

service content and of little more value than information gleaned from articles in a good weekly West German magazine like *Der Spiegel*.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, the HV A Regional Departments, as in Gera and Magdeburg, seriously questioned whether the heavy investment of resources in the recruitment and running of agents produced its equivalent in worthwhile information.<sup>62</sup>

It was the SED's ideology of the 'unity of reconnaissance and defence' which tied HV A to the Stasi's apparatus of domestic repression and to the belief that internal opposition was the work of foreign 'political-ideological subversion' of East German citizens. In the 1970s, HV A's role was primarily to supply the MfS's domestic units with relevant information concerning opposition to SED rule. However, with the rise of cross-border opposition movements in the aftermath of the events in Poland in the early 1980s and the inter-bloc peace and ecology movements, HV A's role became increasingly hands-on. Not only did HV A act against the 'external enemy' in the Operation Area, its regional branches also acted against the church-based opposition in East Germany. HV A's greater involvement in the work of the domestic apparatus is symbolised by its officers' participation in the efforts to suppress the demonstrators in East Berlin in October 1989 during the regime's 40th anniversary celebrations.<sup>63</sup> The fact that there has been a debate about the extent to which HV A played a part in the Stasi's domestic repression is a final testament to Wolf's, and his officers', adept use of their tradecraft. It represents no less than their final campaign of disinformation by one of the Cold War's most efficient intelligence services. In this respect we should not be overly surprised that Wolf has no wish to tell us the whole story of his role in sustaining the communist system; it was, after all, his job to prevaricate for a political purpose. However, as the researchers of the Gauck Authority uncovered the traces of HV A's actions, Wolf became the spy who had said too much, and one day's denial became the next day's reluctant admission.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Richter P. and Rösler K. 1992: 99–100.

<sup>62</sup> Müller-Enbergs H. 1998: 259, 281.

<sup>63</sup> Richter P. and Rösler K. 1992: 143–4.

<sup>64</sup> For example, compare Wolf's denial of any role in the imprisonment of Georg Angerer in an effort to extract information in the late 1950s to discredit Willy Brandt as a fellow-travelling Nazi with a subsequent admission to having played a central role; see *Der Spiegel*, no. 18, 1993 and no. 2, 1997.

## Part VII

# THE OCTOPUS LOSES ITS TENTACLES

## THE COLLAPSE OF COMMUNIST RULE

---

### DÉNOUEMENT

At the beginning of 1989, Honecker had some good tidings for his subjects: the Berlin Wall would remain in place for another 50 to 100 years unless, he conceded, a change occurred in the conditions which had led to its construction.<sup>1</sup> In other words, at least for the ageing SED leader, the Cold War was not over. But by the summer of 1989, with popular protests breaking out on the streets of East Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden and elsewhere and the mass exodus gathering momentum, not only was the Wall looking obsolescent but the other foundations of SED power were also starting to crumble. At a conference with his top regional leaders at the end of August, an anxious Mielke asked if popular unrest was likely to lead to another 17 June 1953. He was reassured by Colonel Dangrieff, the head of the Gera Regional Administration, that this would not happen. Most of the other officers concurred with Dangrieff's view that the situation was stable and under control; after all, that was what the Stasi was there for.<sup>2</sup>

This proved to be a disastrous prediction: the 77-year-old Honecker was removed from power on 18 October in a palace coup and replaced as head of party and state by Egon Krenz; the Berlin Wall fell on the night of 9–10 November without the Soviet Union moving a muscle to protect its westernmost outpost; demonstrators became ever bolder; new parties and citizens' groups articulated in the public arena their ideas on a civil society free from the grip of the SED and Stasi; and 343,854 East Germans had left their country by the end of the year. Succumbing to the multiple pressures, an increasingly bewildered SED ejected Honecker and Mielke from its ranks, reluctantly decided to abandon its leadership role in society, and in February 1990 finally and after much hesitation adopted a completely new title, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS). The latter decision had been partly

<sup>1</sup> See Mitter A. and Wollé S. 1990: 125.

<sup>2</sup> Süß W. 1999: 181.

motivated by the need to refurbish its image for the forthcoming elections to the GDR Parliament, the *Volkskammer*, in March 1990. Although the PDS obtained a creditable 16.32 per cent of the vote, it was overshadowed by the astonishing 47.79 per cent scored by the Alliance for Germany of CDU, Democratic Awakening and German Social Union. The Alliance had been sponsored by the West German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, as a vehicle for the rapid unification which he had been pursuing since early February. The conservatives' overwhelming victory was an endorsement of the fast track to unity: on 1 July, monetary, economic and social union was sealed by the introduction of the Deutschmark as the sole legal currency in the GDR, and on 3 October the GDR, now reconfigured as the five new states or *Länder*, was incorporated into the Federal Republic. Germany's political division and the Cold War had ended.

At some stage in this process, at least until early October 1989, the momentum might have been arrested by concerted force. Not only had SED leaders such as Krenz and Margot Honecker issued thinly veiled threats of a GDR version of the bloody suppression of the Chinese students' democratic movement in Tiananmen Square in June, but the SED had the military capability to do so. It had at its disposal the troops of the NVA, the workers' militia, the People's Police and, by no means least, the MfS. It had sanctioned gratuitous violence against protesters at the time of the GDR's macabre 40th anniversary either side of 7 October. And had not Mielke proclaimed to his officers only a few weeks before that it was better to die defending socialism than to live in servitude to the imperialists?<sup>3</sup> But when the crunch came on the night of 9 October in Leipzig, the emptiness of such boasts was plain for all to see. Before the customary Monday night demonstration, rumours were rife that armed troops and tanks were ready to move into the city and that hospital beds had been prepared for the wounded. However, the political struggle between Honecker and Krenz in East Berlin, the peaceful nature of the protests and the incalculable risks of civil war and international opprobrium rendered the powerful powerless.

The feebleness of the communist leaders and the sheer rapidity of unification was beyond the imagination of even the most fervent Cold War warrior when Honecker had spoken of the survival of the Berlin Wall. And yet, Honecker had not spoken with confidence. His speech had been crafted as a response to mounting pressures on East Berlin to adjust to Gorbachev's more conciliatory line on reform and accommodation with the West. These pressures had been felt keenly by Honecker at the Vienna meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in early January 1989 when the Soviet Union had forced the GDR to make concessions on human rights. Even more worrying was the statement by the Soviet Foreign Minister, Eduard Schevardnaze, that the conference had shaken the Iron Curtain and

<sup>3</sup> Süß W. 1999: 71.

that the Berlin Wall was an obstacle to the unification process in Europe.<sup>4</sup> Hence Honecker's speech.

The new thinking in the Soviet Union since Gorbachev's accession to power in 1985 was undoubtedly a major factor behind the collapse of the communist system in the GDR, as was the reform process in Poland and Hungary, all of them manifestations of the general crisis affecting the communist world. These factors are but one part of the equation, however. The disintegration of the SED – and with it the MfS – must also be seen as part of a wider series of developments: the Soviet retreat from its East European empire; the emigration movement; the gathering strength and determination of the East German opposition groups; the loss of faith in the state socialist project; the obduracy and the loss of confidence of the ruling elites; and the stalled modernisation and technological flaws of the command economy. The German factor, too, played a crucial part: the powerful attraction of the superior living standards of West Germany; the SED regime's ambivalence to nationhood in a divided Germany; and the adroit manoeuvres of Chancellor Kohl after the fall of the Berlin Wall. All these factors were interlinked, their significance varying at different stages of the East German revolution. Their nature and role will be examined in the next section, mainly on the basis of materials in the Stasi files, before looking at the disintegration of the Stasi in the late autumn of 1990.

## POPULAR DISSATISFACTION

Throughout the four decades of communist rule in East Germany, the MfS had tracked popular opinion for signs of rebellion on the lines of June 1953 as well as monitoring attitudes to SED domestic policies, the standard of living and the GDR's foreign relations, especially with West Germany. The MfS was not the only agency involved in this task. The SED and the other political parties also gathered data and a Central Committee Institute for Public Opinion Research, which existed between 1964 and 1979, provided the Politbüro and other leading organs with information about citizens' views.<sup>5</sup> One other significant body, the Central Institute for Youth Research in Leipzig, monitored the attitudes and opinions of young people. The Institute's longitudinal studies are particularly crucial for assessing the precipitous fall in support for the SED and the socialist cause during the 1980s. While the Institute's research is not without methodological flaws, the declassified findings indicate a rapid decline between 1985 and 1989 in young people's approval of aspects of the system after the broad consensus of the 1970s. The mass defection can be measured by the collapse in adherence to basic tenets of

<sup>4</sup> Süß W. 1999: 92–3.

<sup>5</sup> See Niemann H. 1993.

official socialist culture, such as a belief in the eventual victory of socialism over capitalism. Identification with the GDR also fell sharply. Between the mid- and late 1980s, the percentage of apprentices and young workers who felt a strong attachment to the GDR declined from 51 per cent and 57 per cent to 18 per cent and 19 per cent respectively, whereas the proportion of those who had virtually no affinity with their country rose by 28 points and 13 points respectively.<sup>6</sup>

### PETITIONING THE STASI

Among other declassified materials now available for tracing popular attitudes are the *Eingaben* or petitions which, according to GDR law, entitled East Germans to address their complaints and concerns, mainly in writing but also orally, to the appropriate body or individuals. Among the main addressees were Honecker and Mielke, the Council of State, the MfS and the mass media. East Germans made full use of their right, with almost every GDR household, at least in statistical terms, submitting a petition between 1949 and 1989.<sup>7</sup> The contents of *Eingaben* varied according to the addressee. Thus the Council of State was primarily involved in matters arising from legislative questions and the MfS dealt with security issues. The most frequent themes running through the petitions are complaints about the poor quality of housing, restrictions on travel or emigration to the West, and the inadequate supply of consumer goods.<sup>8</sup>

The petitions, according to the SED, demonstrated the trust of the population in their state and provided citizens with a flexible and effective instrument to resolve their problems. In the absence of administrative courts and a pluralistic political system, the petitions did at least offer East Germans an opportunity to exert pressure on the representatives of state and party, and many grievances were settled. However, the records of the MfS indicate that the official line on petitions contained much wishful thinking: the materials reaching the ministry were often redeployed for security purposes, whether for checking contacts with the West or for pursuing 'hostile-negative' forces. One illustration of MfS manipulation is the case of a check in 1983 by a local MfS unit in Kamenz on an *Eingabe* from parents whose son had failed to secure an apprenticeship as a sailor. An internal investigation confirmed the parents' suspicion that the Stasi lurked behind the rejection on account of the family's contacts in the West. The officers in Kamenz insisted that the decision should not be reversed and that the parents be advised to break off their Western links.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Dennis M. 2000: 270.

<sup>7</sup> Mühlberg F. 1999: 7.

<sup>8</sup> Merkel I. 1998: 14, 22, 25.

<sup>9</sup> MfS ZA, AS, no. 209/86, pp. 34, 46, 53.

Of the petitions reaching the Stasi some were addressed directly to the ministry, the remainder were passed on by other bodies on account of their security implications. In 1988, 698 *Eingaben* and letters were sent to the MfS, 315 more than in 1986, and over 31,000 arrived via Honecker's Central Committee office and the Council of State's Department for petitions. The latter figure represented a sharp increase over the approximately 7,000 in 1980.<sup>10</sup> The focus of the petitions was on everyday matters such as poor housing, problems at work, neighbourhood concerns and the reintegration of prisoners into society. They also dealt with the more sensitive political issues of visits to the West, the alternative political culture and complaints against officialdom, such as telephone tapping, passport control and interrogations by the MfS. Given that they record in a vivid and highly personal manner some of the innermost concerns of East Germans, the petitions have been likened to an 'ethnographic diary'.<sup>11</sup> Even though they tended to record disturbances in daily life rather than its normal flow, no objective reader could have continued to attach much credibility by the end of the 1980s to the notion that Honecker's much-vaunted 'unity of social and economic policy' was sustaining a social consensus between regime and population.

While some of the complaints in the petitions appear to have little direct political import, they nevertheless reflect the irritations with life under state socialism. The grievance of a Berliner about a broken telephone at the time when his partner went into labour and the police refusal to help draw attention to the inadequacies of the telephone network and the pettiness of state bureaucracy.<sup>12</sup> An anonymous letter to the MfS from Neustadt in Saxony in 1985 was disparaging about conditions at work: the belittling of critics as 'grumblers'; the misuse of business trips abroad for tourism; the prevalence of 'personal connections'; and the widespread corruption arising from payments in hard currency for services by craftsmen. The MfS and the central organs of state should, he demanded, deal with those who misuse their positions, not those who draw attention to the problems.<sup>13</sup> Bribery and corruption were the theme of another petition in 1985 which revealed a veritable mafia at an engineering trading company in the Pankow district of East Berlin. The firm had been purchasing secondhand cars and spare automobile parts from state-owned enterprises and state organs, including cars seized from their owners by MfS units, and selling them on at inflated prices to private buyers.<sup>14</sup> A convoluted story concerned a doctor at the University of Rostock's clinic for women and his appeal, in 1984, against the rejection of his application to spend some time working in a developing country. In consequence, he

<sup>10</sup> MfS ZA, Sekretariat des Ministers, no. 361, pp. 6, 13, 61.

<sup>11</sup> Mühlberg F. 1999: 8.

<sup>12</sup> MfS ZA, AS, no. 119/88, p. 10. The complaint was sent on 9 January 1985.

<sup>13</sup> MfS ZA, AS, no. 98/88, pp. 126-30.

<sup>14</sup> MfS ZA, HA XVIII, no. 7820, pp. 1-2, 7-9. The year was 1985.

claimed that he had been downgraded to the status of a second-class citizen. Security checks revealed that, on the instructions of the ministry, he had been removed from the university's list of cadres with the right to travel abroad on account of his Western contacts, his sexual affairs with women and bringing pornographic literature into the GDR from the Netherlands.<sup>15</sup> Finally, a resident of Leipzig, a married woman with four children, erupted at the police's refusal of her request to visit Marburg in West Germany: 'In this state we give every skiver, everybody who has done something wrong or been condemned the chance to prove themselves and yet many people don't learn their lesson – but for me I've never put a foot wrong in all my life – for me all doors are closed'.<sup>16</sup>

The elements of defiance and protest which resonate among many of the *Eingaben* are not easily reconciled with the popular image of the GDR as a harsh dictatorship presiding over a cowed and conformist society. While some writers were adroit at expressing their grievances and many others focused on non-political issues, some of the petitions reaching the MfS were nevertheless blunt and openly critical of malpractices and unsatisfactory conditions. In 1984, a department head in the research and development unit of a car-body works accused the Stasi of having blocked his promotion, or so he believed, despite his dedication to the welfare of society and the goals of party and state.<sup>17</sup> A regular petitioner from Birkenfelde, who had been imprisoned in 1964 for six months on a charge of embezzlement, argued that while he did not mind being a stoker or a watchman, he did object to unqualified 'yes-men' having positions of responsibility. 'The stupid govern better' was his ironic conclusion.<sup>18</sup> Finally, although the list could be extended, a hospital worker, who was also engaged in social work for the Protestant churches, drew attention to the paradox of being observed by the Stasi but, because of his positive attitude towards the GDR, had to face accusations from his colleagues of being an IM. 'Here', he concluded, 'the dog is somehow biting its own tail' and 'It is a vicious circle that I'm being drawn into'.<sup>19</sup> Little did he know that he was not under observation by the MfS.

Nor was the Stasi a petition-free zone. Stasi personnel, especially younger members, frequently complained about the poor quality of their apartments, an indicator that even an elite body like the Stasi was also caught up in the everyday problems of society. In 1988, among the *Eingaben* sent by MfS employees 20 concerned accommodation problems and 26 objections to decisions by superior officers, including disciplinary measures.<sup>20</sup> Another

<sup>15</sup> MfS ZA, AS, no. 282/87, pp. 204, 246–50.

<sup>16</sup> MfS ZA, AS, no. 113/88, p. 68. Our translation.

<sup>17</sup> MfS ZA, AS, no. 107/88, p. 140.

<sup>18</sup> MfS ZA, AS, no. 111/88, p. 139.

<sup>19</sup> MfS ZA, AS, no. 115/88, p. 144.

<sup>20</sup> MfS ZA, Sekretariat des Ministers, no. 361, p. 8.

trigger for an *Eingabe* was official rejection of a request to undertake a visit to West Berlin or the Federal Republic because the petitioner was related to a member of the MfS or had once been an employee of the ministry.<sup>21</sup> It was not unusual for staff to enlist their parents' help. The parents of a full-time informer (HIM) complained on her behalf that: 'We can't understand why young comrades who sacrifice their youth and all their energy for the security of the state have to live in degrading conditions. Not without reason has our party declared the housing programme is at the heart of social policy'.<sup>22</sup> The woman lived with her husband and two children in a tiny apartment; her husband was also a full-time informer.

### ZAIG: ASSESSING THE POPULAR MOOD

While the individual petitions offer fascinating insights into personal attitudes and actions, the key Stasi agency for evaluating and delineating the contours of popular opinion was the Central Assessment and Information Group (*Zentrale Auswertungs- und Informationsgruppe* – ZAIG) and its offshoots, the Assessment and Information Groups (AKGs) in the Regional Administrations and the District Service Units. ZAIG digested and collated information from its myriad sources and despatched reports and indicators on the mood of the population and specific events to the leadership of the Stasi as well as to the party and state elites, notably Honecker, Krenz, Stoph and Mittag. The actual distribution list varied according to the nature of the topic addressed in the report. Other SED organs at regional and district level were also in receipt of pertinent information.<sup>23</sup> Although the ZAIG reports cannot be regarded as GDR-representative and were coloured by the ministry's Marxist-Leninist ideology and SED policy preoccupations, they provide invaluable and sometimes highly critical insights into popular thinking. The format of most reports was initially to paint a positive picture of the popular mind before turning to the problem areas.

Despite the generally positive gloss, the grievances of the populace at large as well as of specific social groups pervade the ZAIG reports. Along with the petitions, these reports capture a society which, the steamroller impact of state socialism notwithstanding, was characterised by perceptible cleavages of social status, age, gender, political position and access to Western goods. Take just two examples: older workers and pensioners carped at the unwillingness of many younger people to take on positions of responsibility despite their higher standard of living. The state's social policy, they complained, had

<sup>21</sup> MfS ZA, Sekretariat des Ministers, no. 361, p. 33.

<sup>22</sup> MfS ZA, AS, no. 113/88, p. 92. The latter was sent to the MfS on 25 April 1985. Our translation.

<sup>23</sup> Giesecke J. 1998: 40.

made life too comfortable for young people.<sup>24</sup> Secondly, a host of complaints concerned the divisive effect of unequal access to Deutschmarks and the Intershops. It was a standard argument among those who did not have Western currency that they worked more conscientiously and had a more positive attitude to the socialist system than those who acquired Deutschmarks through family connections or by providing services which were not easily found in the public sector, such as plumbing and car maintenance.<sup>25</sup> Resentment was also expressed about the many privileges enjoyed by leading SED functionaries,<sup>26</sup> even though their true extent did not become public knowledge until Honecker was overthrown.

While it awaited the galvanising impact of Gorbachev's reforms and the erosion of communist power elsewhere in the Soviet empire to translate grievances among East Germans into calls for radical change, the ZAIG materials provide indicators of some of the preconditions which led to the fall of communism. As already mentioned, the main complaints concerned the inadequacy of supplies to the population and poor housing. These were sensitive matters as the leitmotif of the Honecker regime was the provision of higher living standards, especially better housing, on the basis of greater economic efficiency. Yet despite the construction of new high-rise flats and fundamental improvements in heating systems and toilets and despite the high level of subsidies for rents, transport and many consumer items, East Germans continued to give vent to their anger. Their frustration was exacerbated by their awareness of the superior provision in the West. Just how out of touch Mielke was with popular feeling can be seen from the minister's condemnation in August 1989 of the ingratitude of the emigrants for scorning the benefits of socialism.<sup>27</sup>

The mood of the population can be traced in ZAIG's weekly surveys (*Wochenübersichten*) and information bulletins (*Hinweise*). The latter were overviews of the current situation and tended to home in on one broad theme, often reproducing the criticisms of a number of social, political, economic and cultural groups. The weekly surveys were usually divided into separate sections, which focused on specific events, such as accidents at work or illegal attempts to leave the GDR. The issue of endemic shortages is a thread running through these reports, especially at times of acute economic difficulties as in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the GDR had to tighten its belt because of the sharp rise in oil prices and the ballooning hard currency indebtedness. Complaints about shortages and waste were, of course, not new but feelings were exacerbated by the gloomy international economic climate and contributed to the gradual undermining of the fragile social

<sup>24</sup> MfS ZA, ZAIG, no. 4175, 'Hinweise', 29 May 1984, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> MfS ZA, ZAIG, no. 4119, 'Hinweise', 17 February 1977, pp. 3-4.

<sup>26</sup> MfS ZA, ZAIG, no. 4158, 'Weitere Hinweise', 17 April 1981, p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> Süß W. 1999: 182.

consensus of the 1970s.<sup>28</sup> One report, compiled in January 1979, encapsulates popular reactions to the disruption caused by bad weather to transport and consumer and energy supplies: 'After the initial appreciation of certain restrictions in all regions, especially in the central and southern ones, there is now widespread incomprehension that a few days of hard frost and snowfall can have such effects on all aspects of life'.<sup>29</sup> The reports in the mass media of the successful development of modern technology were contradicted by reality: 'Technology is useless when 20 cm of snow, as in the central and southern regions, produce a catastrophe in the economy'.<sup>30</sup> Towards the close of 1979, the state's manipulation of prices, whereby certain commodities were transferred into higher price categories, resulted in long queues for goods in short supply and widespread dissatisfaction with the negative impact on living standards.<sup>31</sup> Given that criticism was fiercer and more outspoken than hitherto, ZAIG assessors testified to an 'overall dwindling trust on the part of its people in the party and in the economic policy of the GDR (especially trade and price policy)'.<sup>32</sup>

The consumer supply problems assumed an even greater urgency in the early 1980s when the emergence of the independent trade union, the so-called 'counterrevolutionary' Solidarity, in neighbouring Poland set the alarm bells ringing in East Berlin. The GDR's rulers were worried not only by the threat posed by such a movement to the Communist monopoly on power but also because the dislocation of supplies and price rises in the GDR might provoke similar unrest and destabilise the SED system. MfS reports from the autumn of 1980, when Solidarity was beginning to organise strikes and undermine the administrations of Gierek and Kania, lent some substance to SED and MfS worries. Long-time SED members and experienced labour activists warned that great care was needed in order to prevent similar developments being triggered off in the GDR if union functionaries continued to be insensitive to workers' grievances and if the disruptive activities of 'hostile-negative forces' were not contained.<sup>33</sup> However, popular opinion, at least according to ZAIG reports, did not anticipate that the GDR would share the fate of Poland, partly because the MfS and the other security forces were likely to take preventive action and partly because, for all its problems, the GDR was regarded as having the superior social and economic system. Although the SED provided some material assistance to the beleaguered

<sup>28</sup> A Stasi assessment of the social consensus in this vein can be found in MfS ZA, ZAIG, no. 4082, May 1972, pp. 1-3.

<sup>29</sup> MfS ZA, ZAIG, no. 4165, 'Hinweise', 8 January 1979, p. 4. Our translation.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Our translation.

<sup>31</sup> MfS ZA, ZAIG, no. 4480, 'Wochenübersicht', Berlin, 5 November 1979, pp. 58-9.

<sup>32</sup> MfS ZA, ZAIG, no. 4480, 'Wochenübersicht', Berlin, 19 November 1979, p. 149. Our translation.

<sup>33</sup> See the various reports in August and September 1980 in MfS ZA, ZAIG, no. 4151, pp. 19, 31, 33, 40, 52.

Polish government, its campaign against Solidarity, which was also designed to stoke up traditional anti-Polish feeling, was not without resonance among the East German population. In late August 1980, the MfS noted considerable popular antipathy to aiding Poland for fear that it might cause consumer supply shortages in the GDR. The Poles, it was believed, had brought the desperate situation upon themselves through their own 'apathy' and 'laziness'.<sup>34</sup>

Although the end of the communist power monopoly in Poland lay several years in the future, endemic problems could not be erased by the declaration of martial law. Nor could those of the GDR be solved by Western credit injections. Schalck-Golodkowski utilised his Bavarian contacts to negotiate two massive credits from West German *Land* and private banks of 1 billion DM and 950 million DM in 1983 and 1984 respectively, thereby boosting the creditworthiness of the GDR in the eyes of foreign banks. East German reactions were mixed. According to ZAIG, 'progressive forces', meaning SED supporters, welcomed the credit agreements as they strengthened the GDR economy and demonstrated that the country was a 'trustworthy partner'. Yet even this group had reservations: the credits increased the GDR's dependence on the FRG and plunged the country deeper into debt.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, as it was generally believed that the credits were linked to concessions by the SED on emigration to the West, they feared for the internal stability of the GDR. When Honecker's visit to West Germany finally went ahead, in September 1987, it undoubtedly boosted his international reputation and appeared to seal the GDR's position as a separate and sovereign state. ZAIG, however, drew attention to the other side of the coin: young people interpreted the visit as a sign that the Berlin Wall and the traditional negative image of West German imperialism were both redundant.<sup>36</sup>

### MASS EMIGRATION

The widespread dissatisfaction with the regime fuelled a mass exodus which almost brought the GDR to its knees in 1953 and 1961, and would finally do so in 1989. Although the building of the Berlin Wall had bought the SED some breathing space in 1961 and helped the party to rebuild the shattered economy and establish an uneasy social contract with the population in the later 1960s and early 1970s, the emigration pressures did not vanish. Indeed, with the advent of détente and the signing of the Helsinki Accords ratified by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1975 (see Chapter 2), the emigration movement gathered momentum. The Accords committed the Soviet Union, the GDR and the other East European allies to promote

<sup>34</sup> See the reports on the reaction of the East German population to events in Poland in MfS ZA, ZAIG, no. 4151, pp. 14, 48.

<sup>35</sup> MfS ZA, ZAIG, no. 4158, 31 July 1984, pp. 54-6.

<sup>36</sup> Dennis M. 2000: 181.

**Table 14.1** Reasons and motives for leaving the GDR; comparison between the 1984 and 1989 émigrés

	Percentage of the émigrés	
	1984	1989
Lack of freedom to express one's own opinion	71	74
Limited opportunities for travel	56	74
To be able to shape one's own life	(not included)	72
A lack of or unfavourable future prospects	45	69
Political pressures/regimentation and tight control by the state	66	65
Poor supply situation	46	56
Uniting of the family	36	28
Unfavourable career opportunities	21	26

The 1984 survey took place between the end of March and early April 1984: 500 emigrants at the Gießen emergency camp responded to a questionnaire. As in 1989, all persons were aged 18 years or over. The 1989 data were collected between 29 August and 11 September 1989 from written responses by a sample of 537 emigrants.

Source: Hilmer R. and Köhler A. 1989: 1385.

the cause of human rights in return for Western recognition of the 'inviolability' of Europe's post-war boundaries. This provided individuals and groups within the GDR with a lever to extract permission from the authorities to leave the GDR. Collective applications were made on various occasions during the 1980s and some applicants resorted to staging silent marches of protests in town centres.

The SED was soon confronted by a mass movement which it was increasingly unable to control. Official records show a six-fold increase in the number of applicants under pensionable age between 1980 and the second half of 1989.<sup>37</sup> In numerical terms, 21,500 applied to leave in 1980, 53,000 in 1985 and 113,500 in 1988. In a vain attempt to defuse the situation, the regime allowed over 21,000 of its citizens to leave in the first three months of 1984. By the end of the year, about 35,000 had been given official permission to leave and a further 6,000 had fled the country. *In toto*, between the building of the Berlin Wall and the end of 1988, 616,000 left for the West, of whom as many as 235,000 (38 per cent) managed to leave without the permission of the authorities. Although West German researchers found that political considerations such as 'lack of freedom to express one's own opinion' narrowly outweighed material factors in propelling the 1984 and 1989 emigration waves (see Table 14.1), the great exodus undoubtedly reflected the failure of the GDR to tackle its systemic defects and to reverse the pull exerted by West German living standards and political pluralism.

<sup>37</sup> On the statistics of the emigration movement, see Eisenfeld B. 1995a: 192-3, 203, 21 and Eisenfeld B. 1995b: 50.

The MfS sought to stem the tide by means of the Central Coordinating Group (*Zentrale Koordinierungsgruppe* – ZKG) and its regional branches.<sup>38</sup> When it was first set up, in 1976, the emphasis was on combating ‘illegal’ flight from the GDR and the so-called criminal traffickers in human beings. The focus shifted, especially after 1983, towards reducing the numbers applying to leave the country. The latter were supposedly inspired by external forces opposed to socialism and détente, notably Amnesty International and the International Society for Human Rights in Frankfurt am Main. In carrying out its tasks, ZKG cooperated closely with, among others, ZAIG, HV A, Main Department VI (passport control and tourism), and Main Department VII (counterintelligence in the Ministry of the Interior and the People’s Police). As the exodus pressures mounted, so did the size of ZKG. Between 1976 and the end of 1986, it grew from the original three to six departments. Department 1 dealt with stemming the emigration pressures within the GDR, whereas Department 4 concentrated on West Germany, including the refugee centre at Marienfelde in West Berlin. ZKG’s highly qualified staff rose from 20 in 1976 to 185 in October 1989 and in the Regional Coordinating Groups from 84 to 261 over the same period. As part of its general strategy, the SED allowed periodic increases in legal emigration and from 1986 onwards extended the categories of citizens who were allowed to go to the FRG on urgent family business, with the latter being interpreted in a much more generous manner than before. The boomerang effect of the new policy did not escape ZAIG: ‘According to current information, the supply level in the GDR and in the FRG is being compared more and more frequently especially by people returning from journeys on urgent family business and the supply situation in the FRG is being praised. In some cases these comparisons lead to doubts about the productive capacity of the GDR’s economy as a whole and the ostensible superiority of the capitalist production system is being underlined’.<sup>39</sup> The point about the reinforcement of perceptions was apposite as most East Germans were able to tune into West German TV programmes to form favourable impressions of life in the West. Despite the rapid expansion of ZKG and the heavy price paid by many of those applying to leave the GDR – interrogation, charges of treasonable activity, imprisonment, job discrimination, the withdrawal of driving licences – the MfS failed to halt the emigration movement and, in the summer of 1989, exit via Hungary and Czechoslovakia coalesced with the voice of the street to topple the SED monolith. The trickle of East Germans fleeing to the West after the barbed wire separating Hungary and Austria was cut on 2 May 1989 turned into a torrent when, on 10 September, the liberalising Hungarian government, to the fury of the SED, suspended its bilateral agreement with the GDR and opened the Iron Curtain in the East.

<sup>38</sup> Eisenfeld B. 1995a: 3–13, 21–6, 34–5, 49.

<sup>39</sup> MfS ZA, ZAIG, no. 3605, ‘Weitere Hinweise’, 8 September 1987, p. 73. Our translation.

## GORBACHEV, REFORM AND OPPOSITION

Mikhail Gorbachev’s accession to the post of General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in March 1985 acted as a catalyst for reform and change in the GDR. Honecker and the SED leaders were not unduly worried by Gorbachev’s initial ideas on the modernisation of the Soviet Union, both economically and politically, by means of economic reconstruction (*perestroika*) and openness (*glasnost*). However, they became alarmed by, and then bitterly opposed to, his plans when it became apparent in the autumn of 1986, and particularly after the CPSU’s Central Committee plena in January and June 1987, that Gorbachev was engaged in a massive overhaul of the Soviet Union’s obsolescent structures. This was a momentous development for although the Prague Spring had shown how the administrative-command system might be reformed, the Soviet Union had then been the enemy of reform rather than, as in the later 1980s, a motor of radical change. The SED leadership sought to restrict the circulation of reformist ideas from the Soviet Union by ordering the censor to cut key passages from Gorbachev’s speeches and to ban, in October 1988, the German issue of *Sputnik*, the Soviet monthly digest, which contained sharp criticism of the Hitler–Stalin non-aggression pact of 1939 and of the KPD’s failure to cooperate with the SPD against Hitler. The banning of *Sputnik* precipitated widespread and bitter protests among the GDR population. ZAIG reported that East Germans, both SED and non-party members, felt that they had been ‘rendered politically immature’.<sup>40</sup>

The most disturbing development in the eyes of Honecker and his associates was Gorbachev’s reformulation of the Soviet Union’s relations with its Warsaw Pact allies and the West, which entailed the erosion and then the *de facto* abandonment of the Brezhnev Doctrine in the summer of 1989. The latter became apparent when Gorbachev asserted before the Council of Europe in July 1989 the ‘right of all countries to unimpeded independence and equal rights’. Although the Soviet leader had informed both Honecker and Kohl one month earlier that the Soviet Union would not abandon the GDR, it was apparent that thinking in Moscow on the German question was in a state of flux as the Soviet reformers strove for closer economic and political ties with West Germany and the USA. Whereas Gorbachev’s preferred option seems to have been a form of *perestroika* for the GDR, some Soviet reformers were thinking the unthinkable. Vyacheslav Daschichev, a member of the Institute of the Economy of World Socialism, contrasted the inferior economic performance of the GDR’s administrative-command system with that attained by the FRG’s market economy and liberal political system, and he advocated the gradual drawing together and eventual reunification of the two German states.

<sup>40</sup> Süß W. 1999: 101.



As early as August 1985, ZAIG was reporting to Mielke, Mittag and Neiber that the new Soviet leader was, in the opinion of politically engaged GDR workers and management cadres, undertaking the kind of critical assessment of the Soviet Union's economy which was necessary in the GDR.<sup>41</sup> With Gorbachev becoming ever more radical and the SED gerontocracy more dogmatic and more obstructive, the Soviet leader's confrontation with the deficiencies of the administrative command system found 'widespread support' in the GDR. The SED leaders' counterargument that the GDR had to tread cautiously as it stood on the dividing line between NATO and the Warsaw Pact was rejected and greater openness was advocated in order to restore workers' loss of trust in the SED.<sup>42</sup> The unpopularity and counter-productive nature of Honecker's opposition to Gorbachev's course, no matter how the SED leader sought to cloak it in superficial approval of change in the Soviet Union, can be seen in popular reactions to the SED Party Congress in 1986. Whereas 'the remarks of comrade Gorbachev enjoyed great resonance among broad sections of the population' as regards the reform programme agreed by the XXVIIth Soviet Communist Party Congress,<sup>43</sup> many East German management cadres and members of the scientific-technical intelligentsia castigated the SED Party Congress for its failure to address the GDR's serious economic problems – the administrative methods of economic management, breaches of work discipline, manipulation of economic plans and so forth.<sup>44</sup> Gorbachev's new thinking was contrasted with that of the SED, whose approach produced 'apathy and indifference' and 'high-handedness and arrogance'.<sup>45</sup>

Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, as well as the flowering of even more radical reform in Poland and Hungary, was an enormous boost to the small autonomous political groups in the GDR. Reform in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe legitimised calls for political change and the promotion of human rights in the GDR and it encouraged civil rights groups to emerge from their niches. However, despite these developments, not only did the opposition remain divided between the would-be emigrants and the 'voice' dissidents but the autonomous groups and critical church circles were numerically weak. Furthermore, the ministry continued to target the groups as it regarded them as one of the main channels for political underground activities and political-ideological diversion. The imperialist powers, notably the USA, the FRG and Great Britain were, it was believed, using the groups to subvert and ultimately destroy socialism by the propagation of notions of democratisation, liberalisation and political

<sup>41</sup> MfS ZA, ZAIG, no. 4518, 'Hinweise', 8 August 1985, pp. 59–60.

<sup>42</sup> MfS ZA, ZAIG, no. 4518, 'Hinweise', August 1988, pp. 102–3.

<sup>43</sup> MfS ZA, ZAIG, no. 4518, 'Weitere Hinweise', 20 April 1986, p. 50.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50–51.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

pluralism.<sup>46</sup> While ZAIG appreciated that no consensus existed among the groups on an alternative model of society, its assessors were antipathetic to what they saw as the groups' 'attacks' against the foundations of socialism through the 'demagogic' use of concepts such as *glasnost* and their demands for a fundamental reform of socialism.<sup>47</sup> In condemning the groups' notions of a renewal of socialism, the MfS and the SED leaders were acting in accordance with their Marxist-Leninist viewpoint but, ironically, were undermining those very forces which, in late 1989 and early 1990, were seeking to reinvent the GDR as an independent and reformed state. For it was from among those autonomous groups and church circles that the citizens' movements and the new political parties emerged in September as part of the first foundation wave – notably New Forum, Democracy Now, Democratic Awakening and the Social Democratic Party – which sought to devise a Third Way between SED-style state socialism and the capitalist system of West Germany.

### THE STASI IN TURMOIL

Important studies by Walter Süß and Jens Gieseke of the Gauck Authority's research unit have demonstrated that the MfS remained largely intact both organisationally and ideologically until early October 1989, and that members were determined to preserve their elite status and privileges. Wanja Abramowski, a captain in HV A until his departure in April 1988, recalls that in the 1980s the MfS staff were 'loyal to most of the top SED leaders and to the entire hierarchy. They identified with Marxism-Leninism as well as with socialist reality and accepted unconditionally the existing mechanisms of power'.<sup>48</sup> Despite murmurings, especially among younger staff, about the SED's negative attitude to Gorbachev's reforms and despite the existence of a limited reform potential in the ministry, Mielke, an unreconstructed hard-liner set the tone. The minister was opposed to *perestroika* and Gorbachev's opening to the West, fearing that such a course could only benefit the imperialist enemy.<sup>49</sup> In an important speech in December 1988, Mielke warned that in the difficult year ahead the GDR would be under pressure from three sides. Two of these sources were traditional – the imperialist enemy and internal oppositional forces – but the third, reform in the Soviet Union and several other socialist states, denoted the sea change in GDR–Soviet relations. Mielke's deputy, Mittag, underlined this point in the same month: 'By the misuse of the words *glasnost* and *perestroika* people hope in general for greater ideological effectiveness of demagogic demands for freedom and human rights . . .'.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Mitter A. and Wolle S. 1990: 46, 50.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 51–2.

<sup>48</sup> Abramowski W. 1992: 213.

<sup>49</sup> Süß W. 1999: 98–9, 105–8.

<sup>50</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, 106. Our translation.

By the middle of the year, Mielke was becoming extremely nervous about the growing pace of democratisation in Hungary and Poland. Solidarity had scored an overwhelming victory in the elections to the *Sejm* at the beginning of June when it won 99 out of the 100 seats contested, a vivid demonstration that power was slipping away from the Communists. In Hungary, under pressure from the liberal wing of the Communist Party under Pozsgay and the centrists under Grosz, Kadar had stepped down as General Secretary in May 1988. At the beginning of the following year, a Law on Associations legitimised numerous new political groupings, some of whom, like the Free Democrats, were pushing for a Western parliamentary democracy and a free market economy. Mielke conceded that 'the many attempts by anti-socialist forces in Poland and Hungary as the legal opposition to undermine and destabilise the power of the working class have also encouraged hostile opposition forces and groupings to come forward more and more openly and provocatively with the same objective in our country too'.<sup>51</sup> However, he insisted that no concessions be made as regards the crucial question of power and the leading role of the SED.<sup>52</sup> And he concluded on a totally unfounded and anachronistic note that under the banner of the October Revolution 'all the conditions were created to continue the victorious struggle in today's class conflict . . .'.<sup>53</sup>

Yet neither the SED nor the Stasi could afford to ignore the growing crisis in East Germany, which manifested itself in the concession, albeit secretly, for the withdrawal in April 1989 of the order to the GDR border guards to shoot persons attempting illegally to cross the border.<sup>54</sup> In the following month, the Hungarians started to relax controls on their border with Austria, before, in September, dismantling the Iron Curtain. The latter action gave a powerful boost to flight from the GDR and led to a merging between 'exit' and 'voice' as it encouraged civil rights groups to emerge from the confines of the alternative political culture. The most significant of the new groups – New Forum – issued a manifesto on 9 September calling for a widespread discussion in society on reform. Ten days later, it applied, in vain, for official recognition as an association. The ministry was caught up in the contradictions of SED policy and the problems of society were piercing its protective shield. It was becoming increasingly difficult to sustain the traditional image of the class enemy in the West at a time when Honecker, Mittag and Schalck-Golodkowski were courting politicians such as the arch-conservative Minister President of Bavaria, Franz-Josef Strauß, as well as West Germany businessmen, in order to keep the GDR economy afloat. The visit of Honecker to the FRG in September 1987 and the joint SED/SPD document 'The

<sup>51</sup> From Mielke's speech on 29 June 1989 in Otto W. 2000: 680. Our translation.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 670.

<sup>53</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, 685. Our translation.

<sup>54</sup> Süß W. 1999: 148–54.

Conflict of Ideologies and Common Security', an ideological *hors d'oeuvre* to the visit, also unnerved the Stasi. The SED/SPD document agreed on the need for open debate on the competition between the two world systems, accepted that each system was capable of reform, and advocated that the presentation of each side be done in a realistic manner rather than through the propagation of enemy images.<sup>55</sup> As one Stasi officer stated in his 1989 dissertation: 'Can you hate the opponent with whom you are cooperating? Doesn't maintaining peace also serve the purpose of maintaining the imperialist system? . . . Will there ever be an imperialism that can exist without lying about and slandering socialism? Is not our struggle for peaceful coexistence and cooperation hopeless?'<sup>56</sup>

Nor could the MfS fall back on the mantra that 'to learn from the Soviet Union is to learn to be victorious' for Gorbachev's radical critique of the Soviet system, which confirmed many of the criticisms hitherto dismissed as Western propaganda, was destroying the ideological and political pillars of the MfS as well as of the entire *ancien régime*. Wolfgang Schwanitz confirms this when recalling, in 1990, that from about the middle of the 1980s, a 'starkly increasing contradiction' developed between everyday life and Central Committee reports, a contradiction which was sharpened by *perestroika* in the Soviet Union.<sup>57</sup> In consequence, Mielke was tilting at windmills when he called for greater political-ideological work in the MfS and the reinvigoration of traditional communist attitudes.<sup>58</sup>

Furthermore, as the MfS was directly involved in stemming the demographic exodus, the intractable problems of GDR society and politics found their way into the very heart of the ministry and helped undermine its sense of exclusivity. Former MfS members, mainly conscripts in the Guard Regiment, and their relatives joined the exodus and as the ministry was entrusted with the task of dissuading would-be émigrés from abandoning the GDR, it could no longer ignore the growing discrepancy between everyday reality and the 'virtual socialism' of the state media. This was but one of the factors which would undermine the ministry's unity and erode traditional ideological tenets. In September, the record of a meeting of MfS members of the SED basic organisation in Main Department III noted that a considerable number 'are convinced that not only political-ideological diversion has had its effect but that social problems and contradictions in our development have also played a part and should not be underestimated'.<sup>59</sup>

On the eve of communism's collapse, the Stasi's options for dealing with opposition groups, dissenters and would-be émigrés were narrowing.

<sup>55</sup> The full English text is printed in *Foreign Affairs* 27 (26), 10 September 1987, pp. 205–7.

<sup>56</sup> Cited in Giesecke J. 2000: 464–5. Our translation.

<sup>57</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, 457.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 436.

<sup>59</sup> Cited in Süß W. 1999: 191. Our translation.

Decomposition remained the favoured course, and the ministry continued to deploy top IMs such as Schnur and Böhme among the alternative political groups. But in good Chekist fashion, the MfS sometimes resorted to open repression. Soon after Honecker had returned from his visit to West Germany, the security forces raided the Zionskirche in East Berlin, where the illegal periodical *Grenzfall* and the ecological church newsletter *Umweltblätter* were printed, and arrested members of the Initiative for Peace and Human Rights. Although these and other activists were soon released after public demonstrations at the church, a second and more ruthless phase was inaugurated with the arrest of some 200 activists both before and after protests at the official rally in January 1988 commemorating the death of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. Among those arrested were the songwriter and singer Stefan Krawczyk, his wife Freya Klier and Vera Wollenberger. This unleashed waves of protest and support; unexpectedly, all were released from jail. Several were deported to the West, among them Krawczyk, Freya Klier, Wolfgang Templin and Bärbel Bohley. The crackdown may have pleased the conservative elements in the SED, but it did nothing to resolve the underlying contradictions facing party and state.

A similar dilemma resurfaced in the summer and autumn of 1989 when the SED and the security forces began to run out of ideas on how to preserve communism. As Honecker and Mielke were unable, either psychologically or politically, to implement even a limited reform which might have brought them some relief, rumours spread that force might be used in a GDR version of Beijing's Tiananmen Square massacre. Honecker's wife, Margot, the Minister of People's Education, had stated in public that socialism might have to be defended 'with weapon in hand'.<sup>60</sup> However, as the Soviet Union made it clear to Honecker that the 400,000 Soviet troops in the GDR would remain in barracks and as the SED leadership was reluctant to run the risk of civil war and international ostracism, regime violence tended to be sporadic and hesitant. Mielke's deputy, Mittag, acknowledged that the use of penal legislation, a favoured option with which the MfS had sought to combat the opposition groups in the summer of 1989, had not succeeded. And rather than create martyrs, he stressed the need to continue the well-tryed decomposition measures against the leading opposition figures and the groups.<sup>61</sup>

The uncovering in March 1990 of Wolfgang Schnur (IMB 'Dr Ralf Schirmer') of Democratic Awakening and Ibrahim Böhme (IMB 'Maximilian') of the Eastern Social Democratic Party as informers and later revelations of the involvement with the Stasi of prominent individuals such as Manfred Stolpe (IM 'Sekretär'), Lothar de Maizière (allegedly IM 'Czerni'), the chairman of the National Democratic Party Günter Hartmann (IMS 'Harry') and the General Secretary of the Eastern CDU Martin Kirchner (IME 'Hesselbarth')

<sup>60</sup> Süß W. 1999: 128.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 222-3.

have given rise to a conspiracy theory of the revolution. According to this version, the activities of the citizens' movements in the early stage of the revolution were largely steered by the Stasi and its numerous agents as part of a broader scheme to remove Honecker, whose intransigence was regarded as endangering the SED power monopoly. The informers, so it would seem, were not only subverting the new groups but Honecker too! There is also irrefutable evidence that after the failure of the security forces in the summer to quell the protests and movements by the selective use of arrests and imprisonment, the Stasi deployed its informers as *agents pacifiteurs* rather than as *agents provocateurs*. A report issued by the head of the Dresden Regional Administration at the end of November reveals that between 80 and 100 IMs had been planted in the citizens' movements.<sup>62</sup> Although the Stasi was undoubtedly successful in infiltrating the citizens' movements, the conspiracy theory is unsatisfactory. It exaggerates the ministry's ability to influence the powerful forces generated by the mass exodus, the citizens' movements and the demonstrators. Rather than steering developments, the Stasi tended to be reactive and its leaders' plans were often confused and uncertain. In these circumstances, informers like Schnur and Böhme were caught between the cross-currents of reaction and reform: while personally not unsympathetic to elements of reform, their main function was to apply the brakes on the process of change.

The SED and MfS leaders were anxious that the GDR's 40th anniversary should pass smoothly in East Berlin before the eyes of the assembled guests, the most notable being Gorbachev, especially on the main day of celebration, 7 October. However, the police and MfS forces were unable to suppress the cries of protest and spontaneous demonstrations against the SED despite the mass arrests and the use of gratuitous violence. Other demonstrations and arrests took place in Leipzig, Dresden, Karl-Marx-Stadt, Potsdam, Halle and elsewhere. It is estimated that about 3,500 persons were arrested between 4 and 9 October.<sup>63</sup> The key moment was the night of 9 October in the Saxon city of Leipzig when some 70,000 protestors gathered for what had become the customary Monday night demonstration after the early evening service in the Nikolai church. Two days prior to the demonstration, the Defence Minister, Heinz Keßler, had issued an order for the NVA to be made fully combat ready. Mielke, too, had hatched plans for crushing the demonstration, including the use of special Stasi forces and the workers' militia. On the day before the demonstration, Mielke reminded heads of service units that those 'who regularly carry arms are to have their weapons on them at all times according to the given requirements'.<sup>64</sup> By the evening, security forces with live ammunition were waiting in readiness in the narrow side streets;

<sup>62</sup> Süß W. 1999: 566, 576-9, 585-6, 701-3.

<sup>63</sup> Gieseke J. 2000: 479.

<sup>64</sup> See the telegram containing this instruction in Otto W. 2000: 687.

hospitals had been warned to prepare beds for the wounded. A letter had already been planted in the 6 October edition of the local Leipzig daily SED organ, the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, from the commander of a workers' militia group condemning the misuse of the church service by enemies of the state and asserting that members of the militia were prepared to put a stop to counterrevolutionary actions. He concluded ominously: 'If needs be with weapons in their hands'.<sup>65</sup> While there was no doubt that the demonstration could have been put down by force and that Mielke was not averse to such a solution, the SED and the security forces were not in fact intent on this kind of course. They hoped that threats and rumours of force would intimidate the protestors. It was a high-risk strategy and it could have misfired if clashes had occurred inadvertently. That a bloody outcome was avoided was due to a number of reasons: the political infighting among the SED elites in East Berlin aimed at bringing about the removal of the old guard; the self-discipline of the crowd and the appeal for non-violence made in the churches and by six local luminaries; the confinement of Soviet troops to their barracks; and the risks attendant on the outbreak of civil war. Furthermore, the view was widespread among the Stasi and security forces that to use force against workers would demonstrate the hollowness of the SED claim to be the party of the working class.<sup>66</sup>

### THE END OF THE STASI

With force no longer a realistic option, the hardliners were soon removed from power. On 18 October, Egon Krenz, with Mielke's unenthusiastic and opportunistic support, succeeded Honecker as head of the SED and the Council of State in a vain and desperate attempt by the SED to arrest the slide into powerlessness. Krenz's calls for dialogue in society fell on deaf ears and on 6 November an estimated 500,000 braved pouring rain in Leipzig to demand a new travel law and an end to the SED's leading role in society. Two days earlier, an even larger crowd had gathered on Alexanderplatz in East Berlin for a demonstration coordinated by the Artists' Federation. The SED and MfS were only able to organise a damage limitation exercise, a clear sign of the growing weakness of the *ancien régime*. Even though Stoph. Hager and other members of the old guard were ejected from the Politbüro, and Hans Modrow, who was known to have some reform leanings, was appointed Chairman of the Council of Ministers, the colourless Krenz appeared to be reacting to events and too inclined to half measures to convince people that he was an East German Gorbachev. With the mass exodus and popular protests gathering momentum and the SED grassroots becoming increasingly

restless, Krenz, in a confused manoeuvre, allowed the Berlin Wall to be opened on the night of 9–10 November. The opening of the Wall, which had become only a matter of time, compounded rather than relieved Krenz's problems. Even before Krenz resigned as General Secretary on 3 December, the legitimacy crisis of the SED regime was so deep that unification was rising rapidly towards the top of the political agenda. This is caught in the shift in calls on the streets from 'We are the people' in the early stages of the revolution to 'We are one people'. The latter was a reference to the concept of one German nation. Although Modrow laboured hard to prevent the absorption of the GDR by its powerful West German neighbour, the parliamentary election in March 1990 ended in a resounding victory for the conservative coalition of the East German CDU leader Lothar de Maizière. The GDR moved rapidly along the path to economic and monetary union in July and then political unification on 3 October 1990, when the five new *Länder* of East Germany were incorporated into the FRG.

The MfS had no option but to follow the course of 'defensive liberalisation'<sup>67</sup> set in motion by Krenz and continued with greater vigour by Modrow, and it also had to face the anger of the crowds and calls for its dissolution. During the burgeoning demonstrations, the cries of 'Power to the people forever, SED never!', 'Stasi out, Stasi out!' and 'Your days are numbered!' encapsulated the double rejection of the party and its sword and shield, a mood which turned into fury when the scale of Stasi surveillance and the corruption among the old elites began to make the headlines. There could, however, be no recourse to arms. As the deputy head of the Rostock's Regional Administration, Colonel Anthor, stated: 'We must not shoot, we'll destroy the current development . . . even if in the face of abuse and insults our hearts bleed and our trigger finger itches'.<sup>68</sup>

Mielke was an early victim of popular ire and of the SED's ejection of its old leaders. He resigned from the Politbüro and as minister on 3 November. Ten days later in a rambling valedictory speech at a televised session of the *Volkskammer*, a confused and irritated Mielke was revealed as a latter-day Wizard of Oz. He aroused derision and anger by his failure to express regret and by his pathetic protestation 'But I love you all'. The disoriented MfS staff were appalled at Mielke's abject performance, believing that he had undermined the ministry's sense of mission and the 'good cause'. In a letter to the President of the *Volkskammer* on the following day, the SED party organisation in the MfS distanced itself on behalf of all members of the Stasi from Mielke's statement and criticised him for his failure to accept personal responsibility for what had happened and for presenting a false picture of the ministry's work.<sup>69</sup> Bewilderment was combined with arrogance in the

<sup>65</sup> Neues Forum Leipzig 1990: 63.

<sup>66</sup> Süß W. 1999: 745.

<sup>67</sup> The term is used by Süß in Süß W. 1999: 465.

<sup>68</sup> Cited in Gieseke J. 2000: 503. Our translation.

<sup>69</sup> Cited from the document in Otto W. 2000: 702.

statement by one officer from Halle: 'We had hope right up to the last day. It had to be a mistake, perhaps it was even a huge joke. Now we can only look on in complete incomprehension as the so-called people refuse to stop yelling.'<sup>70</sup> Three days before the opening of the Berlin Wall, Mielke's number two, Mittag, had been equally arrogant in an interview with *Neues Deutschland*: 'The total surveillance state, the ubiquitous spy system exist only in the imagination of the Western media. The Ministry of State Security does not keep the people under surveillance. It cooperates with the citizens . . .'<sup>71</sup>

As for Mielke, he was thrown out of the SED on 3 December 1989, imprisoned four days later and released on health grounds in March 1990 from the Berlin-Hohenschönhausen jail, where he had spent several weeks in solitary confinement in the hospital wing. Although he escaped prosecution for various charges during the next few years, including one relating to the shootings at the Berlin Wall, on grounds of ill-health, he was sentenced to six years' imprisonment in 1993 for the murder of two policemen in 1931. However, he was released two years later when he was diagnosed as senile. He died in June 2000, after having spent most of the intervening period in a spacious flat in the vicinity of the Hohenschönhausen jail.

Following a suggestion by the Collegium of the ministry, a successor to the Stasi – the Office for National Security (*Ami für Nationale Sicherheit* – AfNS) – was set up by the Modrow government on 17 November. One of Mielke's four deputies, Wolfgang Schwanitz, was elected by the *Volkskammer* to be its new head. As a member of the old officer corps, he could not, however, wipe the slate clean, thereby prompting accusations that the AfNS, dubbed the 'Nasi', was the MfS under a different name. He attempted to strike an unsatisfactory balance between the old and the new system of domestic counterintelligence: to retain the core of the officer class and as many informers as was possible while creating a new constitutional and legal basis for the AfNS and reducing the full-time staff by a half, above all in the District Service Units. In addition, the new organisation was to be divested of some of the Stasi's peripheral functions, such as passport control. At an early stage in the downsizing process, one officer lamented in November that: 'After leaving the organisation our comrades, as skilled MfS workers, are forced to go from door to door begging for integration in our society. The social situation of a high proportion of us has deteriorated and we have the feeling that we are the whipping boy of the nation.'<sup>72</sup> The demoralisation and disillusionment in the ranks was fuelled by revelations in the press from 1 December onwards of the privileged life-style of the SED leaders, feelings which also turned many MfS staff against their own leaders.<sup>73</sup> On

<sup>70</sup> Cited in Fricke K. W. 1991: 71. Our translation.

<sup>71</sup> Cited in Süß W. 1999: 459. Our translation.

<sup>72</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, 551. Our translation. By the beginning of December, the AfNS had lost about 6,000 staff: *ibid.*, 554.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 597–9.

6 December, most of the top generals and colonels – among them Mittag, Neiber, Kienberg and Kleine at central level and Schwarz (Erfurt), Hummitzsch (Leipzig) and Dangrieß (Gera) at regional level – were dismissed.

With citizens' committees occupying the offices of the AfNS in a number of towns such as Gera to prevent the destruction of Stasi files and with the Central Round Table in East Berlin demanding its dissolution, the Council of Ministers finally succumbed to the pressure on 14 December and decided to disband the AfNS. The Modrow government's subsequent efforts to transform HV A into a separate foreign intelligence service of 4,000 members under Werner Großmann as well as creating an Office for the Protection of the Constitution with a staff of 10,000 under the former head of the Frankfurt/Oder Regional Administration, Major General Heinz Engelhardt, also had to be abandoned – on 12 January 1990.<sup>74</sup> Three days later, a citizens' committee, in conjunction with the police and the Procurator General, assumed responsibility for security matters at the Stasi headquarters in East Berlin. That evening, several thousand protesters, in circumstances which are not entirely clear, stormed the building and destroyed some of the materials, despite demonstrators' demands for people to see their individual files. On the day of the occupation, the Central Round Table had received a detailed report from government sources of the finances, operations and the number of staff employed by the Stasi.<sup>75</sup> The dismantling of the AfNS continued until Modrow lost power in March 1990; some officers were dismissed, a few others found shelter in jobs in public administration. At the last session of the Central Round Table in mid-March, it was reported that 96 per cent of MfS regional staff and 87 per cent at headquarters had been removed.<sup>76</sup> The disorientation among the ranks and the rapidity of the ministry's fall led to three major generals in Regional Administrations – Gerhard Lange, Horst Böhm and Peter Koch – committing suicide in January, February and May respectively.<sup>77</sup> HV A remained active for a while longer than the AfNS, being granted a period of grace until 30 June 1990; it used this time to destroy virtually all of its files. The slow and erratic process of putting the AfNS to rest was coordinated by Peter-Michael Diestel, the Minister of the Interior in the de Maizière government, with the assistance of the State Committee for the Dissolution of the Former MfS/AfNS. The process was completed with German unification in October.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Gieseke J. 2001: 241–2.

<sup>75</sup> Fricke K. W. 1991: 73.

<sup>76</sup> Wolfe N. T. 1991: 128.

<sup>77</sup> Fricke K. W. 1991: 74.

<sup>78</sup> Gieseke J. 2001: 241–3.