

## Stasi Operations in the Netherlands, 1979–89

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In the year 2000, the case of former Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who had sued the German Office of the Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the German Democratic Republic (BStU) for releasing files concerning his political activities before 1989, invoked new interest in a special category of victims and collaborators of the Stasi, East Germany's Ministry for State Security (Ministerium für Staatssicherheit—MfS). This category involved West Germans and other West Europeans who were the subject of the Stasi's *West-Arbeit* (Western operations).<sup>a1</sup>

Several studies of the *West-Arbeit* have been published. Some historians, for example, Hubertus Knabe, mentioned the possibility that 20,000 West

Germans may have been spies. Official BStU estimates are much lower, perhaps 3,500–6,000 over a period of 40 years. In 1989, 1,500 of them were still operational. These agents spied on thousands of West German companies, organizations, and citizens, including Helmut Kohl. They also worked against East Germans who were in contact with the West.<sup>b2</sup>

For the Stasi, *West-Arbeit* activities *im und nach dem Operationsgebiet* (in and directed to the target region) were organized not only in geographic terms but in political, organizational, and structural terms. With the scope of *West-Arbeit* so broadly defined, the boundaries between foreign intelligence and domestic policing could not be discerned clearly in Stasi activities.

Although most of the records of the Stasi's Main Directorate for Intelligence (the *Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung*—HVA)

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<sup>a</sup> The BStU (Die Beauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik) is responsible for preserving the records of the Stasi, which had responsibility for both external and internal security. The files on Kohl suggested he had taken bribes from major firms on behalf of his party, the Christian Democratic Union. The BStU's functions are described on its Web site, [www.bstu.bund.de](http://www.bstu.bund.de).

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<sup>b</sup> Knabe's 1999 study was reviewed by CIA historian Ben Fischer in *Studies in Intelligence* 46, no. 2 (2002). It offers a useful overview in English of East German intelligence.

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*All statements of fact, opinion, or analysis expressed in this article are those of the author. Nothing in the article should be construed as asserting or implying US government endorsement of an article's factual statements and interpretations.*

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have been destroyed, traces of the West-Arbeit can be found in “domestic” departments of the MfS. Research into this branch of activities is all the more revealing because the files of the West German intelligence and security services remain closed.

The West-Arbeit had a direct relationship to the domestic duties of the Stasi, because the enemy against whom the operations were directed could be located abroad, among foreigners, or within the GDR population itself. As can be deduced from the training manual of the Stasi, *Haß auf den Feind* (hatred of the enemy) was the organization's all encompassing idea.

Established as the counterpart and junior partner of the KGB and staffed with communist veterans like Erich Mielke, Ernst Wollweber, and Wilhelm Zaisser, the Stasi was a repressive institution from its beginnings. Because communism was considered the logical and inevitable outcome of history, shortcomings and conflicts within the system could only be caused by external factors, for example, saboteurs inspired by the great class enemy in the West.

This definition of the enemy evolved over time, but it was still in place during the *neue Ostpolitik* of 1970–72 of West-German Chancellor Willy

Brandt (1969–74). Brandt's outreach brought the GDR considerable gains: diplomatic recognition (and thus embassies) in the West, economic treaties, technological imports (microelectronics, computers), and loans.

The gains also brought new dangers: East Germany's policy of *Abgrenzung* (the ideological, political and geographical sealing off of the GDR from the West, in particular from the FRG) began to erode because of the many contacts with the West established during this period. The increased percolation through the Wall of Western influences was mirrored by the growth of the Stasi. The “shield and sword of the party” had to make up for the new openness with a major expansion of its personnel, informal agents (*inoffizielle Mitarbeiter*), and duties. At the same time, the Stasi made good use of contacts fostered by Brandt's Ostpolitik and began new offensives against the West. These were directed mainly against West Germany, but other West European countries, including the Netherlands, also were targeted.

*The Stasi's Image of the Enemy, as seen through the Netherlands*

Eva Horn (professor of German literature and the theory

of espionage) has written that “enemy images” are the backbone of intelligence services, but that these images can have negative effects on their efficiency.<sup>3</sup> With respect to Stasi operations against the Dutch, I will argue that the image of the enemy, conceived through a Marxist-Leninist perspective, drove Stasi actions with apparent success at a tactical level. Strategically, however, the Stasi actions failed to prevent the fall of the regime it was charged with protecting.

In this article, I will investigate what the MfS was after in and against the Netherlands and to what extent these operations were affected by its thinking about the enemy. Information about these operations is available in the archives of the Stasi's HVA (foreign intelligence and counterespionage) as well as its Directorate XX (internal opposition) (Hauptabteilung XX—HA XX), and HA I (military intelligence), which are maintained by the BStU.

### *Intelligence Requirements Regarding the Netherlands*

According to MfS guideline No. 1/79, the Stasi was to concentrate on the following goals:

- neutralizing and combating “political-ideological diversion”;
- gathering military intelligence;

- gathering economic intelligence;
- counterintelligence.<sup>4</sup>

Under these guidelines, at least five MfS directorates—HVA, HA XX, HA I, HA II (counterespionage), and HA XVIII (economic intelligence and security)—ran operations against the Netherlands. Research into BStU holdings reveals a broad range of topics and targets between 1979 and 1989.

HVA (foreign intelligence) files contain intelligence on:

- NATO-deployment preparations, the AFCENT-headquarters in Brunssum and the Dutch position in the INF-negotiations;
- preparations for East German communist leader Erich Honecker’s visit to the Netherlands in June 1987;
- activities of the “hostile-negative forces” in the Dutch peace movement;
- reliability of the employees of the GDR consulate and embassy in the Netherlands;
- the microelectronics program of the Philips Corporation;
- the Dutch civil and military security service (telephone numbers, organization charts, pictures);
- security-related issues, such as activities of right wing

*Humint was the Stasi’s main source for West-Arbeit in the Netherlands.*

groups, and terrorist incidents<sup>5</sup>

HA I (military intelligence) collected material on:

- military exercises of the Dutch armed forces;
- The Rotterdam harbour;

HA II and HA XVIII were interested in:

- “operational games” by the Dutch security services against the GDR embassy, consulate, and personnel;
- security issues surrounding the embassy compound.<sup>6</sup>

HA XX (internal opposition) files contain most of the more elaborate analyses found in these files. These mainly regard the:

- Dutch peace movement;
- contacts between Dutch and East German churches, peace groups, and individuals;
- political positions of the Dutch government concerning detente and the East-West conflict.

### *Intelligence Assets*

East German intelligence in the Netherlands involved the use of open sources (OSINT) and technical and human col-

lection. OSINT was easy to come by: The Stasi collected newspaper clippings, official (government) publications, and “grey” reports on GDR- or security-related issues. The MfS also made good use of articles on Dutch military and security issues published by Dutch left-wing pacifist organizations and parties. The Pacifist Political Party, the PSP, for example, exposed details of the structure and activities of the Dutch security service (the Binnenlandse Veiligheidsdienst—BVD). These were immediately analyzed and sent to Berlin.<sup>7</sup>

With respect to technical collection, little is known from the existing files. There is some evidence that the MfS made use of Dutch radio and telecommunications, including those of Dutch military radio and satellite installations in Westerbork and Eibergen.<sup>8</sup>

Humint was the Stasi’s main source for West-Arbeit in the Netherlands. Before the Dutch officially recognized the GDR in January 1973, the HVA made use of the handful of salesmen and church officials who had established contacts in the Netherlands. Because of the proximity of the two countries, these so-called headquarters operations were relatively easy to set up. According to a former Dutch intelligence officer, most of the West-Arbeit against the

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Netherlands was conducted through headquarters operations.

The agents participating in those operations could be East Germans, but sometimes they had Dutch backgrounds. According to the same Dutch intelligence officer, most East German headquarters operations used Dutch citizens who eventually were doubled by the BVD.<sup>9</sup> New Stasi files suggest this is not the case.

From 1973 on, political and economic relations also provided up-to-date information. However, the MfS was especially interested in non-governmental relations between protestant church congregations and peace groups in both countries. Around 1978, some 100 parish contacts had been established, and by 1984 the number had grown to more than 150. By then, 9,000 to 12,000 Dutch protestants and peace activists were participating in exchange programs.<sup>10</sup>

Diplomatic recognition also enabled the MfS to place at least three “legal” intelligence officers at its residentura in the embassy. Although the BVD kept the GDR embassy under strict surveillance, the MfS residentura was able to run several informal-agent operations from the embassy.<sup>11</sup> The records reveal that the following assets were recruited in the

Netherlands (through headquarters operations or by legal residents):

- Three informal agents in the Dutch-East German Friendship Association (a subdivision of the official Liga für Völkerfreundschaft)
- One informal agent and one “prospective agent” from the Horizontal Platform, a Marxist-Leninist offshoot of the Dutch Communist Party.
- Several “contact persons” (not quite “informal agents” but something less committed) inside the Stop-the-Neutron-Bomb campaign and other left wing peace groups.
- At least two informal agents not affiliated with left wing organizations, but recruited because they sought adventure or had financial needs.

The MfS was not allowed to recruit members of the official Dutch Communist Party (they could only be used as contact persons, not as informal agents). Most informal agents and other sources were nevertheless drawn into its service through their sympathy for communist ideals or through their “progressive political convictions,” as Stasi chief Erich Mielke phrased it. As late in the Cold War as September 1988, the resident was complaining about the large num-

ber of Dutch citizens who were showing up at the embassy to offer themselves to the service.<sup>12</sup>

On the whole, informal agents like these volunteers were of limited utility as sources. The members of the Friendship Association (the informal agents “Aorta,” “Arthur,” and “Ozon,” for example) or members of other GDR-affiliated organizations were either too old, unemployed, or too suspect to get anywhere near interesting military or political information. The resident came to the same conclusion: Their assets were too “leftist” and attempts to “broaden the contact scope did not produce many results,” he lamented in 1988.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Stasi “Success” Stories*

However, on at least three occasions the MfS did run successful operations over longer periods of time: on military intelligence, on the Dutch peace movement, and against a group of Dutch draft resisters with East German contacts.

#### *Military Reconnaissance—“Abruf”*

The MfS was first of all interested in political and military intelligence on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the main enemy of the Warsaw Pact. Within pact collection arrangements, the GDR was responsible for collecting intelligence concerning the areas associated with NATO Army Group North and Army Group

Central. The HVA, with 4,000 members, and the military intelligence service of the East German Army, with 2,000 members, were responsible for carrying out these operations. West Germany, Great Britain, France, the Benelux and Denmark were defined as principal objectives.

Fulfilling this aim in the Netherlands meant gathering early warning about NATO preparations and securing information about the order of battle and military dispositions. In addition to the targets listed above, HVA was also interested in Dutch military compounds and in the Schiphol and Zestienhoven airports.<sup>14</sup>

The BVD, however, proved a formidable adversary for the HVA. Intensive Dutch surveillance turned the residentura in The Hague into little more than a shelter for underemployed case officers. HVA security reports from 1984 on regularly record Stasi suspicions that the BVD was using its connections in the Dutch media to publicize acts of espionage conducted by the socialist states. Ironically, these complaints (partially justified, as we shall see) were triggered by concern in Dutch conservative circles that Warsaw Pact countries were trying to infiltrate and manipulate the country's peace movement. Politicians asked questions in Parliament, and the Home Office felt compelled to increase security measures.

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According to the MfS residentura in The Hague, the BVD conducted so many unfriendly acts of surveillance and recruiting activities against the embassy, against East German citizens in the Netherlands, and against "friendly" organizations, such as the Friendship Association GDR-Netherlands (*Vriendschapsvereniging Nederland-DDR*), that they threatened to "obstruct the positive effect of the socialist detente politics concerning disarmament questions." That is, the Stasi blamed the BVD for deteriorating East-West relations and troubled disarmament talks.<sup>15</sup>

However, at least one Dutch informal agent of the 1980s, whose codename was Abruf ("on call") was not discovered. Abruf was run by a case officer code-named Hilmar, who was a member of the legal residentura of the military intelligence department of the East German Army and worked in close cooperation with the MfS staff at the East German embassy. Hilmar had recruited Abruf in November 1983 at a meeting of the Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN) that he, as a comrade and embassy official, could legally attend.

Hilmar described Abruf as young, unemployed, unhappy with the perceived rightist policies of the Dutch government, frustrated by the NATO-modernization decision, and a

staunch supporter of communism. Hilmar played into this zeal and general disaffection with the capitalist environment and had no difficulty recruiting the young man.<sup>16</sup>

As his codename implied, Abruf was used as a freelance agent. He received instructions to photograph Rotterdam Harbor, the Schiphol and Zestienhoven airports, industrial plants in the region, and military compounds. He also collected material on NATO Exercise REFORGER in 1985. After 1985, he was told to move to Woensdrecht, a site then being prepared to receive new NATO missiles.

Abruf received payments of 100 Dutch guilders for every task he carried out. Contact with his case officer was made through dead drops and in short meetings (after long, frantic diversions and smoke screens) in crowded places, such as the Jungerhans department store in Rotterdam. To some of these rendezvous he brought his girlfriend.<sup>17</sup>

Abruf's employment ended after three years, in 1986, after an assignment in 1985 raised suspicions. In that year, he was ordered to Coevorden, Ter Apel, and Vriezenveen, where he was told to locate military depots, and to Woensdrecht, where he was to photograph the deployment site. On 25 February 1986, the BVD paid him a visit

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and asked about the trip to Vriezenveen and about his contacts with the GDR embassy. The BVD had stumbled across Abruf while they were following Hilmar. At the time, Dutch security did not seem to know much about Abruf's history and actual activities as an agent. Hilmar had already been replaced by an MfS case officer codenamed Haupt. The BVD visit alarmed both Abruf and the residentura, and the relationship was mutually terminated two days after the inquiry.

Informal agent Abruf had provided the Stasi with useful reconnaissance material on Dutch military and economic capabilities centering around the Rotterdam region. His cover was never really blown, and the BVD did not uncover his real activities. After 1989, he left the Netherlands and disappeared.

What Abruf provided was typical of the many reports on Dutch military matters, sometimes via open sources, sometimes of obscure origin, found in Stasi files. One of the showpieces is a detailed description of the organizational structure—telephone numbers included—of the intelligence department of the Dutch land forces.<sup>18</sup>

#### *The Stasi and the Dutch Peace Movement*

Files unearthed in the BStU archives also provide insight into another type of intelligence activity, covert influence operations. The Stasi focused in the late 1970s and 1980s on the Dutch peace movement and churches and invested heavily in them and selected leaders. Ironically, the East Germans would find their efforts turned against them as circumstances in Europe and the Soviet Union changed with the introduction of perestroika and other reforms in the region.

East German interest in the Dutch peace movement and its church grew out of West European and Dutch opposition to the planned modernization and expansion of NATO's intermediate range ballistic and cruise missiles in Western Europe in 1977. By the early 1980s, hundreds of thousands of Dutch people would demonstrate to attempt to force the government to postpone or cancel the deployments.

The opposition spawned new opportunities for Soviet and Warsaw Pact leaders, and the official communist World Peace Council and its suborganizations were used to wage open and covert campaigns to capitalize on the protests.<sup>19</sup> Between 1977 and 1979, the ruling East German Socialist

Party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands—SED) and the peace council were responsible, among other things, for financial and logistic support of the “Stop the Neutron Bomb” campaign—a Dutch communist front organization that cost East Berlin around 120,000 Dutch guilders (110,000 West German DM).<sup>20</sup>

In addition, the Stasi influenced the foundation Generals for Peace—a well known and respected anti-nuclear peace organization of former West European generals, with Dutch General Michiel von Meyenfeldt (former chief of the Dutch Royal Military Academy) as secretary. To support its perspectives, the Stasi gave it 100,000 West German DM annually.<sup>21</sup>

Even more potentially useful, it seemed to the Kremlin and East Berlin, was the expansion of the support base of the peace movement in the Netherlands to include churches and the Dutch Interchurch Peace Council (Interkerkelijk Vredesberaad—IKV), which had started a campaign for unilateral atomic disarmament in the Netherlands. All influential Dutch churches participated in the IKV, and the organization succeeded in mobilizing large parts of Dutch society.<sup>22</sup> East German leader Erich Honecker believed that the Dutch “religious powers” were the main cause of turning the anti-nuclear campaign into a mass movement,<sup>22</sup> and invitations

would follow to a variety of church officials to visit like-minded groups in East Germany.

However, Stasi sympathy for the Dutch peace movement started to turn sour after 1981. After Polish government repression of the independent trade union Solidarity in Poland and after exchanges with members of the Czechoslovak dissident group Charter 77, the IKV radically altered its positions and began to target not only NATO missiles but those of the Warsaw Pact and

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demanded that all member countries start dismantling nuclear missiles on their own territories rather than pointing fingers at other nations. In effect, this meant the end of a purely anti-NATO campaign.<sup>23</sup>

To make matters worse for the communists, the IKV extended its contacts with dissidents throughout Eastern Europe and declared that repression in the East was a major political cause of the arms race and not the other way around. The IKV planned

to organize a peace movement “from below” to confront both superpowers at grassroots levels.<sup>24</sup>

With its change of position, extant church contacts within the GDR became especially interesting for the IKV—and troublesome to the MfS. Most inviting was an independent peace movement that appeared in East German protestant churches in 1978 called Swords Into Plowshares (Schwerter zu Pflugscharen). The IKV followed up and sent emissaries to various peace groups in the GDR—as tourists, or under the

umbrella of church exchanges—and eventually announced the formation of a joint Peace Platform with East German dissidents in the summer of 1982.

The Stasi read about the development in a Dutch newspaper and went on red alert. Honecker himself ordered the official state Secretariat for Religious Matters (Staatssekretariat für Kirchenfragen) to exert all means of influence to eliminate these “divisive forces” (*Spalterkräfte*).<sup>25</sup>

A four-part campaign against the IKV was begun. First, the Stasi activated its church agents to force the abandonment of the platform.<sup>26</sup> Second, it started a smear campaign against the IKV. IKV Secretary Mient Jan Faber and other officials of his group were registered as persons of criminal intent.<sup>27</sup> Party and state officials, newspapers and front organizations were instructed to depict the IKV as a divisive force within the West European peace movement and Faber as an arrogant bully.<sup>28</sup> Third, Faber himself was barred from entering the GDR.<sup>29</sup> And finally, the existing contacts between Dutch reformed parishes and East German congregations were threatened. The Dutch working group within the East German churches was told that the obstructions were caused by the state’s misgivings about the IKV. Several visits of Dutch



A leaflet of the IKV illustrating the cooperation between it and East German and Hungarian organizations.



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delegations to East Germany and vice versa were cancelled.<sup>30</sup>

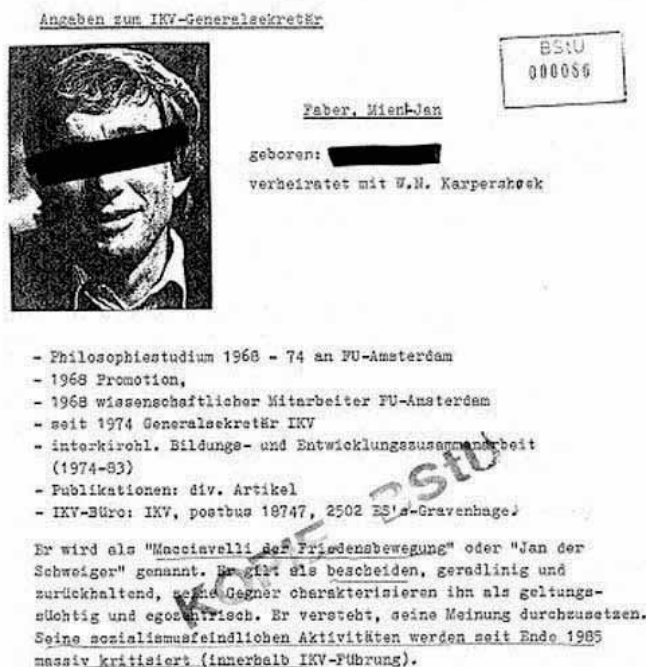
These measures were informed by the strategy of “differentiation” (*Differenzierung*), which was a very subtle method of alienating “divisive” and negative elements from their own base.<sup>31</sup> The Stasi sorted out which IKV and church members disliked Faber and invited them to East Berlin. It succeeded in manipulating the president of the IKV and reformed church official Jan van Putten, General von Meyenfeldt—he was also an advisor to the Reformed Churches

in the Netherlands and a board member of the IKV—and lower-ranking IKV members.<sup>32</sup> IKV officials, Dutch church groups and journalists were led to believe that the IKV’s secretary was no longer in favour in East Europe or with the Protestant churches in the GDR.<sup>33</sup>

In line with this strategy, the Stasi also tried to recruit agents in the Netherlands. IKV Secretary Janneke Houdijk, IKV’s coordinator for East Germany, was approached—in vain. She did not recognise the attempts for what they were and remained loyal to Faber.<sup>34</sup>

In the end, however, the efforts bore fruit. East-German churches detached themselves from their IKV contacts and froze most exchange activities. In the Netherlands, many Dutch church leaders and local groups were convinced that Faber was a threat to stability and East-West relations.<sup>35</sup> Faber was threatened with dismissal. Local IKV groups and parishes sent angry letters to IKV headquarters and demanded that Faber stop meddling in internal East German affairs, let alone lead a campaign for human rights.<sup>36</sup> The envisaged Peace Platform never came into being, frustrated in advance by the Stasi, which was helped, knowingly or unknowingly, by Dutch and East German church leaders.

Ironically, after Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in the Soviet Union, Marxist-Leninist enmity towards a democratization approach faded away. The new leadership in the Kremlin even developed sympathy for it, and, in 1988, Faber and British peace activist Mary Kaldor were invited to Moscow to observe the dismantling of SS-20 rockets. The same year, an IKV delegation visited Moscow, invited by the Kremlin itself.<sup>37</sup> The GDR, however, stuck to its rigid policy. The Stasi was appalled by the tolerance of Soviet communists toward Dutch peace activists and did not adapt itself to the new liberalism. Indeed, it continued the struggle against the IKV and even started a new action



A page from the file of Mient Jan Faber.



against it in 1988. Operations were only aborted after the Berlin Wall came down in November 1989.

*Operation "Bicycle Tour"*

Groups other than the IKV tried to establish exchange programs with East German peace activists, and in doing so generated a Stasi response that illustrates the entanglement of foreign and domestic intelligence activity in East Germany. In 1981, a group of draft resisters from the northern Dutch city of Groningen founded an organization called the Peace Shop (Vredeswinkel). The entity functioned as a communication centre for peace activists from the region. Through existing church contacts and the War Resisters International, the leaders soon contacted a construction branch of the East German army known as the Bausoldaten, that had since 1964 been offering the possibility of completing obligatory military service not with arms but with the spade. This alternative had been provided at the urging of East German protestant churches, which represented about 45 percent of the GDR's population.

As a grass roots organization, the Peace Shop organized bicycle tours through East Germany as a joint venture of Dutch, East German, and, when possible, Czechoslovak and Polish conscientious objectors. The Dutch entered the GDR as private visitors, gathered at prearranged addresses, and, with East Germans, cycled to rural parts of the GDR and

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discussed world politics and disarmament initiatives.<sup>38</sup>

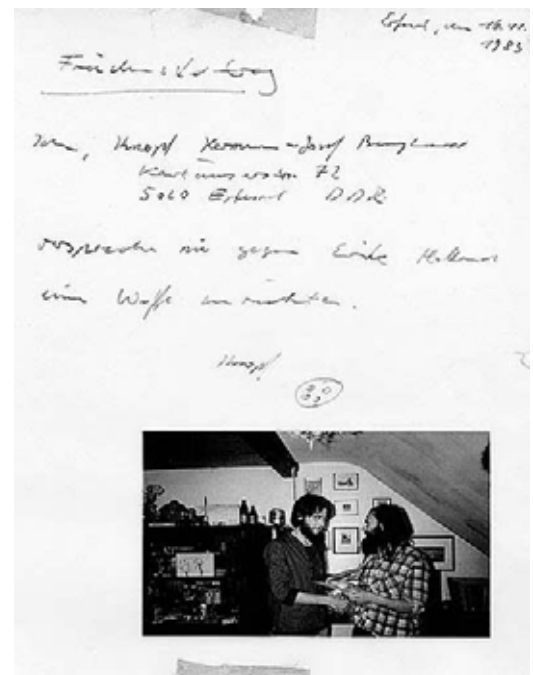
In 1985, IKV Secretary Faber and East German Vicar Rainer Eppelmann (a prominent figure in the East German opposition scene) concluded a personal contract to work together for peace. Many participants in the Groningen-GDR exchange decided to do the same and committed themselves to not using violence against each other in case of a war. According to the signatories, in doing this, they contributed to "detente from below."<sup>39</sup>

Although their activities were relatively low-profile and not aimed at threatening the GDR system, the cycle tours were betrayed by their own success as the Stasi got wind of them. Large international groups peddling, for example, from Karl Marx City (Chemnitz) to Stralsund, could not stay unnoticed, especially after their frequency increased to three or four times a year.

Veterans of the Bausoldaten were suspect to begin with in the eyes of the MfS, especially when they organized meetings with other Bausoldaten and Western draft resisters. Indeed, the Stasi had been carrying out opera-

tions against the idea of "social peace service" as an alternative to military service since at least 1981.<sup>40</sup> (Vicar Eppelmann, in fact, had been a leader in the "social peace service" effort.)

HA XX, the department charged with dealing with the churches and opposition circles, learned that Dutch participants planned to publish stories about their bicycle tours and experiences in the GDR in Dutch church and peace magazines, and, in 1984, Peace Shop members initiated a letter campaign on behalf of Amnesty International for the release of arrested East German dissidents.<sup>41</sup>



A member of the Peace Shop in Groningen and an East German dissident exchange personal peace treaties.

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Such activity fit perfectly in the communist vision of class enemies conspiring from outside the system to create domestic unrest, and the bicycle tours thus became objects of intensive surveillance. In 1983, the Stasi started several *Operative Vorgänge* (intelligence operations aimed at arresting dissidents) against former Bau-soldaten who had participated in the tours. HA XX recruited several East Germans as informal agents “mit Feindkontakt” (in contact with the enemy), who reported on all the meetings and preparations.<sup>42</sup>

Although bicycle tour participants kept their distance from IKV officials, HA XX and the HVA nevertheless increasingly suspected them of being partners of the IKV and executors of the IKV’s grand strategy of developing a “pseudopacifist, bloc-transcending peace movement.” By way of confirmation of this, one Stasi report quotes a Dutch activist as saying “When there are no soldiers on both sides, there will be no weapons used.”<sup>43</sup>

In the belief that the Peace Shop was helping dissidents, the Stasi was not mistaken. The activists had indeed given their East German contacts a typewriter and helped finance Bausoldaten activities with 2,000 Dutch guilders.

With growing Dutch contacts in the so-called Political Under-

ground Forces (*Politische Untergrundtätigkeit*—PUT), which the East German authorities saw as a threat to communist rule, increased international pressure on the GDR, and a perceived potential for embarrassment during Erich Honecker’s planned June 1987 visit to the Netherlands, the MfS tried to obstruct and manipulate cross-border exchanges. HA XX began an Operativer Vorgang against the Dutch organizer of the bicycle tours, Bert Noppers, who was described as the *inspirator* and *organisator* of the PUT tours.

As part of its attack on Noppers, HA XX used a letter from Noppers to an East German friend in which he wrote that Dutch intelligence had tried to

recruit him in 1983 to report on his East German contacts. Although Noppers stated in his letter that he refused, the HA immediately listed him as a probable foreign intelligence agent. It then attempted to collect evidence to indict Noppers for hostile agitation against the East German state and for disseminating information to foreign intelligence agencies or other foreign organizations to discredit the GDR. If convicted, he faced two to 12 years of imprisonment.<sup>44</sup>

Notwithstanding such threats, the Peace Shop organized a protest against East German border controls in 1987, building a model Berlin Wall of cardboard boxes through Groningen and drawing media attention to the condition of their dissident friends in the GDR. Although the peace



Demonstrators by a cardboard “Berlin Wall” built through Groningen in 1987.

activists also criticized the West European and Dutch contribution to the armaments race, these acts had no impact on the activities of HA XX.<sup>45</sup>

Stepped-up HA XX activities included the recruitment as informal agents of three GDR participants in the Peace Shop exchanges. Codenamed Karlheinz, Betty, and Romeo, they reported all of their activities to HA XX. Romeo was sent abroad to visit the Peace Shop in Groningen in July 1988. However, the department could not find enough evidence to prosecute the East German participants or arrest the Dutch organizer.

Even by the standards of the East German Penal Code, the activists were just not subversive enough. The Dutch activists did not advocate open criticism or revolution. As Noppers put it during an interview in 2006, "If the East Germans wanted to topple the regime, they had to do it by themselves. We came from abroad and did not want to tell them what to do. And although we were no friends of communism, we had enough criticism to pass on capitalism and materialism at home."<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the East German government did not want the MfS to make random arrests, since that would cause too much damage to the economic and political relations the GDR had established by then.

Nevertheless, MfS surveillance continued. HA XX ordered



The Peace Shop, on the corner, in Groningen.

continuation of the operations against Noppers, inspired by the same suspicions against the Dutch activist.<sup>47</sup> Although the MfS knew that Moscow had shifted policies and now aimed at cooperation with the IKV and other West European peace organisations, HA XX was still plotting in April 1989 to use intercepted inquiries by the Peace Shop to members of the East German network to recruit more informal agents.<sup>48</sup>

Only in October 1989 were the Operativer Vorgänge against the East German Bausoldaten and against Noppers called off. They ended partly because of a lack of evidence and partly because the Stasi had already begun cleaning up its files in the face of growing unrest and pending revolution. On 24 November 1989,

15 days after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Stasi finally closed its files on Noppers.<sup>49</sup>

#### *In Sum: Tactical Gains, Strategic Loss*

During the last decade of its existence, the MfS was successful in tactical terms. It succeeded in running one operation to collect military intelligence, managed to infiltrate and manipulate most IKV contacts in the GDR, penetrated the Peace Shop, and started an Operativ Vorgang against the Dutch coordinator of East European peace tours. Moreover, there is reason to believe that the MfS employed more Dutch informal agents in the 1980s than are discussed here but whose records remain undiscovered.

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*During its last decade, the MfS had tactical success. Strategically, however, it failed to preserve the security of the GDR*

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In the overall, strategic setting, however, the Ministry of State Security failed in its mission to preserve the security of the GDR.

- First, by entangling its foreign intelligence operations with domestic security interests, the Stasi focused on the foreign inspiration of domestic opposition at the expense of understanding that dissent in the GDR drew on the system's own economic, social, military, and political weaknesses and the government's abuses of its population.
- Second, the MfS itself became part of the problem instead of part of the solution, as the expansion of the security apparatus from the 1970s on acted as a driver for even more protests.
- Third, activities of the IKV and other Dutch peace initiatives like the Peace Shop were blown up out of proportion, and those in the GDR who were in touch with them were deemed to be guilty of high treason. In this intellectual strait-jacket, the Stasi was

blinded to useful insights and could not see that the Dutch movements gave the Soviet bloc opportunities to exploit genuine divisions in NATO.

- Finally, when the Stasi got it right, it could not persuade its leadership. In May 1987, the HVA issued a study of Dutch foreign and military policies before Honecker's state visit to the Netherlands. The analysis precisely listed the deviations of Dutch politics from the US and NATO lines. (The Dutch denounced SDI, favoured a nuclear test ban and prolongation of the ABM treaty.) Honecker, however, made no effort to play into these differences and only uttered the usual clichés about peace-loving socialist countries. To him, the Netherlands remained part and parcel of the imperialist block.<sup>50</sup> Painfully collected and sound intelligence was made useless by incapable and ideologically deformed party leaders.



### *Endnotes*

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11. RoD Den Haag, "Fortschreibung der Sicherheitanalyse zur RoD im Ausbildungsjahr 1987/1988," 11 November 1988. BStU HA I, 1682: 7–10.

12. HA I 1682, S. 11.

13. RoD Den Haag, "Fortschreibung der Sicherheitanalyse zur RoD im Ausbildungsjahr 1987/1988," 11 November 1988. BStU HA I, 1682: 7–10.

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