

The Stasi's Willing Collaborators

By LUCY KOMISAR

BERLIN—Guenter Krusche is a stocky, avuncular man who used to be the Lutheran superintendent for East Berlin. I had interviewed him in 1985 at his church, which that day was hosting a "peace fair," a gathering of East German dissidents who sought protection of the church against harassment and arrest by the Stasi, East Germany's state security police.

I returned to see him this fall, because my own Stasi file, which I had just obtained, described my 1985 visit. I showed him the file, which included pictures of me at the peace fair. The Stasi had summarized my trip under the heading: "On the negative-enemy activities of the American citizen Lucy Komisar in association with underground persons of the GDR."

'Unofficial Collaborator'

Suddenly, Mr. Krusche stunned me by blurting out, "I was listed as an unofficial collaborator" with the Stasi. Later I learned that when that had been made public a few years ago, the activists who had met in his church had denounced him. A few days after that, his daughter had committed suicide. Mr. Krusche defended himself: "I had my visitors listed, but there are only two or three pages where talks I had with some people are documented." The rest of our afternoon was given over to a discussion of the moral justification for the collaboration of some churchmen with the East German secret police.

In 1990, the year after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Stasi files were opened up; any German can go to an office in Berlin and examine his. The millions of pages of files are still rolling German society. One ex-dissident has set up a library and research center to index activists' Stasi papers; another, who declined to see the thousands of pages about herself, said she wasn't about to spend the second half of her life reading about the first half. Sascha Anderson, a dissident poet who turned out to be an informer, is now stunned by the eastern literati. But some leftist intellectuals from western Germany, many still Marxists, don't want to talk about or publish the political criticisms of the former dissidents.

The church, once thought to be an ethical touchstone, turns out to have played a morally ambiguous role. Though some ministers were dissidents, others seemed to straddle the line between protecting dissidents and dealing with the Stasi to protect their own interests.

"After the wall was built," explained Mr. Krusche, "the church confronted the question: We live here and God is here; we are the church in socialism, and we do the best we can. They weren't easy years." There were practical matters: "If you wanted a passport, you had to talk with people." Mr. Krusche argues that to offer support and refuge for dissidents as well as to get greater freedom for the church, the church needed contacts with the government—and that meant talking to the

Stasi. And Mr. Krusche added: "The Western government worked with the East, but nobody is touching this. The files which contain these points are secret."

Dissidents, however, say some church leaders lacked courage. "Krusche could have talked to Stasi, but not reported on people," said Rainer Eppelmann, a leading dissident in East German times and now a member of parliament from the conservative Christian Democratic party. A short man with a beard and mustache, Mr. Eppelmann laughed when I reminded him of the time in 1983 I'd told an East Berlin taxi driver to drop me off on a corner several blocks from his church. "Oh, you're going to see Pastor Eppelmann!" the driver had smirked. After unification, Mr. Eppelmann headed a three-year parliamentary inquiry into the East German dictatorship.

Mr. Anderson, the poet-informer, had been a sweet young man, a musician with long, blond hair. He was one of the first dissidents I'd met in East Berlin in 1983. In

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a cafe in the old, slightly bohemian neighborhood of Prenzlauer Berg, where many dissidents still live, he flipped through my files. He pointed to the report written by a Fritz Mueller and declared, "That is me! I was an unofficial collaborator." He read on: "You went to a peace meeting, you were identified as a foreigner, then the Stasi followed you. From the beginning of your trip, you were quickly observed." Mr. Anderson showed no emotion as he sipped his espresso.

"Why did you report on me?" I asked.

It appeared to have had nothing to do with ideology or the Cold War. "I had been in jail," he shrugged. "I had to find a way to exist. I reported by telephone once a month for 20 years. Everyone has his own story." In telling his story, Mr. Anderson gropes for some sort of explanation of his actions: "My grandmother was from Russia," he noted, as if this meant something. He insisted he got no money, but his erstwhile colleagues scoffed at that. He added, defensively, "But I didn't tell them what you said."

The church and dissident informers were willing collaborators used by the Stasi in the battle against dissent. And Western journalists were used by both sides. The dissidents used them for protection. Werner Fischer, who recognized his lanky form in a photo of the church peace fair, was fired from his theater job after he joined the peace movement; he earned a living making pottery. "We wanted the State Security to know we had

contacts," he told me. "They were protection. The Stasi knew that if something happened to us, the news would go throughout the world. But we always worried that you might not be able to come in." Indeed, after my early visits, I was banned.

Some Western journalists, in order to keep getting visas, shied away from reporting too much about the dissidents. Lutz Rathenow, a prominent East German writer who was part of both the literary and political dissident movements, explained that East Germany let in journalists it thought it could influence. Those who wanted visas had to "play by the rules" and not pay too much attention to dissidents. It was worse, he said, for anyone who also had contact with government opponents from other East European countries.

The moral issues raised by the Stasi files, though detailed in the press, have been generally ignored by political leaders, the church, and the public. "Krusche wasn't criticized by the Church," Mr. Eppelmann noted. "He was part of the establishment."

Many eastern Germans seem to view the East German political drama as a morality tale, featuring in lead roles the Stasi, the dissidents, the informers, the churchmen who made deals and the journalists who pulled punches. Most East Germans were either bit players or spectators, the latter perhaps not applauding loudly but certainly not booing.

Too Forgiving

Christophe Buch, a western German writer, says the public has been far too forgiving of Stasi criminals. "Markus Wolf, who ran foreign intelligence, is called 'the charming, cultivated Stasi,'" Mr. Buch told me. "He is witty and funny, but he sent people to jail and had them tortured. Now he appears on TV talk shows and speaks about Russian recipes."

"People don't want to know any more about it," Mr. Fischer said. "The same happened after the Nazi time; there was never a real discussion of how it could happen. Was our silence partly to blame for the system? I don't know if it's typically German, but in the Nazi time and in East Germany, the majority was silent."

When I asked Mr. Krusche if the Stasi revelations raised moral questions for churchmen, I was surprised when he also brought up the failure to deal with German accommodation to the Nazis. "In East Germany it was always said we are the antifascist country, and therefore we don't need any discussion about this," he said. "One of the problems is that we never had a discussion of civil courage."

Calls to close the files now come from people on both sides of the old border. Perhaps that is why Sascha Anderson seemed so unperturbed. "Politics today is economic politics," he told me. "I don't know a country where the priority is their history."

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