

Part V

CREATING AN ENEMY

## THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

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Chapters 10 and 11 focus on the Stasi's ultimately unsuccessful battle against groups and organisations which, unlike the state-run enterprises, the mass media and the sports organisations, lay essentially outside the immediate domain of party and state. These ranged from the Protestant churches and the Jewish communities to punks and skinheads. All were penetrated by IMs and controlled or held in check throughout most of the Honecker era. Some, like the alternative peace and ecological groups and right-wing extremists, might be undermined, splintered and broken up but the process often resembled cutting off the head of the hydra. There were, of course, many fundamental differences separating the groups. For example, the Protestant churches enjoyed a significant degree of control over their internal affairs and represented an alternative belief system to the prevailing Marxism-Leninism. By contrast, the kaleidoscopic autonomous peace, ecological, gay, human rights and women's groups, many of whom depended on the church for shelter, constituted a variegated counter-culture which was engaged in a constant struggle to obtain space for the articulation of alternative views and styles of life to those propagated by the SED. Whereas many of these groups aspired to the creation of a reformed, democratic socialism – a kind of third way between SED-style socialism and capitalism – the punk, heavy metal and skinhead sub-cultures of the 1980s veered between the anarchic nihilism of many of the punks and the xenophobia and pan-Germanism of the extreme skinheads and 'fascos'. Finally, the emigration 'movement' posed perhaps the greatest challenge to SED rule for not only did the numbers of those wishing to leave the GDR escalate from the mid-1970s onwards but they were a clear demonstration of the failure of the SED to devise an attractive and viable alternative to the social market economy and political pluralism of the Federal Republic. In politicising and treating all these groups in a blanket fashion as 'negative' (albeit with differences according to their perceived 'decadence' and 'hostility'), the MfS and the SED marginalised and subverted some of the groups which might have contributed to the recasting of the GDR, and, just possibly, its survival as a separate political entity.

## THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES: COMPLIANCE AND CONTROL

By their very presence both the Protestant and Catholic churches, as well as the Jewish communities and Jehovah's Witnesses, posed a challenge to the SED's ideological primacy and to its aspiration to erode autonomous organisational tendencies. This section will concentrate on the largest group, the Protestant churches which, in 1989, had a membership of 5.1 million, that is, about 30 per cent of the total population, albeit much lower than the 80.4 per cent in 1950. The secularisation of society partly accounts for this drop, as well as the much lower proportion of the population who actually attended a church service.<sup>1</sup> The Roman Catholic church played a less active role in the GDR than its Protestant counterpart, partly because it lacked the latter's numerical strength. Situated above all in the Eichsfeld, Upper Lusatia and in some of the larger cities, it attracted 11 per cent of the total population in 1950, a figure which had halved by 1989.<sup>2</sup> Although smaller and playing a less conspicuous role in politics than the Protestant churches, it was unable to keep the Stasi at bay. Individuals were officially authorised by their bishops to enter into contact with the MfS. Others did so without formal permission and a few priests and laymen served as IMs.<sup>3</sup>

The fierce battle which the SED waged against the allegedly counter-revolutionary Protestant churches reached its peak in 1953. Although the churches continued to face accusations of being a centre of imperialism, the struggle eventually abated in the later Ulbricht years, as signalled by Ulbricht's statement in 1960 that 'Christianity and the humanist goals of socialism are not irreconcilable'.<sup>4</sup> The regime's new policy was essentially to co-opt or incorporate the churches into the socialist order. This policy was facilitated when, in 1969, the GDR churches withdrew from the all-German umbrella organisation, the Protestant Church of Germany, and established its own separate League of Protestant Churches in the GDR. The separation was not complete as, for example, one-third of the East German churches' total budget came from West German subsidies. By the late 1970s, the more harmonious relationship between the SED and the churches was underpinned by an informal accord at a meeting in 1978 between Honecker and Bishop Schönherr, the chair of the League of Protestant Churches, which confirmed earlier and new concessions such as the construction of church buildings in new towns and a modest amount of TV time. It had been Schönherr who in 1971, at the synod of the League of Protestant Churches in the GDR, had made a considerable personal contribution to laying the

<sup>1</sup> Dennis M. 2000: 246.

<sup>2</sup> Wolle S. 1998: 248.

<sup>3</sup> Grande D. and Schäfer B. 1996: 395-404.

<sup>4</sup> Dennis M. 2000: 246.

groundwork for a compromise by issuing the carefully crafted and ambivalent statement that they do not want to be a church against or alongside but to be a church within socialism.

As far as the regime was concerned, the arrangement had a number of advantages in that the churches, due to their links with the West, were regarded as a useful ally in Honecker's efforts to influence Western political leaders and peace movements. Moreover, the churches were supportive in other respects as they opposed NATO's nuclear build-up in the 1980s and advocated recognition of GDR citizenship in 1985. However, the SED was still not satisfied: it was determined to bind conservative elements in the churches ever more closely to the regime and, according to a circular from Mielke to Stasi officers on 19 April 1978, to subvert, divide and paralyse hostile-negative persons and groups associated with the churches.<sup>5</sup> This approach was underlined by Mielke in a speech in 1976: 'We must support with our Chekist means and methods the efforts of our party and of our state to strengthen progressive church circles and forces, to promote the differentiation process, to induce church groups to act with mature reflection and to marginalise reactionary forces'.<sup>6</sup>

The decomposition measures against the churches, though not uncommon before the 1960s, were pursued with greater vigour in the era of détente and lend weight to Clemens Vollnhals's argument that while the SED's methods might have changed over 40 years, its long-term goal remained constant even in periods of relative political liberalisation: that is, it wished to eliminate the churches as an association with a high level of internal autonomy.<sup>7</sup> The perception of the churches as an alien body in real existing socialism was reflected in Rudi Mittig's statement in 1983 that 'Religion is and remains a type of bourgeois ideology and is incompatible with Marxism-Leninism. At this particular time, such an assessment cannot be the subject of public discussion but it must always co-determine the political as well as the basic political-operative conception'.<sup>8</sup>

Within church circles numerous conflicts and disagreements erupted over relations with the regime and over the position of the autonomous peace and other groups in the church. With regard to the former, a considerable division existed between those ministers and officials who, like Bishop Schönherr, preferred to avoid confrontation and others, notably Bishop Gottfried Forck, who were prepared to take greater risks, for example, in aiding the basic groups. In general terms, the church hierarchy sought to embrace the autonomous groups without jeopardising the fragile compact with the state. It had no intention of becoming an overt political opposition against state and party.

<sup>5</sup> Wagner H. 1993: 111.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Besier G. and Wolf S. 1992: 299. Our translation.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in Vollnhals C. 1996a: 80. Our translation.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 80. Our translation.

This balancing act left church leaders open to the charge of expediency from the more impatient peace and human rights activists. Tension also arose within the churches over the extent to which the groups should be incorporated more firmly into the organisational framework of the religious community. The MfS was most concerned that the groups, especially the peace groups, threatened to disrupt the more harmonious relationship between state and church. According to an internal report compiled in 1983 by several MfS officers, 'opponents were seeking, under the guise of pacifism, to unite all hostile-negative forces and to set in motion a counterrevolutionary process'.<sup>9</sup> The MfS, in other words, regarded independent activities as part of a political underground activity under the roof of the churches which, to quote the officers once more, was characterised by:

The creation or adoption and propagation of anti-socialist ideas and platforms, in particular written materials, objects and symbols by hostile-negative forces within and outside the churches, working together with enemy organisations in non-socialist countries abroad and gathering together hostile-negative individuals in the GDR by using the opportunities afforded by the churches, attempts to form an ostensibly legal opposition movement and the reshaping of hostile organisations.<sup>10</sup>

### THE MONITORING AND CONTROL OF THE CHURCHES

The Stasi made deep inroads.<sup>11</sup> Although unofficial agents were planted in the church at all levels, the ministry concentrated its efforts on the leading bodies. High-ranking officials such as the East Berlin Superintendent Günter Krusche and Bishop Horst Gienke in Greifswald served as informers. The personal secretary to Bishop Schönherr, Anita Steinmetzger, worked for many years as an IM, supplying the MfS with highly confidential documents on church policy. As the church was only able to train a few of its own lawyers and therefore had to recruit from state institutions, the Stasi succeeded in placing lawyers as IMs in important positions. At some church synods as many as 25 out of 100 synod members and assistants might be operating as informers. Many top officials, who were not officially agents, engaged in highly secretive conversations with party and state bodies such as the State Secretariat for Church Questions – itself deeply penetrated by the Stasi<sup>12</sup> – and were frequently indiscreet in disclosing information on church policy and individual members. The body with major responsibility for the churches was

the relatively small Department 4 of Main Department XX, which employed 43 staff at central level and about 120 full-time officers at regional level in 1988.<sup>13</sup> Its similarly named predecessor, between 1953 and 1964, had been located in Main Department V and it worked closely with the State Secretary for Church Questions and the more important Working Party for Church Questions of the SED Central Committee. The number of IMs is difficult to assess. Although there were at least 800 working for the central and regional organs in 1988, it is not clear how many were run by the District Service Units, perhaps 200.<sup>14</sup>

The ministry's goal, in accordance with the general decomposition strategy, was to depoliticise, neutralise and, where possible, 'coordinate' the churches and to use its agents, especially those in key positions, to influence policy and appointments. Critical individuals and groups were to be contained and, where necessary, silenced by the insidious methods employed elsewhere in society. Bishops and prelates were caught up in this net: campaigns were organised to isolate and discredit them and their private life was subjected to close scrutiny. Pastor Eppelmann was for many years 'dealt with' in OV 'Blues' and Main Department XX/4 nurtured church organisations and circles loyal to the SED in order to promote opposition to the church leadership. These groups included the Weißensee Study Group and the Evangelical Pastors' Association.<sup>15</sup> Even though Main Department XX/4 had only 1 per cent of all the ministry's IMs, running the network was an expensive business. In 1987, the cost amounted to 23 per cent of the department's total expenditure and was considerably higher per capita than was spent on the larger networks in those units which dealt with sport, culture and the media.<sup>16</sup>

As in other spheres, the Stasi recruited agents by taking advantage of human frailties and needs such as the desire for personal security, material goods, career advancement, trips abroad and university places for their children. Payments could be high, such as to the 24 IMs who received over 2,000 GDR Marks, including the 14 top earners with over 5,000 Marks in 1988.<sup>17</sup> But as many informers received nothing or only small sums, controllers had to be adept at encouraging IMs to believe that they were helping to modify some of the state's more repressive characteristics. Most church IMs do not seem to have believed that working for the Stasi was tantamount to changing sides; indeed, many who betrayed friends managed to convince themselves that they were working in the interests of the church and in furthering its relationship with the SED and the state. Neubert has referred to

<sup>9</sup> Cited in Besier G. and Wolf S. 1992: 39.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 44. Our translation.

<sup>11</sup> See in particular Neubert E. 1993.

<sup>12</sup> Even the State Secretary for Church Questions, Klaus Gysi, was a Stasi informer between 1956 and 1964: Vollnhals C. 1996a: 96.

<sup>13</sup> Wiedmann R. 1996: 200.

<sup>14</sup> Vollnhals C. 1996a: 106.

<sup>15</sup> Roßberg K. 1996: 61.

<sup>16</sup> Vollnhals C. 1996a: 103, 119.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 104, 109–10.

this as a kind of dual loyalty, which is not easily classified into dichotomies of collaboration and refusal, resistance and accommodation, and which was underpinned in church circles by the authoritarian structures of Protestantism, a utopian belief in a humane socialism as the preferred third way between capitalism and communism, and a pragmatic perception of the GDR's capacity for survival.<sup>18</sup>

### THE DILEMMAS OF COLLABORATION

Manfred Stolpe's involvement with the MfS encapsulates the dilemmas of weaving, no matter how adroitly, between the two tracks of church and state. It also highlights the complexity of a retrospective reconstruction of the motivation of IMs. A church lawyer, Stolpe was the top lay official of the Protestant churches and later, between 1990 and 2002, served as the SPD Minister President of the *Land* Brandenburg. Although registered by the Stasi as an unofficial informer (IM 'Sekretär') in 1970, Stolpe has emphatically denied that he worked as an agent. While there is no evidence that Stolpe entered into a contractual relationship with the MfS, he undoubtedly enjoyed close contacts with Stasi and party officials for almost 20 years. Stolpe went beyond his brief as he did not receive authorisation from or inform the church leaders of his MfS links. This kind of relationship was not untypical of church IMs as the Stasi, on occasions, deliberately refrained from asking officials in sensitive positions from entering into a formal contract.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, from the mid-1970s onwards, the recruitment of a full-time church official required, in some Regional Administrations, the prior approval of its leading officer.<sup>20</sup> The decisive factor was the value, the conspiratorial nature and the regularity of the contacts. Praised before 1989 as a skilled intermediary between East and West and as a protector of dissidents against the state, Stolpe stands accused of being the man of the state in the church. He informed his Stasi and party contacts on the political views of church leaders and he warned them of the danger of an alliance between the alternative political culture and Christians with so-called 'negative' political attitudes. He was also exceptionally indiscreet in his views on pastor Rainer Eppelmann and discussed ways and means of reining him in. Not surprisingly, some former dissidents have turned vehemently against their former 'protector'.

<sup>18</sup> Neubert E. 1993: 93–103; also Vollnhals C. 1996b: 438–46.

<sup>19</sup> Reuth R. G. 1992: 33–4, 42–3. Roßberg, the deputy head of HA XX/4, confirms in his autobiography that the MfS registered Stolpe as IM 'Sekretär' without his knowledge but contends that the crucial criterion was the frequency and the confidential nature of their contacts. Roßberg was Stolpe's MfS contact for about 20 years and regards him as an opportunist and a pragmatist. See Roßberg K. 1996: 85, 88–9.

<sup>20</sup> Vollnhals C. 1996a: 99.

In his defence, Stolpe has argued that he had been working in the best interests of the churches and had helped thousands of would-be émigrés.<sup>21</sup> Given that the GDR appeared to be a permanent feature, the pragmatist in Stolpe probably persuaded him that the churches' internal autonomy could be safeguarded and furthered through dialogue with the party and the state authorities while, hopefully, removing some of the regime's worst features. In a justification of this position after the collapse of communism, he claimed that the GDR 'was a dictatorship, but one which wore velvet gloves, and despite everything, it was possible to do a great deal'.<sup>22</sup>

For many, this kind of defence is unacceptable. In 1992, Joachim Gauck, a former pastor from Rostock and the first head of the Federal office responsible for the Stasi files, opined:

The argument that the church or the opposition could only be effective because they were good 'diplomats' at work overlooks the danger that the 'diplomats' would set the norms for activities within the church, and that it was then child's play for the state to limit those activities. It also overlooks the fact that in church discussions of individuals and issues, the 'diplomats' had often internalized the ideas and behaviour of SED comrades.<sup>23</sup>

In retrospect, it is clear that the Stasi enjoyed considerable success in influencing church policy and in curtailing critical potential. This was certainly true throughout most of the 1960s and 1970s and it was not until the emergence of the peace and other small autonomous groups that the situation within the churches gave reason for concern and led to the formation in 1983 of a special desk in Main Department XX/4 for combating political underground activity.<sup>24</sup> However, the churches were not pliant and defenceless objects. The plurality of opinions and organisations, as well as the dedication of individuals and groups, ensured that critical voices were not silenced and policy was not a mere reflection of the ruling party's priorities. Even though church leaders might seek to distance themselves in public from Eppelmann and other critical pastors, they sought, in the course of discussions with state and party authorities, to ensure that Eppelmann remained at liberty.<sup>25</sup> And it was in no small part thanks to the protection of the churches that the basic groups, though infiltrated by the Stasi, constituted a countervoice to the SED in areas such as human rights and peace (see Chapter 11). Further evaluation of the impact of the Stasi on decision-making processes in, and the development of, the churches will, however, depend very much on further research, in particular on case studies based on oral testimonies and scrupulous documentary studies.

<sup>21</sup> Reuth R. G. 1992: 51.

<sup>22</sup> Cited in Sa'adah A. 1998: 191.

<sup>23</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, 206.

<sup>24</sup> Vollnhals C. 1996a: 94.

<sup>25</sup> Besier G. and Wolf S. 1992: 85.

## THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

In the later 1980s, the GDR's Jewish community comprised less than 400 registered members, about half of whom resided in East Berlin, and several thousand people of Jewish origin.<sup>26</sup> The anti-semitism of the early 1950s, economic difficulties and the regime's antagonism towards religion led to a sharp decline in membership of the official communities (*Gemeinden*) from about 8,000 in 1950 to about 1,500 in 1961. By the mid-1970s, more than 90 per cent of members were over 55 years of age. There were, of course, many other East Germans of Jewish descent who did not belong to the communities, some of them being deterred by the requirements of orthodoxy and by political considerations. Among those of Jewish descent were the Politbüro members Albert Norden and Hermann Axen, high-ranking state officials like the State Secretary for Religious Questions Klaus Gysi, the Minister of Culture Alexander Abusch, the playwright Friedrich Wolf, and the writers Stephan Hermlin and Stefan Heym. Wolf's two sons, Konrad and Markus, were a film director and the head of Stasi foreign intelligence respectively.

As the SED's claim to legitimacy was based, in part, on its anti-fascist credentials, the regime's treatment of the Jewish communities and the official interpretation of the Holocaust are important indicators of the regime's commitment to anti-fascism. While the bravery of many communists in the resistance to National Socialism cannot be denied, the GDR and Soviet adherence to the Comintern's 1935 interpretation of fascism as a class problem endemic in capitalist society made it extremely difficult to appreciate the Holocaust in terms of its ethnic-religious dimension and as part of the history of anti-semitism. For reasons of self-legitimation, the SED and East German historians depicted the communists as the most important victims of National Socialism, thereby marginalising the Jewish catastrophe, and by locating fascism in the capitalist system transferred the guilt and the responsibility for restitution to West Germany. Furthermore, the position of Jews in the GDR was damaged by the repercussions in the GDR of the Slansky trial in Czechoslovakia and the 'doctors' plot' in Moscow between 1952 and 1953. The purging of the SED apparatus of Titoists, Trotskyites and Zionists resulted in the dismissal and flight of many Jewish citizens. Hundreds of Jews left the GDR, including the leaders of most of the communities.<sup>27</sup> Although persecution slackened and the enfeebled communities were able to devote themselves to socio-cultural and religious activities, anti-semitic tendencies were not eradicated and many East German Jews, including those in the MfS, remained sensitive to the ambiguities of Jewish identity in a communist state. A former Stasi officer, Herbert Brehmer, has recalled that his few fellow Jews

in the ministry did not openly admit to their Jewish identity and it was rumoured that Markus Wolf's departure in 1986 was linked to his Jewish origins.<sup>28</sup>

Not until the mid-1980s did the SED adopt a more positive attitude to Jewish organisations and give the green light to a more nuanced understanding of National Socialist persecution of the Jews. This policy was closely linked to the SED's efforts to boost its international reputation, to improve relations with Israel and to attain Most Favoured Nation trading status with the USA. In 1988, the GDR went to great lengths to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Crystal Night and Honcker agreed with Heinz Galinski, the leader of the West German Jewish communities, to establish a Centrum Judaicum in the former synagogue in East Berlin's Oranienburger Strasse. However, when Jewish groups in West Germany and Israel sought to gain access to the archive of the Berlin Jewish community, which had been moved to Potsdam, neither the GDR authorities nor the MfS were keen to release sensitive documents on the expropriation of the Jews in the Third Reich lest they be used to support restitution claims against the GDR.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the relaxation of persecution and the greater toleration afforded the Jewish communities, Marxism-Leninism's aversion to religious denominations and organisational autonomy, the regime's friendship with Israel's Arab opponents and the links of the Jewish communities with Western organisations meant that the Jewish communities were regarded as a 'security issue' to be dealt with by the Secretariat for Religious Questions and by the Stasi. As with the Protestant and Catholic churches and the Jehovah's Witnesses, Main Department XX/4 was mainly responsible for the control and surveillance of the Jewish communities. Other Main Departments were also involved. HA II, for example, kept watch over Western visitors to the Jewish communities.<sup>30</sup> IMs were also recruited from among the latter in order to influence decisions and provide information for the ministry.<sup>31</sup> Among the leading officials in East Berlin who served the MfS for many years were Peter Kirchner, the chair of the capital's community since 1971, and two members of the Board of Directors, Werner Zarrach, and Irene Runge. Zarrach, who had worked for the Polish security service in the 1950s and subsequently as Stasi informer IM 'Rainer Buch', reported on the Polish opposition and on the East Berlin Jewish community. He belonged to the latter's Board of Directors from 1972 onwards. Kirchner, who was registered as IM 'Burg' in 1977 and then as a higher category (IMB) in 1980, was still cooperating with the MfS as late as the autumn of 1989. Dr Peter Fischer ('René'), cooperated, though not unproblematically, for many years as an IM; he was appointed secretary of the East German Organisation of Jewish Communities in April

<sup>28</sup> Brehmer H. 1991: 25, 27.

<sup>29</sup> MfS ZA, HA IX/11, AV 15/87, 'Stellungnahme', 18 September 1989, pp. 2-3.

<sup>30</sup> Offenberg U. 1998: 152-3.

<sup>31</sup> For the details on IMs, see *ibid.*, 160-63, and Wolfssohn M. 1997: 152-3.

<sup>26</sup> MfS ZA, ZOS, no. 1164, p. 78.

<sup>27</sup> Timm A. 1993: 48-9.

1989 and became the leader of the Berlin branch of the Central Council of German Jews in 1990. Community officials and members elsewhere in the GDR were implicated too. In Dresden, Helmut Aris, the president of the community, was recruited in 1954 and Helmut Eschwege, the historian and a community member, was a long-serving informer ('Ferdinand'). Eschwege, one of the co-founders of the Social Democratic Party in Dresden in November 1989, overlooked his MfS links when he came to publish his autobiography in 1991. With a minuscule and senescent membership and a high level of politically reliable SED members among the executives, the communities led a largely quiescent and marginalised existence in the Honecker era.

### JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

Whereas the Jewish communities, the Mormons, the Baptists and the Protestant churches enjoyed a limited space and legal recognition, the Jehovah's Witnesses were beyond the pale and their organisation was banned from 1950 onwards. The society had also been proscribed and Witnesses dismissed from their jobs during the Third Reich. After 1939 most active congregation members were incarcerated in prisons and concentration camps such as Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald, where between 2,500 and 5,000 died. Although after the end of the Second World War the Witnesses had been officially recognised as 'victims of fascism', they soon came into conflict with the SED because of their distinctive doctrine and their links with the society's headquarters in Brooklyn and its Eastern Bureau in Wiesbaden, West Germany, where a special GDR branch was located. The SED and MfS were convinced that the Witnesses were agents of American imperialists and warmongers. The brethren vigorously denied the charge. They saw themselves as citizens of God's Kingdom, firmly believed that the end of the present order was nigh and predicted that destruction loomed for the nations under the sway of Satan. Although Witnesses accepted that they should obey the law of the land – except where it was in conflict with the law of God – they remained politically neutral, resolutely refusing to swear allegiance to any state other than that of God and to take part in elections. They also declined to bear arms, not through pacifism, but because they perceived themselves to be soldiers in God's army.

While the consolidation of SED rule in the later 1960s and détente brought some relief to the Witnesses, both party and Stasi clung to the view that the brethren were engaged in pseudo-religious, anti-communist subversion as lackeys of American imperialism. Allegedly steered from Brooklyn and Wiesbaden, they were thus part of the imperialist strategy to undermine and liquidate the socialist order of the GDR<sup>32</sup> through political-ideological diversionary methods such as:

<sup>32</sup> MfS ZA, JHS, no. 901175, 1975, p. 6; MfS ZA, JHS, no. 123/79, 1978, pp. 4, 8.

... hindering or preventing the formation of a socialist consciousness in children and young people, opposing German-Soviet friendship ... propagating superstition and hostility to science ... and spreading in socialist society the anxiety, uncertainty and fear in their daily lives and for the future such as is found in bourgeois capitalism.<sup>33</sup>

As harsh repression had failed to destroy the society, preventive decomposition, first used against the Witnesses in the 1950s, became more prominent from about the mid-1960s and was the main plank in the struggle against the society.<sup>34</sup> Information was gathered according to the customary 'Who is who?' principle and the main targets were the organisation's functionaries, the training schools, study groups, the Eastern Bureau in West Germany, members who refused to do military service, and the courier system. It was generally recognised that the Witnesses' doctrinal and missionary arteries could be severed by preventing the distribution by secret courier of tracts such as *Watch Tower* and *Awake!* from Brooklyn and Wiesbaden.<sup>35</sup> Despite the emphasis on softer forms of control, punitive measures were not abandoned, especially against young male Witnesses who refused military call-up on the grounds of conscience. As the movement's doctrine did not require total conscientious objection, an unknown number opted for service in a construction unit, the GDR alternative to formal military service. Many refused, however, to take advantage of this provision and between 1964 and 1974, about 1,000 were imprisoned, usually for terms of up to 18 months. Although the GDR authorities became less draconian in the course of the 1980s, 100 Jehovah's Witnesses out of a total of 150 conscientious objectors were imprisoned in 1985. Yet even before they were incarcerated, many members had already experienced discrimination at school and had been deprived of an apprenticeship for refusing to take part in pre-military training.<sup>36</sup>

From the late 1960s onwards, the authorities frequently imposed penalties in accordance with the 1968 Decree on Minor Offences and the 1975 Decree on the Formation of Associations. Fines of 10 to 300 Marks, and on occasions even 1,000 Marks, were imposed for infringements relating to these decrees.<sup>37</sup> Proselytising was punished: in 1983, one Witness was fined 300 Marks for calling on citizens in their apartments in Angermünde and another of the brethren had to pay 50 Marks for approaching people in a cemetery in Hoyerswerda.<sup>38</sup> Such penalties were justified on the grounds that the Witnesses were an illegal organisation. The number of proceedings relating to minor infringements of the law rose sharply in the early 1980s, from 96 in

<sup>33</sup> MfS ZA, HA IX, no. 51, 'Kurzauskunft', 1984, p. 71. Our translation.

<sup>34</sup> Dirksen H-H, 2000: 19–20.

<sup>35</sup> MfS ZA, JHS, no. 135/80, 1980, pp. 5–6.

<sup>36</sup> Hacke G, 2000: 85–6, 88–9, 103.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>38</sup> MfS ZA, HA IX, no. 51, p. 47.

1983 to 269 in 1984.<sup>39</sup> Partly because the Witnesses appealed against the penalties and contested the whole procedure, Main Department XX/4 was most anxious that operations be coordinated smoothly with the People's Police.<sup>40</sup>

The Stasi deployed its usual repertoire of dirty tricks in order to control and, ultimately, to liquidate the Jehovah's Witnesses' organisation. In a thesis devoted to decomposition operations against Jehovah's Witnesses, Lieutenant Bergner of Department XX/4 of the Gera Regional Administration identified a number of measures which could be used to undermine their organisational network: 'defamation of officials', 'denigrating the intellectual and psychological capabilities of group members', 'blaming them for criminal offences', and 'spreading malicious rumours about marital infidelity'.<sup>41</sup> He described one distasteful but successful operation in 1965 concerning a Jehovah's Witness functionary who, while out walking with the wife and four-year-old daughter of an imprisoned Witness, touched the child's genitals. After an IM had discovered the story from the girl's mother, he launched a letter campaign which resulted in the dismissal of the Witness from his function.<sup>42</sup> The thesis received the rating 'very good' from the Stasi assessor, who commended it for its scientific quality and its contribution to practical work.<sup>43</sup> As with other groups and individuals, Witnesses were subject to intensive surveillance in operational cases. As part of OV 'Thurm', the Karl-Marx-Stadt Regional Administration reported in 1972 that the apartment of a Witness district official, Werner Oertel, had been broken into and searched on the basis of information supplied by an informer. A neighbour had helped with the search.<sup>44</sup>

IMs were central to all such operations. For example, Willy Müller, the founder and long-time leader of Christian Responsibility and a Witness official, was recruited as an informer in 1959 after succumbing to psychological pressures and health problems as a result of imprisonment. Christian Responsibility, a special study group of ex-brethren, had been founded in 1952 with the aim of sowing dissension among practising Witnesses.<sup>45</sup> As early as 1951, a service instruction issued by Mielke in his capacity as Secretary of State in the ministry stated that: 'It is only possible to uncover the top functionaries and most dangerous agents of the Witnesses' sect through targeting our work and recruiting GMs and informers with the right potential'.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>39</sup> MfS ZA, HA IX, no. 51, p. 77.

<sup>40</sup> MfS ZA, HA IX, no. 51, 8 April 1985, p. 83. This is a circular from Major General Kienberg to heads of Departments XX.

<sup>41</sup> MfS ZA, JHS, no. 23540, 1976, pp. 31-2, 34.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-2.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-50.

<sup>44</sup> MfS Außenstelle Chemnitz, no. XIV 864/62, pp. 1-3.

<sup>45</sup> Hacke G. 2000: 71-5.

<sup>46</sup> MfS ZA, Allgemeine Sachablage, no. 940/67, no page. Our translation.

The recruitment of IMs, whether congregation members or outsiders, was a complicated and lengthy process because of what the Stasi referred to as the organisation's conspiratorial practices and also because the Eastern Bureau and the functionaries in the GDR were always on guard against MfS spies, carrying out checks on the least suspicion.<sup>47</sup>

Many Witnesses collaborated with the MfS in the belief that they could somehow exert a positive influence on state policies.<sup>48</sup> Given the sensibilities of Witnesses, recruiters were prepared to overlook a written commitment to cooperate.<sup>49</sup> Signs of human weakness were seized upon. In the case of IM candidate 'Blumenberg', the recruiter sought to take advantage of his interest in pornography and alcohol and his aim to purchase an apartment in 1973, ironically two years before the end of the world predicted by the society.<sup>50</sup> Those IMs whom the MfS smuggled into the congregations had to adapt to the Witnesses' belief system and to make fundamental adjustments in their life-style. They were expected to withdraw from politics, retreat into the closed circles of the congregations, possibly forgo watching TV and, if they had children, raise them in the Witnesses' faith. As the process of adjustment was so difficult, the Stasi preferred to recruit IMs from among former or practising Witnesses, including elders. On the other hand, it was recognised that while functionaries might be able to provide invaluable 'insider' information, they were unlikely to have a firm ideological commitment to GDR-style socialism, therefore increasing the chances of being uncovered.<sup>51</sup> Those who were active within the congregations and districts were often initially approached during interrogation after an arrest.<sup>52</sup> The Stasi preferred to recruit single young males, partly to avoid the conflicts of conscience and other problems arising from married life and partly because women did not play a central role in the Witnesses' organisation. Women, however, could be useful as informers on the so-called 'periphery', where agents carried out control and surveillance activities in the neighbourhoods as well as at the workplace. If an IM was married, then the Stasi, aware of the close family ties among Witnesses, considered it advisable that a wife be informed about her husband's work and even attend some of the meetings between the IM and his controller.<sup>53</sup>

Despite the intensity of surveillance and the frequency of arrests, the Jehovah's Witnesses managed to survive and rebuild their networks, although, as the Stasi knew from its agents, the disruption of the courier links between West and East Germany and the decline in the number of new members

<sup>47</sup> MfS ZA, JHS, no. 23501, 1976, p. 10.

<sup>48</sup> Hacke G. 2000: 78.

<sup>49</sup> MfS ZA, JHS, no. 263159, 'Auszüge aus der Lektion HA V/4', 1951, pp. 3-4.

<sup>50</sup> MfS ZA, JHS, no. 138176, 1976, pp. 21-2.

<sup>51</sup> MfS ZA, JHS, no. 23504, 1976, pp. 22-5.

<sup>52</sup> Hacke G. 2000: 78-9.

<sup>53</sup> MfS ZA, JHS, no. 23501, 1976, pp. 6-7, 11, 17.



were causing concern in Brooklyn and Wiesbaden in the early 1980s.<sup>54</sup> In some respects, the final quinquennium of SED rule was a period of hope for the Witnesses in the face of continuing discrimination. Missionary activities were stepped up and, sensitive to external criticism and pressure, the SED was less draconian in its treatment of those refusing to do military service. Developments elsewhere raised spirits in the GDR. In Poland, small congresses were allowed from the early 1980s onwards and the final legalisation of the Witnesses occurred in May 1989. Disturbed by these trends, the MfS attempted to prevent East German Witnesses from meeting their Polish brethren. This was not always successful: in the summer of 1989, 150 Witnesses from the Karl-Marx-Stadt region attended international congresses in Poland.<sup>55</sup> However, the sect was not legalised in the GDR until March 1990 as the Witnesses lacked the political leverage of the Jewish communities and in the eyes of the SED and MfS, the sect was still too much of an exotic outsider and too closely linked to foreign agencies for recognition to be granted.

<sup>54</sup> MfS ZA, HA XX/AKG, no. 5495, pp. 28-30. The organisation calculated that membership had dropped slightly from 21,450 in 1975 to 20,000 in 1983. In January 1989, the Stasi estimated membership at around 21,700, half of whom lived in the Dresden and Karl-Marx-Stadt areas. On the numerical strength of the Witnesses, see Hacke G. 2000: 84 and MfS ZA, ZAIG, no. 3733, 17 January 1989, p. 5.

<sup>55</sup> Hacke G. 2000: 92-3.

## ALTERNATIVE SUB-CULTURES

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### THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ALTERNATIVE POLITICAL CULTURE

Of greater concern to the Stasi than the small religious communities and sects was the emergence towards the close of the 1970s of what can broadly be described as an alternative political culture which managed to find a relatively safe haven in the Protestant churches. Many emerged from existing circles and they recruited heavily from among the so-called GDR generation which had grown up in the shadow of the Berlin Wall. Members of this generation had been influenced by emancipatory tendencies in the West since the mid-1960s and by the democratic socialism of the Prague Spring. The autonomous groups constituted an 'alternative political culture' in that they articulated outside official channels a series of peace, ecological, women's, human rights, gay and Second/Third World issues. Because of the severe restrictions imposed by the SED and implemented, among other bodies, by the Stasi, autonomous activities in the public sphere were largely confined to the protected space afforded by the Protestant churches.

The autonomous groups tended to have a collective rather than a power-political orientation, to be reactive rather than proactive and to favour grass-roots democracy over parliamentary forms.<sup>1</sup> The thrust of their activities and programmes was for a reform of the existing system, not its overthrow. They wanted a democratic socialism which respected civil liberties but, with the exception of individuals such as the Naumburg theologian Edelbert Richter, little attempt was made to develop a theoretical framework. The Naumburg peace circle around Richter was one of the few groups to thematise the German question. Others who did so were the East Berlin pastor Rainer Eppelmann and Robert Havemann. In 1982, they issued the Berlin Appeal, in which they proposed the overcoming of the division of Germany as a prerequisite to the safeguarding of peace. However, the opposition groups

<sup>1</sup> Knabe H. 1990: 23.