

ZA	Zentralarchiv (Central Archive)
ZAIG	Zentrale Auswertungs- und Informationsgruppe (Central Assessment and Information Group)
ZKG	Zentrale Koordinierungsgruppe (Central Coordinating Group)
ZOV	Zentraler Operativer Vorgang (Central Operational Case)

Note: Where reference is made in the footnotes to MfS ZA, this denotes the central archival materials of the Ministry of State Security held by a special federal agency, the BStU.

INTRODUCTION

AN ORWELLIAN NIGHTMARE

The Ministry of State Security,¹ popularly known as the Stasi, was an integral element of communist rule in the German Democratic Republic between the ministry's establishment in 1950 to its dissolution in 1989. The GDR itself was founded in 1949, as Stalin's 'unwanted child' of the Cold War. Despite the popular uprising in 1953 against the Stalinist system which had been imposed on the GDR and despite the mass exodus of East Germans to the West, the new state managed to survive until its next major test in 1961. The Berlin Wall, erected by the East German communists with Soviet endorsement, arrested in a brutal manner the haemorrhaging of the population, thereby stabilising the system behind the ugly barrier which soon came to symbolise the totalitarian nature of communism. A combination of social incentives, economic growth and more subtle forms of coercion subsequently enabled the GDR's rulers to consolidate their position and, in the era of superpower détente, to gain international recognition for their country. However, the Soviet Union's retreat from empire under Gorbachev and the GDR's chronic economic malaise exposed the frail legitimacy of the communist social and political order. When the Berlin Wall eventually fell, on the evening of 9–10 November 1989, it was an act of desperation by East Germany's bewildered rulers to save an obsolescent system which neither they nor their security and military forces could prevent from disintegrating under the twin pressures of popular demonstrations and mass flight.

Following in the footsteps of its Soviet counterpart, the KGB, the Ministry of State Security functioned for almost four decades as the sharp sword and trusty shield of the GDR's key institution, the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED).² Such was the ministry's power and ubiquity that one author, Alexandra

¹ The German term is *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*, abbreviated to MfS.

² The SED was founded in the Soviet zone of occupation in 1946 as the result of a merger between the German Communist Party (KPD) and the Social Democratic Party

Richie, refers to it as exercising, in the 1980s, 'almost complete control over the captive population of East Germany'.³ And, indeed, the comprehensive surveillance of the population by a vast army of informers and a plethora of scientific and technical devices lends substance to the claim by the historian Christoph Klessmann that George Orwell's *1984* was realised to a greater extent in the GDR than was ever the case in the Third Reich.⁴ When, in addition, the Stasi's success in planting agents in all areas of West German political and cultural life is borne in mind, then it is tempting to concur with Anne Appelbaum's verdict that it was 'the most pervasive and efficient secret service in history'.⁵

Former high-ranking officers of the Stasi seize eagerly on this notion of efficiency as part of a well-packaged defence of what they regard as the ministry's honourable and legitimate role in protecting the East German state against a legion of external and internal enemies. This kind of argument is also used to combat the denigration of the MfS as part of what the officers perceive to be a continuation into the new Germany of the traditional anti-communist doctrine of the old Federal Republic (FRG).⁶ The elements of the defamation campaign which they allege is being conducted by the mass media and the 'political class' encompass forced adoptions, the murder of babies, the use of torture in MfS pre-trial detention centres and assisting terrorists in West Germany's notorious Red Army Faction. Not only does this litany of infamy – most of which can be substantiated – serve to discredit the Stasi by association with the murderers of the Gestapo but by depicting the ministry as the centre of evil it adds grist to the mill of those who seek to condemn the GDR as a totalitarian state, thereby justifying the wholesale dismantling of the former GDR's institutions and the socio-economic upheaval since the country's incorporation into the Federal Republic in October 1990.⁷

Although the self-portrayal of a dedicated, professional service class helps to sustain the officers' feelings of worth and identity in a world transformed,

(SPD). The new party soon attired itself in Stalinist clothing and, despite the existence of four other political parties, became the dominant political force in East Germany. The term 'East Germany' will be used to refer to the period from the foundation of the GDR in 1949 to the unification of the two German republics in 1990. The term 'east Germany' is used as an alternative to the 'Soviet zone of occupation' of 1945 to 1949 and to the former GDR after unification in October 1990. Similarly, 'East Berlin' refers to the capital city of the GDR.

³ Richie A. 1998: 758.

⁴ Klessmann C. 1998: 43.

⁵ *The Sunday Telegraph*, 21 February 1999, book section, p. 13.

⁶ See in particular the declaration of 19 March 2001 published in the daily newspaper *Junge Welt*: <http://www.jungewelt.de/2001/03-19/011.shtml>, pp. 1–2.

⁷ See the interviews with former Stasi officers in *Junge Welt* in <http://www.jungewelt.de/2001/04-20/011.shtml>, pp. 2–3, and in <http://www.jungewelt.de/1999/08-27/016.shtml>, pp. 2–3.

it too often masks the darker, repressive side of the GDR which is so closely associated with the totalitarian paradigm. One of the central sub-themes in the highly controversial debate on the applicability, and the value, of the totalitarian label to the GDR concerns the centrality of the role of the Stasi within the system. Rather than being – as its long-serving minister, the autocratic Erich Mielke, insisted – the loyal and trustworthy agent of the SED's will, the ministry is sometimes depicted as a 'state within a state' whose clandestine operations were not rigorously controlled and monitored by party organs. Egon Krenz, the former head of the SED's Central Committee Department for Security Questions and the SED's last leader, subscribes to the latter argument, partly because it helps to relieve him of some of the burden of responsibility for the Stasi's excesses and abuse of human rights. The myth of an ultra-efficient and omnipotent intelligence and security service has also come under challenge on the grounds that the Stasi was submerged in a flood of data, much of it mindless trivia. Tina Rosenberg has depicted the minutiae, or what she calls the thousands of tons of 'shit' under the nuggets of gold, in graphic detail:

The Stasi knew where Comrade Gisela kept the ironing board in her apartment . . . and how many times a week Comrade Armin took out his garbage and what color socks he wore with his sandals while doing it . . . The Stasi kept watch on trash dumps and lending libraries – the names of those who checked out books on hot air balloons or rock-climbing equipment were of particular interest – and tapped the booths of Catholic confessionals and the seats at the Dresden Opera. Stasi cameras monitored public toilets . . . Some of its dossiers on East Germans had a hundred categories of information – even the number, location, and design of tattoos. The Stasi kept a library of smells: a few hundred glass jars containing bits of dissidents' dirty underwear, so trained dogs could sniff and match the smell to an antigovernment pamphlet found on the sidewalk.⁸

Complementary to the 'drowning-men of the Stasi' thesis is the view that the ministry was incapable of controlling the disparate social, economic and political currents in a state bedevilled by a pronounced legitimacy deficit and highly vulnerable to Western influences. One leading German historian, Lutz Niethammer, takes up this theme, arguing that the Stasi, 'an uncontrolled and paranoid military bureaucracy', far from being the core of the regime should be placed at the edge on the grounds that the mass of society had either been integrated or immobilised and, furthermore, that the ministry fostered rather than reduced opposition. By the late 1980s, it had come to personify an outmoded anti-fascism and Chekist steel fist.⁹ While the interpretation of a floundering Stasi is certainly not without substance, the Stasi cannot, of

⁸ Rosenberg T. 1995: 290–91.

⁹ Niethammer L. 1997: 308, 332–4, 339. The Cheka – the Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counterrevolution and Sabotage – was the original Soviet secret service on which the MfS was modelled.

course, be relegated to a peripheral role in the light of its multiplicity of functions as guardian of the verities of Marxist-Leninist ideology, its ruthless implementation of the socialist revolution of the 1950s, its upholding of the communist power monopoly against perceived enemies at home and abroad, its crucial part in the acquisition of hard currency and scientific and technical know-how from the West, and its snooping into the intimate details of people's lives. Far from being a blunt sword and rusty shield, the Stasi was an indispensable instrument of the communist power elites in the global struggle against their capitalist rivals in the West, even though it should be stressed that in some spheres, especially the vital one of the economy, the Stasi's autocratic minister, Erich Mielke, often resembles a Don Quixote tilting at socialist windmills.

THE STASI IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

To what extent was the Stasi *sui generis*, at least in German history? A comparison with its nearest pre-war equivalent, the Gestapo, reveals that the Stasi soon evolved into a much larger organisation than the former and was far more reliant on a structured network of agents than on the kind of voluntary 'spite informers' who supplied denunciatory information to the Gestapo.¹⁰ For example, in 1937, the Gestapo employed probably no more than 7,000 officials out of a population of 66 million. In contrast, the MfS, a mere 2,700 in 1950, had reached 48,786 in 1971 and over 91,000 full-time staff out of a population of about 16.4 million in 1989. Furthermore, the MfS, like its KGB counterpart, housed both foreign intelligence and counter-intelligence under one roof, whereas the Gestapo was but one element in the Third Reich's system of policing, state security and counterintelligence. One of the other key agencies was the Security Service (SD) of Himmler's *Schutzstaffel* or SS, and whereas SD informers reported on popular opinion, the Gestapo agents concentrated on 'political crimes'. The number of SD agents is difficult to assess; some historians speculate that the total may have been between 100,000 and 120,000 in 1939.¹¹ And, as will be stressed in this book, during the course of the 1960s, MfS staff became increasingly professional and more proficient at subtle forms of repression; on the other hand, the professionalism of the Gestapo's early officers – a legacy of the Weimar Republic – was eroded by less qualified new recruits and the organisation was caught up in the growing barbarism of the Third Reich. The contrast is captured in Heiner Geißler's differentiation between the mountain of corpses and files left behind by the Third Reich and the GDR respectively.

Other countries, too, have been unable to dispense with intelligence and security services. In the adversarial atmosphere of the Cold War, the

¹⁰ See Gellately R. 1996.

¹¹ Diewald-Kerkmann G. 1995: 25.

intelligence services of both West and East experienced an exponential growth and were extremely costly to run. They generated a paper mountain of data, suffered information overload, were adept at justifying their existence and evading public accountability, and were pervaded by a conspiratorial view of the world and what Philip Knightley has called 'an obligatory paranoia'. They vied with each other in the use of advanced technology to spy on friend as well as foe and to turn each other's agents.¹² Moreover, the hidden hand of the CIA extended beyond low-level covert operations such as the funding of anti-communist trade unions, political parties and newspapers to the covert 'hot zone' of seeking to overthrow governments in Iran, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Cuba. The overthrow of the Iranian prime minister and the restoration of the Shah in 1953 and the 'Bay of Pigs' fiasco in 1961 illustrate the extremes to which the CIA was prepared to go. But covert activities were also practised at home, notably by J. Edgar Hoover, the long-time head of the FBI, who in the 1960s, according to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, 'helped spread the view among the police that any kind of mass protest is due to a conspiracy promulgated by agitators, often Communists, "who misdirect otherwise contented people"'.¹³ As a purveyor of the Red Scare in American politics, Hoover was not too dissimilar from Mielke as the propagator of the Imperialist Scare in the GDR.

It is little wonder that East Germany's legendary spymaster Markus Wolf stresses the basic similarity in methods and goals between the secret services of the Cold War rivals. They were, he claims, vital to the preservation of peace as they gave statesmen security from being taken by surprise. Not only was he therefore performing a task analogous to that of his West German counterparts in the BND¹⁴ but also, in his words, 'Our sins and mistakes were those of every other intelligence agency'.¹⁵ What Wolf conveniently downplays is that a deep-rooted insecurity pervaded the entire East German leadership class and, secondly, that a symbiotic relationship existed between beauty and the beast, that is, between his elitist foreign intelligence service and the Stasi's enormous apparatus of domestic repression. In the West, there was a clearer, though by no means sharp, differentiation between these two services – in America the CIA and FBI and in Britain MI5 and MI6. In this respect, the Stasi is closer to the KGB whose ruthless and uncompromising campaigns against real or imagined enemies at home and its centrality to the preservation of the Soviet system distinguished it from the intelligence communities of the West.¹⁶ The outcome of the Stasi's dual task of external intelligence and the ubiquitous system of surveillance and intimidation at home was an agency

¹² Knightley P. 1987: 4–7, 342.

¹³ Cited in Blum W. 1986: 9.

¹⁴ Wolf M. 1997: 342.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

¹⁶ Andrew C. and Mitrokhin V. 1999: 708–14.

many times larger than any Western intelligence or security service, including the Stasi's West German counterparts, the BND and BfV.

One of the most striking features of the Stasi was its sheer size – 91,105 full-time staff and about 176,000 informers shortly before the fall of the Berlin Wall – which, together with an elaborate system of postal and telephone monitoring, enabled the ministry to conduct an almost blanket surveillance of society. The ratio of Stasi employees to the East German population as well as the intensity of surveillance may well have been unprecedented in modern history. While the degree of monitoring and intrusion may have been exceptional, the practices were not peculiar to East Germany as the Cold War spurred the antagonists, in both the East and the West, to penetrate each other's countries as well as their own society. Yet, even the MfS has been outstripped by the electronic monitoring capability now available to modern states. At the time of writing this book, in the summer of 2002, EU governments are considering acquiring access to and storing for one year the records of personal communications, including all emails and telephone calls, a concept of universal surveillance which would have delighted the Stasi's monitors.

THE STASI RECORDS AND THE GAUCK AUTHORITY

A comparative study of the Stasi and the KGB is not easily undertaken as the Russian archives are far less accessible to scholars than the mountain of files of the former GDR agency, a comment which is also true of the classified materials relating to the BND and other Western services. After all, no security agency, or its successor, willingly divulges its innermost secrets. Access to the highly sensitive KGB materials is limited at best and sometimes reliant on money oiling the wheels of approval by the Russian authorities, and it was not until the early 1970s that the British security agencies were forced into admitting, after an elaborate cover-up, to the existence of the breaking of the German codes by Ultra and its vital contribution to the victory over the Third Reich.

The materials of the MfS are held by the *Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (BStU) in English, the Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the Former German Democratic Republic. Care must be taken in the use of the term BStU for, as the author discovered when trying to locate the site on the Internet, it is also an acronym for 'Brawny Surfed Tanned Upper Bodies' and 'Best Served with Tepid Utensils'. Luckily, the agency is known for short as the Gauck Authority after the name of its first head, Joachim Gauck, a former Lutheran pastor in Rostock-Evershagen. Although it is also referred to as the Birthler Authority after Gauck's successor, Marianne Birthler, who took office in 2000, the title of Gauck Authority or the

abbreviation BStU will be used in this book for purposes of brevity. The agency, which was set up by the Law on the Records of the Security Service of the Former German Democratic Republic promulgated by the Bundestag in December 1991, has about 3,000 employees in its Berlin and regional offices.¹⁷ As is explained in Chapter 15, the agency's functions include the provision of information relating to the prosecution of crimes, the rehabilitation of, and compensation for, victims of repression, and the historical reappraisal of the Stasi and its employees. The act thereby entitles not only public bodies and employees to check personnel but also gives individuals the right to consult their personal files.

When individuals have inspected the files compiled from information supplied by Stasi agents, many have been shocked at the details they contain about their political and social activities and their private lives, much of it trivial but some of it extremely sensitive and hurtful. Whereas one can usually live with entries on when the lights were switched off at home or when household rubbish was emptied into a bin, it is difficult to come to terms with the discovery that one's husband or brother had acted as an informer or that trusted work colleagues or members of a peace group had reported your views to their Stasi controlling officer. This was the experience of Vera Wollenberger, who discovered that her husband, Knud (codename IMB 'Donald'), had been reporting for many years not only on her activities in the peace and ecological movement but also on the details of their private life.¹⁸ Many others have found similar traces of betrayal in their files.

As far as historians are concerned, the Stasi records held by the Gauck Authority are an invaluable source for the study not only of the ministry itself but also for the broader history of the GDR.¹⁹ Given the extent of the archival holdings – the shelves would stretch for 185 kilometres – scholars are in a particularly favourable position compared to students of other secret services, even though many of the ministry's foreign intelligence files were destroyed or damaged immediately after the fall of the SED. The records held by the Gauck Authority divide into two broad groups, the administrative records and the files on individuals, albeit with considerable overlap between the two categories. The former, comprising about 20 per cent of the total holdings, cover matters such as ministry guidelines, regulations, service instructions, planning documents and statistical data. The preponderance of individual files in the overall holdings is the result of the Stasi's concern with individual persons as the primary security targets. Much of this material relates to security checks on individuals, campaigns against targets, interrogations of suspects, and the recruitment and running of informers. And not only do the records contain data on individuals and groups which are difficult to

¹⁷ *Vierter Tätigkeitsbericht* 1999: 90.

¹⁸ Wollenberger V. 1992.

¹⁹ On this topic, see Engelmann R. 1995 and Schröter U. 1995.

retrieve from other sources, such as the numbers and activities of opposition groups, but they also shed light on developments in Western countries and among the GDR's socialist allies. While the records of a secret police apparatus have to be treated with circumspection, the MfS was most anxious that surveillance reports were both accurate and relevant and, therefore, carried out a variety of checks. Spies informed on each other, blissfully unaware that they were working for the MfS. Wollenberger's husband was described by other Stasi agents as a 'negative, hostile element'. One highly contentious issue concerns individuals who were registered as informers by controlling officers without their agreement and sometimes without their knowledge. The MfS was aware of this and sought to stamp it out; investigations by the Gauck Authority have shown that cases of 'fictional informers' are rare.²⁰

The Stasi archival materials cannot be accepted unreservedly; they need to be used in conjunction with other forms of documentary information and oral testimonies. Some of the potential pitfalls in using the Stasi materials can be mentioned here. Take the example of controllers' reports on clandestine meetings, or *Treffs*, with informers. A report was based on information received, either in written or verbal form, from the agent and was thus the controller's version of what he regarded as significant from the agent's original record. Secondly, in the case of interrogation protocols, especially from the 1950s, confessions or statements may have been extracted by force or fear. Despite regular monitoring by the ministry, the accuracy of intelligence data could not be guaranteed. Its estimates of the numbers of skinheads, punks, heavy metals and so forth had inbuilt flaws as individuals were attached to highly fluid and volatile sub-cultures with which Stasi officers and informers were often unfamiliar. Furthermore, given the ideological lens through which the ministry viewed the world darkly the motives and behaviour of alleged 'hostile forces' were easily misinterpreted. One final point: in the Honecker era, the decision-making process is not easy to track as the protocols of the meetings of the leading bodies of the SED and the Stasi – the Politbüro and the Collegium respectively – tended to record decisions rather than debates, and security issues were often dealt with in private conversations between the top leaders of the SED and the MfS.

SOURCES

This book is based on a range of secondary texts, memoirs, interviews, published compilations of primary sources as well as on extensive archival materials from the Gauck Authority and, to a much lesser extent, the Matthias Domaschk Archive and the Foundation for the Parties and the Mass Organisations of the GDR (SAPMO). Most of the primary materials consulted by

²⁰ Geiger H. 1993: 66–7.

the author come under the following categories: the work of informers; the interaction between the Stasi and specific groups and areas in society such as skinheads and punks, the churches, and sport; voluntary forms of denunciation; and the ministry's assessment of popular opinion. Other areas include the internal workings of the ministry, especially the training of officers, disciplinary measures and staff grievances.

Turning to the secondary texts and other published sources which were also consulted, the origins of the Stasi are delineated by Norman Naimark (1995) as part of his stimulating study of the Russians in Germany. Three general surveys of the MfS exist in English: Childs and Popplewell (1999) provide a clear overview of Stasi activities; Wolfe (1991) produced the earliest survey in English of the Stasi and the People's Police; and Koehler (1999) offers a racy account of foreign intelligence. A fourth book in English, by Tim Garton Ash (1997), draws on materials extracted from his personal Stasi file and a series of searching interviews with former officers and spies. Those who read German can refer to the pioneering study by Karl Wilhelm Fricke (1984), which has stood the test of time remarkably well. His updated version of 1991 and Gill and Schröter's anatomy of the ministry (1991) provide a balance between interpretation and archival sources and are crucial for an understanding of the ministry's mode of operation and its mindset. Both Gill and Schröter were intimately involved in the dissolution of the Stasi in 1990 and Fricke was a victim of the Stasi, having been abducted from West Berlin in 1955. More recently, in 2001, Jens Gieseke, a researcher at the Gauck Authority, synthesised primary and secondary materials in a lucid analysis of the development and structure of the Stasi. Gieseke (2000) has also written an outstanding monograph on the social structure, the ideology, the training and the numerical expansion of the ministry's full-time staff. The ministry's own internal survey of staff numbers and of their distribution across the many departments on the eve of communism's collapse can be found in Wiedmann (1996).

The work of Gieseke, Fricke and Wiedmann is complemented by the memoirs of, and interviews with, former officers. The views and judgements of the head of foreign intelligence, Markus Wolf, are elaborated in *Man without a Face* (Wolf 1997), and the intransigence of the long-serving minister, Erich Mielke, leaps from his interview in the German weekly magazine *Der Spiegel* (31 August 1992). Interviews of varying quality with high-ranking officers can be found in Karau (1995), Wilkening (1990), Villain (1990) and Rieckert, Schwarz and Schneider (1990). One of Jean Villain's interlocutors was Wolfgang Schwanitz, the last Minister of State Security. Werner Stiller, who defected in 1979, produced an informative account of the foreign intelligence arm (HV A) and its Scientific and Technical Section several years before the demise of the GDR (Stiller 1992); Klaus Roßberg (1996) looks back at his involvement in the infiltration of the churches; and Josef Schwarz (1994) reflects on work in a regional administration. Two further memoirs, the first by Werner Großmann (2001), Wolf's successor as leader of HV A,

and the second by Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski (2000), a Stasi Officer on Special Assignment and head of the shadowy trading organisation KoKo, give little away. Mielke and Wolf have been the subject of several biographies. Wilfried Otto (2000) tracks Mielke along every stage of his career and, as befits a journalist with personal experience of the GDR, Colitt (1995) offers a lively examination of Wolf's career and personality.

As for the agents of the Stasi, Barbara Miller (1999) presents a challenging assessment of the work and motives of IMs²¹ and Müller-Enbergs (1993 and 1995b) has written a series of important essays on the motivation of informers and the explosion in their numbers. Hubertus Knabe (1999) has conducted detailed research into HV A's penetration of West German society and politics; he stresses that the issue of informers and collaboration is one shared by both West and East Germany. Not only has Müller-Enbergs (1998) undertaken a critical assessment of the Stasi's informers in the West but he also produced, in 1996, a similar documentary collection and commentary on East German informers. Both books contain the full text of all the ministerial guidelines for work with agents. Several other edited collections of documents reveal the complex and shifting nature of collaboration between the Stasi and eminent writers such as Christa Wolf and Hermann Kant and officials from various parts of the system, among them Manfred Stolpe of the Protestant churches. A highly critical assessment of Stolpe's Stasi contacts appears in Neubert (1993). A sample of documents from Christa Wolf's Stasi files was edited by Vinke (1993), Stolpe's by Reuth (1992), and Kant's by Corino (1995). Files on one of the Stasi's main victims, Reiner Kunze, are printed in *Deckname 'Lyrik'*. Reference has already been made to the case of Vera Wollenberger, whose 1992 publication *Virus der Heuchler*, containing details from her Stasi files, reveals the thoroughness and perniciousness of Stasi operations against her and her colleagues in Pankow. A comparative study of the Gestapo and the Stasi, which draws a contrast between the ways in which the two agencies gathered intelligence, has been undertaken by the American historian Robert Gellately (1996), and Herbert Reinke (1997) has located the MfS within the broader context of political policing in Germany since the early nineteenth century.

The ministry's comprehensive surveillance of society has been well researched: Vollnhals (1996a) and Besier/Wolf (1992) have scrutinised MfS relations with the churches; MfS controls over the legal system and the judiciary are examined by Vollnhals (1999) and Raschka (2000); Joachim Walther (1996) has produced an exhaustive account of the collaboration with the Stasi of so many GDR writers; and Maria Haendke-Hoppe-Arndt (1997) leaves no stone unturned in her examination of the structure and activities of Main Department XVIII in the economic sphere. The latter is part of a multi-volume handbook on the structure of the MfS compiled under the

auspices of the Gauck Authority. Other volumes in the series include Main Department II (counterespionage) and the Central Coordinating Group, which was responsible for combating flight and emigration from the GDR. The oppositional political culture, which consisted of a kaleidoscope of peace, human rights, women's and ecological groups, is the focus of many studies. Two significant works, which are also based on the perspectives of insiders, are the volume edited by Ulrike Poppe, Rainer Eckert and Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk (1995) and the account by Wolfgang Rüdtenklau (1992). The various strains of non-conformist youth culture such as skinheads and punks are investigated by Ross (2000), Süß (1996) and Michael (1999). Top-level sport, especially football and the doping of athletes, is the subject of the documentary study, *MfS und Leistungssport* (1994). Doping malpractices have been exposed by Spitzer (1998a) and Berendonk (1992).

The lines of communication between the SED and the Stasi and the difficult question of Stasi autonomy have been assessed by Fricke (1991), Suckut (1997) and Süß (1997). Despite the general pacification of society, the Stasi's intrusion into society and the deployment of multiple control mechanisms, both the SED and the Stasi imploded in the autumn of 1989. The agony of the MfS in its final year has been uncovered in a series of documents edited by Mitter and Wolle (1990), which became a bestseller immediately after publication, and in Walter Süß's impressive combination of theoretical issues with an exhaustive combing of the archives in a monograph published in 1999.

THE KEY ISSUES

What are the key issues surrounding the Stasi which will be addressed in this book? Some have already been touched upon: the ministry's relationship with the SED; the value to the historian of the Stasi records; the image of the Stasi as a ubiquitous and highly efficient intelligence-gathering agency both at home and abroad; the complexity of the interaction between society and the instruments of coercion; and the legacy of the Stasi for the political culture of contemporary Germany. In addition to exploring these issues further, the ensuing chapters will address aspects such as the motives behind collaboration with the Stasi; and the extent to which the Stasi officers constituted a cohesive and privileged elite. It is the working premise of this book that the GDR was a dictatorship of the SED party leadership and that during the later Ulbricht era and throughout the Honecker years, the system may be characterised as a post-totalitarian dictatorship. While the basic administrative command structures remained intact and the law was often flouted, the latter concept denotes the less brutal and terroristic form of rule which emerged gradually from the chrysalis of Khrushchev's deStalinisation campaigns. In contrast to the Stalinist era, compliance rather than revolutionary dynamic pervaded the system, a limited but highly contested degree of space existed

²¹ IM is the abbreviation for *Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter* – unofficial collaborator or informer.

for a parallel society, and the top leaders tended to be more bureaucratic and state-technocratic than charismatic. In view of the Stasi's role as a junior ally of the SED, the label post-totalitarian party police state might also be regarded as appropriate. This underlines the dictatorial nature of SED rule and the fact that, unlike in Poland in the 1980s, the East German secret services remained subject to the overall political and normative control of the Communist party even though their operational latitude may have been greater than is often believed.²²

After a brief survey in Chapter 1 of the origins and development of the Stasi, the discussion will focus on the years 1971–89, that is, the period when Erich Honecker presided over country and party and the Stasi was in 'full bloom'. In the early 1970s, the GDR emerged from its diplomatic isolation and appeared to be a stable member of the international community. Despite this improvement in its status and despite the protection afforded by the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, the GDR's rulers remained allergic to the 'imperialist' threat and suspicious of the loyalty of their subjects. The closer relations with West Germany following the Basic Treaty between the GDR and the FRG in 1972, the country's entry into the United Nations in the following year and the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975 stimulated popular hopes of an improvement in human rights and of a relaxation of restrictions on contacts with the West. But from the point of view of the regime, and particularly with memories of the Prague Spring of 1968 still very much alive, the new situation was seen as potentially destabilising. Hence, the Stasi was called upon to play a major role in countering the negative aspects of détente. Furthermore, as the terroristic methods of the 1950s and early 1960s were becoming increasingly inappropriate, the Stasi was also expected to carry out a multiplicity of tasks aimed at maintaining the SED system in all walks of life. Such was its apparent success in performing this function that as late as the spring of 1989 German unification appeared inconceivable. Why, despite its enormous potential for coercion, the Stasi was unable to halt the implosion of the GDR, as well as its own disintegration, will conclude the investigation into the 'firm' and the paradox of omnipotence.

Part I

THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE EAST GERMAN SECURITY SERVICE, 1945–71

²² See Chapman B. 1970: 119–21 and Los M. and Zybortowicz A. 2000: 17–18, 29–31.