

Kingshott School, Hitchin

What Effect did the Stasi have on East and West Berliners?

By Harry Crossley

What Effect did the Stasi have on East and West Berliners?

By Harry Crossley

During the 28-year period of the rise of the Berlin Wall and the separation of the two halves of Berlin, a new style of life was introduced to citizens living either side of this wall. On one side, the everyday life of a jubilant Allied rule, on the other side, the forceful control of Stalin's secret army that in many cases ruined lives. Over this period, the Stasi, who for most of the time during the wall was led by Erich Mielke was killed up to 80 000 people in the east of Berlin, either by starvation, forced labour or execution. On either side of Berlin, the wall and the Stasi behind it had a huge impact on the lives of the many civilians that occupied Berlin at the time and after.

As tensions grew between the Soviets and the allied forces who occupied west Berlin, the Russians made new laws and sanctions on east Berlin, and forced millions to flee to the west (controlled by the French, British and Americans). Before the wall, 2.1 million fled to West Berlin from the East between 1949 and 1961. In West Berlin, they were allowed a lot more lenient living conditions and there were many more opportunities to be found in the west, this could economically damage the Russians system. So, the Russians decided to take a physical change, preventing anyone in East Berlin from travelling into the west, consisting of the allied rule.

On August the 3rd 1961, a concrete wall separated Berlin into two separate parts. The west, controlled by the allied forces, and the east, ruled by Stalin and Soviet Russia. The wall went up overnight, separating families and forcing its way through the houses that lay in its path. It divided neighbours and families and meant many people in the east lost their jobs if they were on the other side of the new divide. The east was an area ruled by propaganda, and fear as well as the Stasi who terrified all those East Berliners with their horrifying labour camps and incredibly harsh laws, restricting rations and cracking down on security with occasional executions. Nobody was willing to confront the Stasi. As soon as the wall went up life changed for all those on both sides of the wall and immediately the Stasi, (ministry for state security) gained control, with their elaborate, hundred-page documents that described every individual in East Berlin and demonstrated their control over one's identity. Nothing

was kept from the brutal Stasi. They took over control with their harsh communism and chilling force and demeanour not forgetting their ties to the Russian government. They could manipulate an individual to do anything they pleased with the right information and turn them into informers, who could seek information from any plots going on to try and escape east Berlin in the early stages.

Gradually, the Stasi' influence grew, as they rapidly increased the security along the border. They added land mines, patrol dogs, watch towers with the guards instructed to shoot anyone attempting to escape the east. This grew massively over the years with over 100 people losing their lives (1961-1989) trying to cross the border. The Stasi terrified the East Berliners and rumour in the west dissuaded most from trying to help others across the wall.

As time went on the citizens in the east starved and people became more desperate to escape. But still the Stasi kept improving all forms of security and had guards at every post, prowling the border. Their control over the east was imminent and forceful. Crossing the border was almost impossible and virtually nothing could be done to significantly help in the west. In the west, the city had been split into three different regions ruled by the British, France and the US.

At this time, the Stasi employed up to 85 000 officers full time, monitoring up to one third of the east Berlin and establishing a network of treacherous informers who were among regular citizens employed by the Stasi to find out any plot to escape and any form of espionage whatsoever. Within East Germany it sought to infiltrate every institution of society and every aspect of daily life, including even intimate personal and family relationships. It accomplished this goal both through a vast network of the informants and unofficial collaborators, who spied on colleagues, friends, neighbours, and even family members.

Their impact was enormous to East Berlin and separated many families overnight causing widespread devastation and immediate communist rule in the east. All individuals in the east had no right of speech and were powerless against the rising security and force of the Stasi. What they said went and there was no hesitation. Everyday life was very much ruled and affected by the Stasi rule and education was largely effected. Food was expensive and scarce and even some pregnant women

became desperate and tried to escape but were shot with no mercy. The economy was depressed and east berlin was suffering from the lack of so many educated individuals.

The Stasi also made a pervasive footprint in west berlin and one of the several objectives of the Stasi was operations in West Berlin and even West Germany as a whole, was to obtain information on politicians, parties and government officials dealing with East German affairs. They also managed to penetrate West Germany's governing circle and military intelligence via various informers inside West Berlin. The secret police were becoming increasingly feared by the west and the east because of their many forms of intelligence. On only one person the Stasi could possess many pages of information on them, and always had the power of knowledge over their enemy's. The Stasi listened to telephone calls in the west and were adamant that they would possess all information from their enemy's and prevent any kind of opposition. there were 25 of these monitoring stations in east berlin, and captured between four to six hundred of these calls daily. This affected West Berliners and showed there was no hiding from the notorious Stasi whether in the east or the west, they seemed to control Berlin as a whole with their strong presence throughout Germany. In total they kept files on 5.6 million people.

During their control, the Stasi became incredibly effective at mental torture and interrogations which was something they had aspired to. it was one of their many skills that terrified all they captured and interrogated. Often officers used to be in interviews with the prisoners for up to twelve hours at a time, all recorded and filed, maybe then taking a half an hour break until continuing to be drilled with intense questions by the steel faced interrogator, they usually asking the same questions over and over again, almost forcing their captives to go mad. They used this on any person under questioning no matter who they were. They managed to sneak their way into every man's mind and force them into spilling the needed information that the Stasi were intent on getting. In total, the Stasi had over ten thousand official files based on citizens of berlin and other influential individuals. Some innocent people found themselves in jail for no reason, as maybe their neighbour could have reported a false story. Some inmates were made to stand in ice cold water for up to 24 hours at a time.

And when the water warmed with the person's body heat, the Stasi would replace it with more ice-cold water just so the prisoner would suffer.

The Stasi was under the leadership of Erich Mielke, and foreign espionage was directed under Markus Wolf who in 1974 accessed and exposed west Berlin's inner circle of the government military and intelligence services, Günter Guillaume, who was an official in west Berlin, was discovered as an east German spy, in the inner circle of the government. This forced the chancellor, Willy Brandt to resign as a result. This showed the fearful and significant grip and even control, that the Stasi had on west Berlin. They were infiltrating groups and blackmailed and disturbed dissidents in any way possible. The Stasi wanted to know in advance what west Germany were planning and doing all together. Many officials and west Berliners were under surveillance and many were abducted. This became common place for the Stasi before and during the wall. One of these were, Heinz Brandt, drugged and taken from his home in an organised assault led by the Stasi.

In East Berlin, the conditions were bad. Many had died as a cause of starvation and even execution, some also died in the labour camps outside Berlin or whilst captive of the Stasi and during interrogation. The hatred for the Stasi grew as more people attempted to escape the control of the Stasi and flee or be smuggled into the west with some daring attempts like Tunnel 57. Tunnel 57 was the most successful attempt to smuggle east Berliners into the west via a tunnel stretching 1036 meters, from an old bakery in the west, under the wall to a cottage in the east. This plan was organised and executed numerous times after many different attempts of the tunnel itself led by a group of escaped students imminent on the escape of family and friends. Joachim Neumann was the man who sacrificed and risked so much to carry out the operation, desperate for money to carry out the tunnel, were funded and filmed, secretly by an American TV company, NBC. At first attempt, the tunnel hit a pipe and flooded, and at second a Stasi informer fed the plans to the Stasi leading to arrest of the refugees. In the end, the tunnel was a success managing to escape 57 people (hence the name) despite the many setbacks and failures as well as the intense force, security and control of the Stasi in the east and the terror of the wall in the west. They defied all odds to carry out this feat successfully.

When the wall came down in 1989 the damage was already done but still huge relief fell over Berlin. The Stasi collapsed and the wall was torn from its roots as a final act of freedom and Berlin was united. Most of the east were thoroughly malnourished. Life was improved in East Berlin from then and was led by Germany's own government. German will never forget that era of mass surveillance and terror, but indeed the Stasi immensely affected daily life on both sides (especially the east) of the Berlin wall. It changed the lives of so many people and will never be forgotten.

Word count: 1,808

Bibliography

- BBC Bitesize
- Britannica.com
- Yahoo
- Google
- History.com
- Wikipedia
- Access to records BStU
- Telegraph

Books

- Britannica Concise Encyclopaedia
- Stasiland
- Stasi the untold story

