

Part II

THE SWORD AND THE
COMPASS

THE PARTY AND ITS SWORD

This chapter examines the organisational structure of the MfS, the political influence of the minister, and the Stasi's role as the SED's junior ally during Honecker's years in power. Although the Stasi was a vast bureaucratic apparatus enjoying a considerable latitude over operational tasks, it remained tied to the overall political and ideological control of the SED, which it served as an agent of repression against a perceived omnipresent enemy, as a source of intelligence and as a firefighter against the burgeoning symptoms of crisis in society. In retrospect, some MfS officers, Mielke not excluded, have come to rue the myriad burdens borne by the ministry and its staff.¹ When interviewed by the German weekly magazine *Der Spiegel*, the ex-minister protested, without any sense of irony, that the Stasi had been a 'maid of all work' and that it had to deal with 'trivialities'. 'If we had a supply problem, if for example rain was coming through a hole in the roof of a hospital, then they turned to us. And we tried to put things right'.²

ERICH MIELKE: HONECKER'S LOYAL MACHIAVELLI

Before examining the organisational structure of the ministry, first a word about its autocratic boss.³ Erich Mielke was born in the Wedding district of Berlin in December 1907 into a working-class family of six children. His father, Emil, a cartwright and a member of the KPD, was sentenced in 1923 to 18 months' imprisonment for his involvement in a clash with the Berlin police. Mielke's mother, a seamstress, died in 1910. Although Mielke won a scholarship to a grammar school in 1923, the family's financial difficulties required him to leave school at 16 to work as a despatch clerk. He acquired an

¹ See, for example, the comments in Schwarz J. 1994: 44.

² Interview with Mielke in *Der Spiegel*, no. 36, 1992, p. 480. Our translation.

³ For the biographical details, see in particular Schwan H. 1997: 50–1, 65–6, 72–5, 276–9, 287–93; Otto W. 2000: 18, 33–7, 60–91.

impeccable pedigree as a Communist militant. In 1921, he joined the Communist party's youth organisation and the KPD itself a few years later. He was also a member of the Revolutionary Trade Union Opposition and took charge of a street cell. While he was unemployed in 1931, he worked for the KPD newspaper *The Red Flag*. As Germany's political and social crisis intensified in the aftermath of the great depression, a state of virtual civil war existed on the streets of Berlin. Mielke and a colleague, Erich Ziemer, who both belonged to a para-military formation, the KPD Self Defence Group, killed two police constables on 9 August 1931 in the vicinity of party headquarters during one of the many clashes between the KPD and the security forces. Mielke would be sentenced in 1993 to six years' imprisonment for this action, only to be released after two years on account of his senility.

Soon after the murder, Mielke fled to Moscow, where, under the alias 'Paul Bach', he trained for a short time at a military-political school headed by Wilhelm Zaisser and then at the Comintern's Lenin School for Cadres between late 1932 and 1936. He observed at first hand the denunciations, trials and purges of the Stalinist era. Although Mielke was not a target of persecution, the experience left its imprint on him and steered him in the arts of survival and repression. In the words of one biographer: 'Jesuitical adherence to the faith and the principle: "The end justifies the means" became the political and ideological maxim pervading his life'.⁴ At the end of his training, he signed a declaration that he would work for the Central Committee of the CPSU in an exemplary and obedient manner. Towards the close of 1936, he went to Spain and served there until 1939 in various divisions of the International Brigade. After Franco's victory in the civil war, Mielke was despatched by KPD central office in Moscow to Belgium where, from May 1939 onwards, under yet another cover name, this time 'Gaston', he co-edited the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* and was active in the underground. His next destination was France where, as 'Richard Heller', he helped to build up an illegal KPD organisation in Toulouse. He worked for a while as a woodchopper before being interned and handed over to the Nazi Todt Organisation in January 1944. When the Germans retreated from France, he probably remained with the organisation until it crossed the Rhine in December 1944. By June 1945, he was in Berlin. Throughout the GDR era, Mielke shrouded his time in Belgium and France in secrecy, preferring his comrades to believe the official line that he had been in Moscow, making a vital contribution to the defeat of the Third Reich as a member of the National Committee for a Free Germany and other strategic groups.

Mielke was instrumental in setting up a security force in the Soviet zone and the GDR. He occupied the important position as State Secretary in the ministry between 1950 and 1953 and, for a second spell between 1955 and 1957 before his appointment as minister in the latter year. He owed his

⁴ Otto W. 2000: 60. Our translation.

promotion not only to his Soviet connections but also to Ulbricht's desire for a loyal and politically reliable assistant after the upheavals under Zaisser and Wollweber, a wish that, given his customary obsequiousness to his superiors, Mielke was well able to fulfil. Mielke was also admirably qualified for the task of transforming the Stasi into a security colossus. Though not an intellectual like Markus Wolf, he was intelligent, a highly talented organiser, devious, ruthless and a true believer. His ruthlessness is evident from his comments on the execution by shooting in 1981 of a Stasi officer, Dr Werner Teske, suspected of spying for the Federal Republic:

We are not immune against scoundrels in our own ranks. If I knew about this now he would not be alive tomorrow! Over and done with fast! Because I'm a humanist, that's why I take such a view. All this waffle about not executing, not sentencing to death – all nonsense, comrades. Execution, if necessary without a court verdict!⁵

A fitness fanatic, Mielke swam every morning before work, abstained from drinking and smoking and was fond of hunting. Among the regular guests at his hunting lodge were the MfS generals Markus Wolf, Rudi Mittig and Gerhard Neiber. Brezhnev, Khrushchev and top KGB officers also joined him in the hunt. Sport was an abiding passion, second only to police work. From 1953 onwards, he was the chairman of the Dynamo Sports Association and from 1957 a member of the executive of the German Gymnastics and Sports Association (DTSB). Mielke used his influence in these positions to help transform the GDR into one of the world's leading sports nations. This was not done simply for love of sport but was also motivated by the drive to gain diplomatic recognition for the GDR and to demonstrate the superiority of socialism in the international class struggle. He was dedicated to the Berlin Football Club Dynamo, which was part of the Dynamo Sports Association. He attended most home games, and was unscrupulous in the search for success. When refereeing decisions went against his club, one high-ranking Stasi officer with Dynamo described a choleric Mielke shrieking: 'The referee is a bandit. He is against Dynamo. He is an enemy. The man must be sorted out, we must lock him up'.⁶

His determination to impose a strict disciplinary code on the ministry can be seen in his comments on the execution in 1960 of Manfred Smolka, a former East German border guard, for espionage and treason:

1. This order on the crime and punishment of Smolka is to be made known to all members of the Ministry of State Security.
2. The contents of this order, together with the 10 commandments of our socialist ethics and morality, are to form the topic of thorough discussion and instruction

⁵ Cited in Fricke K. W. 1992: 158.

⁶ Cited in Schwan H. 1997: 278. Our translation.

in service units in order to heighten their vigilance and solidarity and further to strengthen the political-moral unity and team-spirit in our ranks.

3. All colleagues in the Ministry are to be trained to hate treachery, to work as Chekists towards overcoming political-moral weakness, and to improve their technical qualifications so that they will place their whole strength at the service of the successful implementation of the political-operational tasks which are entrusted to them.⁷

Mielke did not deny himself some of the fruits of power. He and his wife, Gertrud, lived in the luxury Wandlitz compound reserved for the Council of Gods, that is, the members of the Politbüro. The veteran minister's vanity and addiction to military attire are well caught in Anne McElvoy's description of him as 'an ageing Cadillo', weighed down with ribbons and medals 'like a teddy bear in military fancy dress'.⁸ The former *Financial Times* correspondent in East Berlin, Leslie Colitt, was even less flattering in his comparison of Mielke and Markus Wolf:

The two men were exact opposites in almost every way. Wolf was extroverted, urbane, and towered over the dumpy and paranoically suspicious Mielke. Wolf's vastly superior learning automatically tagged him as a member of the intelligentsia, which Mielke instinctively mistrusted. Wolf was a cosmopolitan, part of an extended family that had been dispersed around the globe from Moscow to New York, whereas Mielke's horizon ended at the sector border of East Berlin.⁹

After the collapse of the GDR, former MfS generals like Wolfgang Schwanitz and Rudi Mittig and leading SED functionaries such as Dr Wolfgang Herger of the Central Committee Department for Security Questions all testified to Mielke's overweening self-confidence and his utter conviction of the superiority of the socialist cause. His generals held him in high regard for his anti-fascist past and for his devotion to duty, even though their relationship with the authoritarian Mielke seems to have been lacking in personal warmth.¹⁰ According to Werner Großmann, the last head of foreign intelligence, Mielke laboured under the illusion that the stability of the GDR could be preserved only if one could know everything and everyone. This mania for omniscience was rooted in the traditional Communist International's perception of the class struggle and in the belief that internal opposition forces were influenced and steered from outside.¹¹ Großmann's criticism of Mielke's passion for minutiae was apt. Even after German unification and from his hospital ward in the Berlin-Plötzensee prison, Mielke insisted that the opposition forces in the GDR had been conducted from the West and that the critical

situation in the GDR had made it essential to expand the MfS and to collect information so that 'we soon noticed if anyone attempted to lead us up the garden path'.¹² Großmann's predecessor, Markus Wolf, is the only general to strike a significant discordant note, contemptuously referring to Mielke as a 'warped personality even by the peculiar standards that apply in the espionage world'.¹³ However, while serving as one of his deputies, Wolf did not fail to pay fulsome tribute to Mielke in public and had fed his insatiable appetite for flattery.

SED AND MfS

The Stasi was first and foremost the agent of the hegemonic SED and repeatedly and unhesitatingly endorsed the party's leading role in society, as enshrined in the GDR Constitution. Broadly speaking, the party set the political and ideological compass and the MfS acted as its shield and sword. Declarations to this effect abound in top secret documents and in speeches by ministers. At the 1954 SED Party Congress, Wollweber described the MfS as the 'sharp sword' with which the party mercilessly beats the enemy;¹⁴ and the 1979 guidelines to the Stasi's work with informers emphasised that: 'The reliable protection of societal development, the all-round guarantee of the internal security of the GDR and the strengthening of the socialist community of states require the further intensification of work against the enemy as well as damage prevention. It is therefore necessary to contribute effectively to the unflagging implementation of the policy of the party and state leadership'.¹⁵ This function as servant of the party was underscored by the taboo, imposed in 1954 by a decision of the Security Commission of the SED Politbüro, on the Stasi's surveillance of the SED. The SED apparatus, unlike that of the bloc parties, could not be spied upon by the informers of the MfS, except when its assistance was required by the SED leadership in investigating deviationists within its own ranks.¹⁶

Another indicator of the role of the Stasi within the normative and institutional framework of the SED state can be found in the ministry's second statute, issued in 1969. The statute defined the MfS as an organ of the Council of Ministers and the basis of its work as the SED programme, the decisions of the Politbüro, the Central Committee and the National Defence Council and the laws of the People's Chamber. On the other hand, it should be noted that the statute recognised the ministry as a legal entity and laid down the principle of the individual management of the MfS by the minister,

⁷ Cited in Evans R. J. 1997: 852.

⁸ McElvoy A. 1993: 94-5.

⁹ Colitt L. 1996: 63.

¹⁰ Interview with Mittig in Rieckert A., Schwarz A. and Schneider D. 1990: 177 and with Schwanitz in Villain J. 1990: 135-6.

¹¹ Großman W. 2001: 159, 177-8.

¹² Interview with Mielke in *Der Spiegel*, no. 36, 1992, p. 44. Our translation.

¹³ Wolf M. 1997: 66.

¹⁴ Fricke K. W. 1991: 11.

¹⁵ Cited in Gill D. and Schröter U. 1991: 417. Our translation.

¹⁶ Süß W. 1995: 85; Fricke K. W. 1991: 14.

who was empowered to issue legally binding service instructions, orders and regulations.¹⁷ These powers were adroitly utilised by the ambitious Mielke to boost his own position and that of his ministry.

The Stasi was not directly subordinate to the party as a corporate body, which encompassed 2.3 million members in 1988, but was rather the instrument of the political elites and the leading organs, notably the Politbüro and the Central Committee Secretariat. Erich Honecker, as General Secretary of the Central Committee, was *primus inter pares*. Despite all the professions of fealty, relations between the MfS and the SED elites were not always harmonious. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the early to mid-1950s had witnessed a struggle over the political and operational autonomy of the ministry between Ulbricht and the first two ministers, Zaisser and Wollweber. Direct party control was also very much limited by the presence of Soviet advisers; not until their number was reduced from 76 to 32 in 1958 was Soviet influence significantly curtailed and Ulbricht able to tighten SED control.¹⁸ Although Mielke proved to be more amenable than his predecessors, disputes broke out in the 1960s over appointments and, as in 1962, over charges that the ministry was exceeding its brief. Although the controversy soon subsided, it did reveal an underlying tension at that time between the SED's steering function and what has been referred to as the Stasi's understanding of itself as the party's societal monitoring and control agency.¹⁹

Conscious that the ruling party's power had been undermined in other dictatorships by over-mighty police chiefs and by the security services' mania for empire building and conspiratorial methods, the SED was assiduous in spreading an organisational net over the Stasi. At the apex of party political control stood the Central Committee Secretary for Security Questions; he was responsible for the party's military and security policy and for the political monitoring of the National People's Army (NVA), the MfS and other armed forces. This post was occupied by Paul Verner from 1971 to 1983 and then by Egon Krenz until October 1989. Their influence over the Stasi should not be exaggerated, partly because their remit did not extend to operational activities and partly because Mielke's experience and political stature enabled him to keep them at arm's length. Krenz, who anyhow was stretched by his other responsibilities for youth and sport, was not held in high regard by the older and more experienced Mielke. Even when Honecker was in charge of the Department between 1958 and 1971, the office was far from being an omnipotent instrument of direction and control. Both Verner and Krenz were very much dependent on the next tier below them in the hierarchy, that is, on Herbert Scheibe's Department for Security Questions in the Central Committee apparatus for the armed forces. Scheibe who came from the

¹⁷ Otto W. 2000: 345–6.

¹⁸ Engelmann R. 1997: 52, 54, 70–71.

¹⁹ See Suckut S. 1997: 166.

NVA in 1972 was replaced by a civilian, Dr Wolfgang Herger, in 1985. Within his department, the Section for State Security under Major General Fritz Bengelsdorf was directly responsible for the MfS.²⁰

So much for the pyramidal structure and the leading officials of the SED's steering unit. What were its main duties and how did it seek to exercise control? In the first place, Herger's Department for Security Questions had a say in the selection and appointment of the Stasi's top officials, a task which it undertook in conjunction with the head of the ministry's own Main Department for Cadres and Training. Joint recommendations were submitted to Mielke before a final decision was reached after yet further consultation with other bodies. The process was a tortuous one and territorial disputes were frequent as Mielke was determined to limit undue interference by external agencies and to manipulate the nomenklatura system to his own advantage. In 1986, the nomenklatura of the Politbüro covered appointments to the post of minister as well as of the top generals of the Stasi and that of the National Defence Council included the heads of several key Main Departments and all the Regional Administrations. Among other SED bodies with a say in appointments to the MfS, the Department for Security Questions was responsible for the deputy heads of Main Departments. The nomenklatura, a Soviet practice, was designed to facilitate party control over appointments to key positions throughout politics and society, but, as regards the MfS, the process was far from transparent and awaits further investigation.²¹

The various organs of Krenz's Central Committee Secretariat for Security Questions implemented their control function first and foremost by means of the SED groups within the MfS. Their work was facilitated by the fact that virtually all full-time MfS staff belonged to the SED. The latter's main control organ within the Stasi, the Central Party Organisation of the MfS, operated on the basis of directives from the Central Committee and enjoyed the elevated status of a Party District Organisation.²² In 1989, its apparatus consisted of 159 full-time MfS employees. Major General Dr Horst Felber, the head of the organisation and a member of the minister's Collegium, described the function of his unit in typical ministry jargon as: 'to expound on the decisions of the Central Committee and its Politbüro as well as the general orientations derived from them for carrying out the work of the MfS; to motivate and mobilise the party members politically for the solution of their tasks; and, drawing on the strength of the party, to overcome obstacles and deficiencies in our own ranks'.²³

Below the Central District Party Organisation, the SED was further embedded in the MfS by means of a plethora of party organisations and party groups at central, regional, district and 'object' level. This kind of intricate

²⁰ Fricke F. W. 1991: 16.

²¹ Süß W. 1997: 221.

²² Schumann S. 1998: 6–7.

²³ Cited in Fricke K. W. 1991: 17–18. Our translation.

organisational network was to be found in other ministries and was instrumental in the political socialisation and disciplining of members. With regard to the latter, the SED District Party Control Commission in the MfS could impose penalties for a variety of offences, such as if staff neglected political training, deviated from the party's ideological norms and drank to excess. It did not operate independently as it was obliged to work closely with the disciplinary arm of the ministry's Main Department for Cadres and Training (see Chapter 6).²⁴

The basic task common to all party organisations – although the language changed slightly over the years – was outlined in a Politbüro directive issued in 1954: 'To train the co-workers of the State Secretary of State Security in patriotism as well as in love for and devotion to the GDR and its government, to the SED, to the conscientious fulfilment of duties and to the uncompromising fight against agents, spies, saboteurs and all enemies of the workers' and peasants' power'.²⁵ Meetings of Party Groups, on the lowest tier of the ministry, were supposed to be convened twice a month and seminars were held within the framework of the Party Teaching Year and after important meetings of the Central Committee.²⁶ Through these and other means, including the elaborate system of training and military discipline discussed in Chapter 6, the SED organs within the MfS contributed to the inculcation of the official image of the enemy and to ensuring that the MfS was a politically and ideologically reliable aide of the SED.

A STATE WITHIN A STATE?

While the party organs were crucial for the political and ideological steeling of the MfS, Silke Schumann, an expert on SED–MfS relations, has shown that the Central Party District Organisation of Dr Felber did not have the same level of involvement in overseeing operational work and did not carry out surveillance of the service units.²⁷ This raises a central question, that is, the degree of autonomy and influence which the ministry exercised over its own internal affairs and on policymaking generally. It is not an easy question to answer, nor is it only applicable to the Stasi as historians similarly debate the issue with regard to the KGB and secret police forces in other countries, seeking to establish how the party or the government exercised political control over such clandestine organisations.

After the fall of the GDR, party big-wigs rushed to put as much distance as possible between themselves and the vilified Stasi in a largely vain attempt to rehabilitate their own reputation and that of the 'moral' party. Egon

Krenz, the ex-Central Committee Secretary for Security Questions, asserted in his statement to the Central Round Table in 1990, that he was powerless when confronted by the MfS 'state within a state', an interpretation of the role of the Stasi with which Honecker was only too happy to concur.²⁸ According to Krenz: 'In reality, the MfS developed increasingly into a state within a state, screened off from the outside world and even exercising control over members of the party. Without paying heed to democratic principles, questions of state security and the concrete operational work of the Ministry of State Security were, with the exception of cadre appointments and investments, discussed and decided between the Chairman of the National Defence Council [Honecker] and the Minister of State Security'.²⁹ Not surprisingly, this view has been fiercely contested by ex-Stasi officers. Werner Großmann, the last head of HV A, retorted that Krenz and other members of the SED elite have deliberately set out to distort the role of the Stasi as the loyal shield and sword of the ruling party.³⁰ This accords with his former chief's insistence that the ministry followed the party line, was under SED control until the very end and did not enjoy 'an independent existence'.³¹

The dispute over the degree of autonomy enjoyed by the MfS very much centres around the ministry's control over operational work. In an interview in February 1990, Wolfgang Herger, a close associate of Egon Krenz and head of the Central Committee Department for Security Questions between 1985 and 1989, insisted that a clear line of demarcation was drawn between political and operational work. His department, Herger contended, was authorised by the Politbüro, the Central Committee and the Central Committee Secretariat to carry out the political management and control of party work within the MfS, and although political-ideological questions were discussed at MfS party meetings, special service matters were off the agenda. Mielke put this with characteristic bluntness in a telephone conversation shortly after Herger's appointment: 'And furthermore – you do not need to worry yourself about operational matters. Your field is party work'.³² Herger also asserted, correctly, that the Stasi's impulse to insulate itself was, in part, a consequence of the strict enforcement of the principle of conspiracy, which was applied not only to relations with the outside world but also within the MfS itself, where even full-time staff were often unaware of internal operational matters outside their own remit.³³ As for the political work of his own department, Herger saw it primarily as ensuring that MfS staff were faithful to the SED and to the implementation of the general decisions of the party.³⁴

²⁸ Andert R. and Herzberg W. 1991: 367.

²⁹ Cited in Gieseke J. 2001: 92. Our translation.

³⁰ Großmann W. 2001: 171.

³¹ Interview with Mielke in *Der Spiegel*, no. 36, 1992. p. 48.

³² Interview in Villain J. 1990: 112. Our translation.

³³ *Ibid.*, 112.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

²⁴ Fricke F. W. 1991: 17; Schumann S. 1998: 16–17, 21.

²⁵ Cited in Süß W. 1997: 224. Our translation.

²⁶ Fricke K. W. 1991: 17; also Villain J. 1990: 120.

²⁷ Schumann S. 1998: 3–4, 12.

Before looking at the crucial area of SED–MfS relations, the Honecker–Mielke axis, a few methodological issues need to be borne in mind. In the first place, relations between the two bodies fluctuated over the four decades of SED rule and what was true of the era of stability under Honecker was not necessarily applicable to the period of close KGB control and to the crisis decade of the 1950s when SED and MfS leaders often clashed sharply. Secondly, research is needed into the ways in which the MfS used intelligence data to shape, consciously or otherwise, the direction of SED policy and into how Mielke exerted his influence on the SED elites. Thirdly, further research is urgently required into the relationship between the SED and the MfS at the local and regional level. Until this area is clarified, it is difficult to reach any overall judgement, especially as the SED was not reliant on the MfS alone for intelligence about developments in the enterprises and society as data were also provided by the members and organs of the party. Fourthly, personalities did matter in state socialism. Thus powerful autocrats like Günter Mittag in the economy and Mielke in state security were able to advance the interests of their own respective blocs, not least through their personal access to the party leader, who in his turn used the relationship to retain a grip over key groups and individuals.

Finally, it should be stressed that while a range of groups played some role in the political process, autonomous interest or pressure groups, such as those within the alternative political culture, were usually deemed to be both illegal and illegitimate. Even though it is difficult to identify boundaries and to delineate cleavages and the decision-making process both between and within the organs of party and state, it is nevertheless clear that core insider groups such as the central party apparatus and the military and security organs enjoyed primacy over many ministries and that they were in a qualitatively different category of influence from occupational groups like lawyers, writers and teachers. As regards the MfS, while its leaders harboured many reservations about détente and Honecker's Western policy, in the final analysis it toed the party line and remained a loyal servant of state socialism, a system which also guaranteed the ministry's expansion and influence.³⁵

THE HONECKER–MIELKE AXIS

The relationship between the Minister of State Security and the SED party leader was crucial both for the ministry's performance of its functions and its political leverage in the overall political system. Under Ulbricht, Mielke was deliberately kept from the inner sanctum, but with Honecker's accession to power in 1971 Mielke entered the Politbüro as a candidate member and was appointed as a full member five years later. This was testimony to Honecker's

recognition of the significance of the Stasi in the age of détente, to Mielke's assistance in engineering Ulbricht's political downfall, and to their long-standing cooperation in security and political matters. Despite their subsequent differences over Honecker's policy towards West Germany, both Honecker and Mielke were in fundamental agreement with regard to the need to maintain SED hegemony and the socialist order. In retrospect, Mielke describes their working relationship as a good one and that any other interpretation is 'twaddle'.³⁶

After the end of communist rule, former members of the SED leadership corps became embroiled in conflicting assessments of their involvement in and knowledge of the scope of the Stasi's activities. The claim by top Politbüro members such as Kurt Hager and Günter Schabowski that the Politbüro was not provided with a full picture of the Stasi's activities and numerical strength was rejected by Mielke, who insisted that his colleagues were kept informed about the methods and the extent of the Stasi's work.³⁷ Yet even Honecker contended, in 1990, that he too had been kept in the dark with regard to the number of full-time personnel and informers on the Stasi's books. His best guess had been 35,000 full-time staff, including the Guard Regiment.³⁸ The candidate member of the Politbüro and long-serving Chairman of the State Planning Commission, Gerhard Schürer, found this hard to swallow. He argued that, even if Honecker's statement were true, he could have arrived at a reasonably accurate estimate by examining the materials of the State Planning Commission and the Finance Ministry relating to the Stasi's requirements for salaries and materials.³⁹ Although it is difficult to establish the truth of the matter, Politbüro records and statements by Egon Krenz⁴⁰ indicate that only selected members received information relating to the MfS,⁴¹ a procedure which accords with the way in which Honecker ran the Politbüro in the 1970s and 1980s. He kept a tight grip on the management of business; open discussion was inhibited by the administrative *modus operandi*; and agreement was usually reached without a formal vote and on the basis of the position adopted in draft papers which had already received the General Secretary's seal of approval. Furthermore, most members were ill-equipped to deal with matters which were not directly related to their own functional sphere and they hesitated to disturb the smooth flow of team business.

³⁶ Interview with Mielke in *Der Spiegel*, no. 36, 1992.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Andert R. and Herzberg W. 1991: 369. Mielke, while conceding in the *Spiegel* interview (p. 48) that Honecker may not have known exactly how many IMs worked for the Stasi, insisted that he must have been aware of the number of full-time staff and of the full range of Stasi activities.

³⁹ Schürer G. 1996: 145.

⁴⁰ Krenz E. 1990: 124.

⁴¹ Otto W. 2000: 353–4.

³⁵ On the influence of groups within state socialism, see Giesecke J. 2001: 94–101, 106–7.

Another method favoured by Honecker was to deal with sensitive issues behind closed doors and in small groups. In the case of the Stasi, the Politbüro, according to Schabowski, failed to exercise control over the ministry as it did not act as a collective decision-making body.⁴² At least one thing is certain: Honecker preferred to discuss matters of domestic and foreign security on a one-to-one basis with Mielke after the weekly Politbüro meeting on a Tuesday as well as after sessions of the National Defence Council (which met two to three times per year). Business was also conducted between them during car journeys and by telephone.⁴³ This form of contact suited Mielke,⁴⁴ who was suspicious of Honecker's intimates, such as the Minister of Defence, Heinz Keßler, and he was determined to keep at bay those Politbüro comrades whose position entitled them to have some say in Stasi and security matters. This was particularly true of Egon Krenz, Horst Dohlius, the Central Committee Secretary for Party Organs, and Erich Mückenberger, the head of the Party Central Control Commission.⁴⁵ As no records exist of the highly confidential talks between Honecker and Mielke, their content is open to different interpretations based on the selective memory of the participants. During his questioning by the military public prosecutor in June 1990, Mielke claimed that he had been a loyal servant of party and state and that: 'I could decide nothing. I submitted ideas and had my decisions confirmed'.⁴⁶ Honecker rejected Mielke's claim that he kept him fully informed and sought to transfer much of the blame on to the shoulders of Egon Krenz, the man who had been instrumental in his overthrow as General Secretary. As Krenz was in charge of the Central Committee Department for Security Questions for most of the 1980s, he was, therefore, according to Honecker, the official who was responsible for the political control and operational activities of the MfS.⁴⁷ Predictably, Krenz lobbed the ball back into Honecker's court, insisting that he was not the GDR's security chief, that he was kept in the dark as regards the contents of the Honecker-Mielke discussions, and that Mielke was responsible to Honecker as head of the SED and the National Defence Council.⁴⁸

Although the Honecker-Mielke axis obviously requires further study, some documentary evidence has been unearthed which shows them cooperating closely on important matters of state security.⁴⁹ MfS materials from the year

1979 reveal that the two leaders collaborated in the planning of criminal proceedings against Robert Havemann, one of the GDR's leading Marxist dissidents, a plan which also involved the participation of the State Prosecutor, the Supreme Court and the Ministry of Justice. A similar linkage between the Stasi, the SED and judicial bodies is also apparent in the sentencing in 1978 of another major dissident, Rudolf Bahro, to eight years' imprisonment and in the preparation of the Third Amendment to the Criminal Code of 1979. In the latter case, Johannes Raschka has shown that both Honecker and Mielke were active in drafting the legislation.⁵⁰

A provisional assessment of the influence of Mielke is that both he and the General Secretary operated on the basis of a broad consensus on means and ends but where disagreement occurred, Mielke had to bite his lip or use other channels. Mielke had serious reservations concerning détente with the West, the influx of visitors from the FRG and the growing dependence of the GDR on the hard currency infusions from West Germany, which were a corollary of détente and a consequence of the growing economic weakness of the GDR. However, although Mielke and Politbüro critics of Honecker's line, such as Werner Krolokowski and Willi Stoph, used their Soviet contacts to try and put the brakes on rapprochement between East and West Germany, they were unable to achieve their goal, partly because of Moscow's own economic enfeeblement and its gradual retreat from empire.⁵¹

⁴² Schabowski G. 1990: 44.

⁴³ Interview with Herger in Villain J. 1990: 105.

⁴⁴ Wolf M. 1991: 27.

⁴⁵ Schwan H. 1997: 297.

⁴⁶ von Lang J. 1991: 271. Mielke in *Der Spiegel*, no. 36, 1992, p. 44 – our translation.

⁴⁷ Andert R. and Herzberg W. 1991: 363, 366–8.

⁴⁸ Krenz E. 1990: 123–4. Childs D. and Popplewell R. 1999: 67–8. Also Schabowski G. 1990: 41–2, 44.

⁴⁹ On the following, see Vollnhals C. 1999: 230–31, 251.

⁵⁰ Raschka J. 2000: 158; for details of the process, see Raschka J. 1999: 290–98.

⁵¹ See, for example, Werner Krolokowski's note on a conversation between Stoph and Mielke on 13 November 1980 printed in Przybylski P. 1991: 345–8, and the interview with Mielke in *Der Spiegel*, no. 36, 1992, p. 41.