



Jens Gieseke, *Mielke-Konzern. Die Geschichte der Stasi 1945-1990*

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- 1 The German Democratic Republic collapsed in 1989. But the legacy of one of its most influential institutions, the Staatssicherheitsdienst (Stasi), is still present in Germany. Jens Gieseke, who works as a historian in the so-called Stasi Archives, a federal institution who preserves the records of the East German State Security and makes them accessible, analyses the Stasi as a part of state and society in the former German Democratic Republic. The book has eight chapters, five of them concentrating on the post-Stalinist years after 1956. The author starts by describing briefly the major lines of the development and the growth of the Stasi. The introductory chapter touches briefly upon the growth of the Stasi before shifting the focus to the «Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter» (translated literally as 'inofficial cooperators'). Gieseke calls them «denunciators of a new type» (p. 108). The following chapter consists of an analysis of the Stasi's control and surveillance-system. The remaining chapters cover political opposition and resistance in the GDR and the ways the Stasi handled this opposition, and – last but not least – the activities of the East German State Security in Western Germany and in foreign countries. In the final chapter of the book, the author describes the crisis and collapse of the Stasi after October 9th, 1989. At the very end, he adds a useful annotated bibliography and some statistical information on the East German State Security.
- 2 After some incremental beginnings in the early 1950s, the Stasi became, starting in 1956, sort of an all-purpose state enterprise for securing the state's capabilities and

power for suppressing any political opposition (p. 17). In early 1956 the Stasi had 16,000 employees. The Stasi doubled its personnel every ten years until the early 1980s, reaching a maximum 91,000 full-time employees in 1989. That meant a ratio of one full-time agent Stasi for 180 inhabitants of the German Democratic Republic (p. 70). Gieseke sees the instability and the lack of acceptance of the communist regime in Eastern Germany as one of the reasons for the Growth of the Stasi, but the politics of détente in the 1970s were perceived as threatening the German Democratic Republic, resulting in increased activities of the Stasi during the last two decades of the German Democratic Republic (p. 89). The Stasi had functions far beyond those of 'traditional' political polices or intelligence agencies. There are many indicators that the Stasi penetrated deeply into many spheres of the society in Eastern Germany, although there is still a lack of studies on the social and psychological effects the Stasi had on families, on neighbourhoods and on work places.

- 3 The group of the Stasi's top officers consisted to a large extent of communist veterans. Most of them had taken exile in the Soviet Union and had returned in 1945. During the almost forty years of the Stasi's existence, the recruitment policies for filling the 'rank and file' of the state security were focused on young males from the East German working class. In the early years, the Stasi had to tackle with a high turnover rate among its members. Gieseke characterizes the many «militant class fighters» or «Tschekisten» (after Tscheka, the soviet secret police) among the Stasi officers (p. 18) as having a rigid concept of the (Western) class enemy, and as having a moderate level of education only, combining it with anti-intellectual and anti-bourgeois preferences (p. 101).
- 4 The Stasi conceptualized the class enemy, directed by Western forces, as exercising so called «political ideological diversion», which was supposed to be virtually 'everywhere'. As a consequence, the Stasi collected enormous quantities of information and material, which increasingly became unmanageable (p. 72), as the boundaries between important and unimportant information were blurred increasingly (p. 137). Comparable perceptions about 'the enemy' (coming from the East this time) and the presumed necessities to collect information about this enemy were seen as being relevant among some police groups in Western Germany in the 1970s. This issue hasn't raised much historical interest yet.
- 5 Gieseke shows that many people, especially those showing an overall loyalty to the GDR's political and economic system, supported the Stasi (p. 121). But he nevertheless underlines, when looking at the numerous denunciations that had occurred, that the willingness of ordinary people to cooperate and to denunciate wasn't as pronounced as it had been during the Nazi period. Altogether, so-called unpolitical denunciations prevailed during the GDR's period (p. 117). The family has been relatively immune in that context; information came mostly from neighbours, colleagues at work and other people those to be researched met regularly, e.g. during sports activities (p. 157 f.).
- 6 Given the size of the Stasi, it would have been interesting to analyse the factors that held such a huge organisation together. Was it mostly elitism? A look beyond the fence at the new – culturally informed – sociology of organizations could have been helpful. Moreover, a turning around of one of Jens' Gieseke's central questions could lead onto interesting interpretative grounds: Why ask only how deeply the Stasi was able to penetrate East German Society and not how deeply East German society influenced the Stasi? One could take Gieseke's study as a starting point for the social and especially for

the cultural historical research on the Stasi. Future research would benefit from a comparison with other bureaucratic institutions.

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