwardly broke with party doctrine at any point, neither concerning a policy that it regarded as unpalatable such as détente with the West, nor during the heightened confusion of the final period. It is difficult not to be struck by the irony of how

29 Erich Mielke, "Ich sterbe in diesem Kasten," *Der Spiegel*, no. 36 (1992): 48.

30 Werner Großmann, *Bonn im Blick* (Berlin, 2001), 171. At the same time, it is noteworthy that Großmann had no fondness for Mielke's leadership style, especially his habitual choleric outbursts directed at subordinates.

the relationship between the party and the security forces ultimately climaxed. One of the trademark tactics of the Stasi involved infiltrating opposition groups with IMs in order to sow dissension and cripple them from within. Such was notably the case as protests sharply escalated in the summer and fall of 1989. What happened instead was that the citizens groups remained generally intact while major fissures began to appear in the ruling regime — none greater, in fact, than the one that developed between the SED and the MfS. It was an outcome that no one had predicted.

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**Jefferson Adams** is a professor of history at Sarah Lawrence College, where he teaches twentieth-century European history. He is particularly interested in European and German political, diplomatic, and cultural history, including espionage history. His *Historical Dictionary of German Intelligence* (2009) combines all these ambitious topics in a unique way. His most recent work is *Strategic Intelligence in the Cold War and Beyond* (2015).