Anglo/GDR Relations and the Role of Christian Idealism in Cold War Politics
1961-1965: A Case Study of the Coventry/Dresden Project

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ABSTRACT

This study is an examination of the interaction between Anglo/GDR relations and GDR Church/state relations during the first half of the 1960s. Using the Coventry/Dresden project of Christian reconciliation as a case study, it analyses the manner in which the governments of both countries exploited the concept of Christian/Marxist dialogue in order to create a climate of co-operation within the GDR which would, in the short term, ensure the stability of the regime.

In particular, this study examines the activities of Christian organisations such as the British Council of Churches and Coventry Cathedral in Britain, Aktion Sühnezeichen (an organisation founded to atone for Nazi war crimes) in the GDR, and the Evangelische Akademie in West Berlin. It sets these activities in the context of Anglo/GDR official bilateral relations, particularly the West's policy of non-recognition of the GDR; GDR Church/state relations; and Ulbricht's period of domestic liberalisation between 1963 and 1965. In the context of the Coventry/Dresden project of reconciliation, special attention is paid to Church/state relations in the diocese of Saxony, and to Anglo/GDR relations at the regional level of city partnerships.

Based on the premise that the Cold War was primarily an intelligence war, the study demonstrates the manner in which the intelligence services of both countries operated within the context of domestic and foreign policy decisions. Two major conclusions are drawn. First, that contrary to official British foreign policy the British sought to prop up the Ulbricht regime in order to preserve peace and stability in Central Europe, and that the Coventry/Dresden project was secretly used for this purpose. Second, that dissident GDR Church leaders were encouraged to find an accommodation with the atheist regime not only by their colleagues in Britain but also by West German Church leaders who were in the vanguard of Ostpolitik.
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### ABBREVIATIONS and GERMAN TERMS

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADN</td>
<td>Allgemeine Deutsche Nachrichtenagentur (GDR news agency)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ATO</td>
<td>Allied Travel Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCC</td>
<td>British Council of Churches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bezirk</td>
<td>Regional administrative area in the GDR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BfV</td>
<td>Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (West German internal security service)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BND</td>
<td>Bundesnachrichtendienst (West German foreign intelligence service)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCIU</td>
<td>Coventry Committee for International Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDU</td>
<td>Christlich-Demokratische Union (Christian Democrat Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIA</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Agency (US foreign intelligence service)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CND</td>
<td>Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPC</td>
<td>Christian Peace Conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DNB</td>
<td>Deutsche Notenbank (GDR currency before 1964)</td>
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<tr>
<td>EKD</td>
<td>Evangelische Kirche Deutschland (Protestant Church of Germany)</td>
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<tr>
<td>EKU</td>
<td>Evangelische Kirche der Union (administrative body of some GDR diocese)</td>
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<tr>
<td>epd</td>
<td>Evangelische Pressedienst (Protestant Press Agency)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EWRAC</td>
<td>East/West Relations Advisory Committee of the BCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GESW</td>
<td>Gesamteuropäischen Studienwerk (West German European study centre)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GI</td>
<td>Geheimer Informator (pre-1960s term for a Stasi informer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hauskreis</td>
<td>Name given to small underground groups connected to the Evangelische Akademie in West Berlin</td>
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<tr>
<td>HVA</td>
<td>Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung (foreign intelligence department of the Stasi)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<td>--------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>IM</td>
<td>Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter (<em>Stasi</em> term for an informer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirchenfragen</td>
<td>Church affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>kommunale</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Auslandsverbindungen</td>
<td>International contacts at local government level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPD</td>
<td>Kommunistischer Partei Deutschlands (German Communist Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landeskirche</td>
<td>Diocese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legende</td>
<td><em>Stasi</em> cover story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDN</td>
<td>Mark der Deutschen Notenbank (GDR currency after 1964)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MfAA</td>
<td>Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MfS</td>
<td>Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (Stasi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI6</td>
<td>British foreign intelligence service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSDAP</td>
<td>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (Nazi Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oberbürgermeister</td>
<td>Lord Mayor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OKR</td>
<td>Oberkirchenrat (German Protestant Church title)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Sicherheitsdienst (Nazi security service)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SED</td>
<td>Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschland (Socialist Unity Party of Germany)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>StK</td>
<td>Staatssekretariat für Kirchenfragen (Department of State for Church Affairs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPD</td>
<td>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (West German Social Democrat Party)</td>
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<tr>
<td>TTD</td>
<td>Temporary Travel Document</td>
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Case Study

On 16 March 1965, a group of young British volunteers and their leaders crossed through the Berlin Wall on their way to Dresden in the German Democratic Republic to take part in a project of international reconciliation. The project had been organised in Britain by Coventry Cathedral and, in particular, by its Provost, the Very Reverend H C N Williams (universally known as Bill). The aim was to help with the rebuilding of a wing of the Dresden Diakonissenkrankenhaus, a hospital which had been badly damaged during the British and US bombing raid of February 1945. The hospital was run by an order of sisters belonging to the Evangelische Kirche, the German Protestant Church. The organisation which acted in partnership with Coventry Cathedral in helping to bring the project to fruition was called Aktion Sühnezeichen. This was an all-German Christian organisation which had been founded to enable Germans to atone for Nazi war crimes.

The project was scheduled to last until September 1965 and be resumed the following year. Its aim was to restore a section of the hospital in order to provide an outpatients clinic and 30 to 40 beds, in addition to the 175 beds which were already in use. The first party to set out from Britain consisted of 15 students from Cambridge University together with their leader, the Reverend John Alleyne, the chaplain of Clare College, Cambridge and a friend and former colleague of the Provost, as well as five other volunteers and the overall group leader, a young curate from Rugby, the Reverend Martin Turner. The Cambridge students stayed for about three weeks, their role being to get the project off to a good start. The other volunteers stayed for varying amounts of time. Some, such as Mike Carmody and Allan Swales, worked in Dresden, together with Turner, for the whole seven-month period. Another seven people arrived in June and stayed until September and, in total,
31 people from Britain took part in the project during 1965. The British volunteers were joined during the course of the project by a total of about 100 young East German Christians from all parts of the country. Most came for two or three weeks but three stayed for the entire period.

The British volunteers were commissioned at a special service held in Coventry Cathedral on 14 March 1965. They then travelled by train through West Germany and the GDR to West Berlin where they spent the night before crossing into East Berlin. It was a journey into the unknown. The cathedral issued the party with three pages of advice on practical matters, such as the changing of currency. It was suggested that each person might like to take a gift of ground coffee, in short supply in the GDR at that time. The volunteers were warned that Western newspapers were not usually allowed into the GDR and that this was strictly controlled. A small number of books for personal use would be permitted. The cathedral was also at that time trying to obtain permission for the weekly edition of the Guardian to be sent out to the group, a request which was eventually granted.

Most of the volunteers were young men aged between 18 and 25. They slept in a dormitory that had been built in the tower of the Dreikönigskirche, a Dresden church which had been destroyed during the 1945 bombing raid and which was, in 1965, still a ruin. The tower had remained intact and was specially reconstructed in order to house the volunteers. Much of Dresden was still in ruins and accommodation was scarce. The girls slept at the hospital. Meals and all other facilities were provided by the sisters in what was known as the Motherhouse.

The main task of the volunteers was to remove the mountain of rubble which had lain untouched at the hospital since 1945. During the 20 years which had passed, young trees had established themselves in the debris. This work was mostly done with pickaxe and shovel, there being no machinery available for the task. The rubble was shovelled onto a conveyer belt and removed by an ancient lorry. The volunteers also salvaged undamaged bricks and cleaned them for use in rebuilding. They worked under the direction of a professional East German foreman.
The British volunteers were greeted in Dresden with surprise and delight. Turner wrote: 'The reception we received in Dresden was terrific. Everyone seemed to have heard of our coming and everyone seemed to welcome it. The State put no obstacles in our way and gave us visas for the whole of East Germany - a rare privilege for visitors from the west, which we used to the full.' But Turner was also aware of the potential dangers involved in leading a disparate group of young British people to a country which was not recognised by Britain and where there would be no diplomatic help available if things should go wrong. A mathematics graduate from Cambridge, he had done his National Service in the army and had been based in West Berlin. He was aware of the tensions that existed in the divided city. He has recalled:

"... I was absolutely paralysed with fear as to what these young Cambridge undergraduates were going to do. I said to them... if I tell you to do something, you do it. If you want to argue you wait until later and argue later. We are going to have to go through Checkpoint Charlie... and I do not want anybody stepping out of line. If anybody gets asked questions you refer them to me."

There was a perception that the group was 'going into danger. It was a bit like going into the deepest jungle. Nobody in England had any idea about the GDR. The picture we were given of East Germany before we went there was that it was a place that was oppressed, that there were Volkspolizei on every corner with guns ordering people to go to work.' Mike Carmody, who kept a daily diary, recorded his feelings on first seeing communist East Germany from the train. 'Barbed wire stretching as far as the eye could see either side of the train. Train thoroughly checked at Marienbom by numerous guards with guns and dogs. Uniforms were a real shock. Just as the Nazis but without swastikas.'

In the event, the fears were on the whole unwarranted. The group was allowed total freedom to do what it wanted. With their open visas, members travelled throughout the whole of the GDR. They were, according to Turner, known everywhere. They frequently accepted invitations to spend the weekend with families in different parts of the country. They went to schools and youth clubs. They visited the opera, galleries and places of interest, such as Weimar. They went rock climbing in the Sächsisches Schweiz. They joined the crowds for the May Day parade in Dresden. They took photographs and Carmody, who
had worked for a film company in England, used a cinecamera to make a history of the project. If people wanted to find them, they just had to ask somebody in the street. Many of the volunteers hitchhiked around the country, a form of transport almost unheard of in the GDR. One young volunteer had brought with him a bowler hat, a rolled umbrella and a dark suit and used to hitchhike wearing this outfit and waving a large Union Jack - a tactic which was guaranteed to ensure attention from the small number of drivers on the road, even if they did not stop. Almost the only problem in all this travel occurred when some of the group tried to go to Prague for the weekend on the train. They were removed from the train at the border and had to return to Dresden because they did not have the appropriate re-entry visas.

East Germans reacted to the project with delighted surprise. The sisters who ran the hospital were amazed that the Provost's plan had been given permission. Schwester Margarete Herold, who was given the job of caring for the volunteers, has recalled that they first heard of it in October 1964.

"The first reaction of nearly everyone here was that it would not happen. We were used to the fact that anything that was supposed to come from the state never came to anything. We didn't believe that it would come anywhere near and then we were very surprised when it all happened so quickly. It was astonishing. But all the problems had been sorted out before we heard of it."14

There were times when she and the other sisters were afraid, says Schwester Margarete, because they did not understand exactly what was happening. Werner Fink, a young priest at the hospital in 1965 and more recently the Rektor, has remarked that the volunteers brought hope and happiness to the hospital. But he has also acknowledged there was some fear, not among the British people who showed no fear but among the East Germans working with them. 'There was a little bit of fear that in the evening, after work, [the volunteers] were out too much with other people... We spoke with Martin Turner, saying for example that there should not be any political talk in a bar or hotel.'15

In fact, according to the memories of the British volunteers, liberated from the constraints of their own country they behaved with happy abandon in East Germany. A few days after arriving in Dresden, Carmody recorded: 'I must seem strange. People keep
looking at me'. But that strangeness obviously vanished fairly quickly as Coventry Cathedral youth officer, Michael Butterfield, reported at the time that: 'Their gaiety has become a familiar feature in the City of Dresden, and a group walking to work singing "What shall we do with a drunken sailor" no longer invites curious inquiry.'

The end of the project in 1965 was marked with an English garden party held in the grounds of the Diakonissenkrankenhaus, which was attended by the Provost and others from Coventry, representatives of the Church and state in Dresden, and many 'citizens' who had 'opened their homes to the team'. The hospital sisters were presented with a Coventry Cross of Nails. The first such cross was fashioned from medieval nails found in the ruins of the old Coventry Cathedral. Since then, many have been given as gifts around the world as a symbol of reconciliation. The following year, difficulties were encountered in obtaining visas. A small group of British volunteers did go to Dresden for a month on what were known as 'camping visas' but Aktion Sühnezeichen was censored by the East German government because the group did not confine itself to camping. The project effectively came to an end.

In present day terms, the idea that young people, motivated by a sense of idealism, should volunteer their services in other countries and be welcomed by those countries is relatively commonplace. In the context of Europe in the Cold War in the 1960s, this was not the case. Indeed, the Coventry/Dresden project (as I shall refer to it) had the appearance of being an incongruous event, out of keeping with the political situation in East and West. As the volunteers were aware, this was a period of high tension in the Cold War. The Berlin Wall had been erected in 1961, only two years before the start of negotiations to enable the project to take place. The world had held its breath during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. In the eyes of West Germany, Britain and her Nato allies the GDR officially did not exist. Contact was discouraged. But the evidence presented in this thesis points to the fact that behind the scenes the British government gave its support to the Coventry/Dresden project. Why should it have done so?
Within the GDR, the Church represented one of the main stumbling blocks in the way of the regime's desire to create a strong and independent socialist state. And yet, for one year - but one year only - the GDR leader, Walter Ulbricht, appeared to welcome the presence of a group of young Britons on a project organised by Christians from the West in co-operation with GDR Christians. Why should this have been so? It is true that Western visitors were encouraged to visit the GDR as part of the country's campaign to obtain diplomatic recognition, but these visitors were strictly monitored and controlled. Their visits were regulated and brief. The guests were usually politically sympathetic to the regime. One of the most remarkable aspects of the visit of the British group is the manner in which they were allowed to travel throughout East Germany without restriction. Why should the GDR regime have deliberately allowed, even encouraged, these visitors to interact so freely with the citizens of the GDR?

These were some of the puzzles and inconsistencies which begged for explanations when I first began my investigation of the Coventry/Dresden project. Most of the Christians involved with its organisation clung to the belief that it had been purely an idealistic act of Christian reconciliation. The Provost of Coventry Cathedral wrote at the time: 'It [the project] is an act of Faith - faith in the effective power of Christian Reconciliation; faith that positive creative enterprises can heal the wounds of the past; and faith that the Christian religion can be made to bridge the divisions of nationality, race, politics, or historical traditions'. In the years that followed, those involved credited God with overcoming the political difficulties involved, a thought process which left room for further enquiry. But what exactly had motivated the GDR regime to briefly allow this incursion through its impenetrable borders? And what was the motivation behind the tacit British support for an action which, officially, was frowned upon?

The Context - Ulbricht, the Liberal?

In the process of attempting to answer these questions, it has been necessary to carry out a detailed examination of the wider context in which the Coventry/Dresden project was set. It is this context which has given the project significance beyond that which it would merit in terms of world history. The context is that of Anglo/GDR relations and GDR
Church/state relations during the first half of the 1960s. This thesis will demonstrate that, contrary to official British policy, behind the scenes there was a degree of co-operation between Britain and the GDR during the early 1960s which arose as a result of a congruency of aims. Those aims were to preserve the stability of the GDR and, in so doing, world peace. I will demonstrate that both Britain and the GDR believed that the Coventry/Dresden project and its members could be used in order to promote the concept of co-operation between Christians and Marxists, a concept which was being advocated by Ulbricht as a means of obtaining support for his socialist regime, and which was seen by the British as way of avoiding political unrest in the GDR of the kind which had been seen in Budapest in 1956 and in East Berlin in 1953. The means by which both countries manipulated the project for these purposes was through their intelligence services. And so, the Coventry/Dresden project, which claimed to be non-political and in terms of world history was an event of only minor significance, became, unwittingly, a part of an intelligence operation. This thesis will provide evidence to show the manner in which the project was steered by the intelligence services of both countries, and in so doing demonstrate the integral role played by these services in the foreign and domestic policy aims of their countries. The problems that are axiomatic when researching matters connected to the intelligence services, I will describe later.

But there is also another aspect of GDR history which bears examination in relation to the Coventry/Dresden project, that being what has become known as the Ulbricht liberalisation period. It is a curious and significant fact that the dates during which the Coventry/Dresden project was a live issue almost exactly overlap the period of Walter Ulbricht's liberalisation programme. Ulbricht, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschland (SED) (Socialist Unity Party of German), the political figure who dominated all aspects of the history with which this thesis is concerned, to the surprise of most observers signalled a change in direction at the SED's 6th Party Congress in January 1963. The first moves in the negotiating process which brought about the Coventry/Dresden project were made in May 1963. Negotiations continued throughout 1964 and the project took place in 1965. It came to an end shortly before the SED's 11th Plenum in December 1965 which heralded the end of the liberalisation period.22
This thesis does not set out to examine Ulbricht's liberalisation period in any great detail, this being the subject of other studies which have been carried out, or will be in the future. However, it takes note of the fact that the Coventry/Dresden project took place within the context of this liberalisation period and believes this study to provide further support for the theory, as expressed by Monika Kaiser, that Ulbricht's liberalisation touched many more areas of life than just the economic. While acknowledging that the most dramatic change introduced by Ulbricht, and that which has been most closely analysed by historians, was his new economic programme which borrowed some of the mores of capitalism, this thesis provides additional evidence of a general relaxation within the GDR which benefited young people, writers and artists in particular. The Church and its congregations were not excluded from this breeze of liberalisation, although Ulbricht had in fact signalled a more amenable attitude towards the Church as long ago as 1960.

The major significance of Ulbricht's liberalisation period in the context of this study relates to the character of the man himself, to the personality of this political leader who dominated events. In her study of the power struggle between Ulbricht and Honecker, Kaiser has stressed the need to examine the personality of Ulbricht in order to arrive at an understanding of events. She has argued that personality played a greater, or at least a different role in socialist dictatorships such as the GDR than it does in parliamentary democracies. This thesis supports this view, arguing that it was Ulbricht's direct intervention which brought about the Coventry/Dresden project and that to understand why he should do so, or even if he was capable of doing so, it is necessary to appreciate not only the political context of the decision, both domestically and in foreign policy terms, but also to comprehend the mindset of the man who was the decision maker.

Walter Ulbricht's style of government has been described as authoritarian, dictatorial and intimidating. His was the controlling hand in all aspects of government. According to Peter Grieder, who has made a study of the Ulbricht era, during the 1950s Ulbricht 'effectively abolished collective leadership in favour of one-man rule'. He 'moulded' the Party into 'an instrument of his own dictatorial power'. SED colleagues who criticised
Ulbricht during the second half of the 1950s for the manner in which Ulbricht's personality cult had suppressed discussion within the Politburo and other Party organisations were removed from their positions.\textsuperscript{30} It was Ulbricht who was the driving force behind the GDR's recognition policy, its Church policy and its domestic policy. It is necessary, therefore, in order to understand the complexity of events surrounding the Coventry/Dresden project and the complexity of the policies which impacted upon the project, first of all to attempt to understand something of the complexity of Ulbricht, the man. Did Ulbricht have the kind of personality and intellect which could have been responsible for the devious but also flexible thought processes behind the Coventry/Dresden project and the policies which it represented? This thesis will argue that he did.

Despite the fact that Ulbricht effectively ruled the GDR for around a quarter of a century and had been politically active since the First World War, surprisingly little has, until recently, been written about him. His only biographer for many years was Carola Stern, who published her work in Germany in 1963. Since German reunification, two new biographies have appeared in Germany.\textsuperscript{31} Contributions to our picture of Ulbricht have been made by some of his former colleagues, such as Ernst Wollweber and Wolfgang Leonhard.\textsuperscript{32} But both crossed swords with Ulbricht and lost, Wollweber being ousted from his position as head of the GDR's security service in 1957 and Leonhard fleeing to Yugoslavia in 1949. Interest in Ulbricht and the Ulbricht years has shown signs of a revival during the 1990s with the publication of Kaiser's study\textsuperscript{33} and Grieder's exploration of the opposition Ulbricht faced from his colleagues during his period of power.\textsuperscript{34} An overview of the Ulbricht era is also due to be published this year.\textsuperscript{35} But the image of Ulbricht as the hardline Stalinist dogmatist has generally been little changed. As Kaiser has observed, the last ten years of Ulbricht's rule have been relatively little examined.\textsuperscript{36} Much that was written in the GDR before the \textit{Wende} was based on 'retrospective political assessment', influenced by Honecker who wished to legitimise his power.\textsuperscript{37} In West Germany, research tended to concentrate on the economy and the GDR's relations with Moscow or Bonn, and in any case was hampered by lack of access to primary sources.\textsuperscript{38}
As is perhaps not surprising for a man who was one of the most vilified political leaders, both in the West and by his own people, commentators are divided on their verdict on Walter Ulbricht. Stern virtually apologised to her readers for writing about such a boring man. Her opening words were: 'Is Walter Ulbricht worth a biography'? She accused him of lacking 'social graces, charm, persuasiveness, rhetorical gifts, originality, brilliance, education, imagination and the vitality of the passionate revolutionary'. Some might wonder how a man lacking so much managed to survive and rule for so many years through such a turbulent period of history. But it is questionable whether Stern, writing in the early 1960s, could have been expected to produce a glowing testimony of a man who was her country's enemy. She herself wrote: 'Ulbricht is the most hated man in Germany. He is a convenient channel through which many people discharge their hatred or disgust with Communism'. Ulbrich's later biographer, Podewin, also appears to have been unimpressed, describing the GDR leader as a 'pedantic, narrow calculator in big and small matters, with his finger in every pie'.

Kaiser has presented a different picture of the Ulbricht of the 1960s. He was not the old, dogmatic Stalinist of the past, but 'reform-friendly, flexible, in favour of liberalisation and a modern industrial society, and prepared to compromise over inter-German relations'. She argues that his merit lies in the fact that he was the first Soviet bloc leader to realise that the success of socialism depended on being able to cope with the new challenges. But this did not mean that Ulbricht wanted to loosen his control or introduce any form of Western-type democratic reforms. His aim was simply to improve participation in his socialist democracy.

This view has been supported by other more recent commentators, including some who did business with Ulbricht. I have drawn on the experiences of two men on opposite sides of the Cold War divide who knew Ulbricht personally and are united in their appreciation of him: Juli Kvitzinsky, a former Soviet diplomat based in East Berlin during the 1960s; and Paul Oestreicher, the British clergyman who operated as an non-governmental envoy during the Cold War from around 1961 onwards. They agree that Ulbricht was an extraordinary man. Their verdict is that Ulbricht was clever, committed,
determined and, when necessary, ruthless. According to Kvitzinsky, Ulbricht was a 'personality'.\textsuperscript{44} It would be a mistake to think of him as a mere puppet of Moscow, Kvitzinsky has written. He had the vision to see the necessity for flexibility in the socialist system which the Soviet rulers only first began to understand in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{45} He knew that the course he advocated in the 1960s sounded like 'heresy' but he was convinced that he was right. He could see the crisis that was coming and tried to avert it.\textsuperscript{46} He was a complex figure.\textsuperscript{47}

Oestreicher was even more effusive. He met Ulbricht in 1963 when he was attempting to negotiate the release of the GDR political prisoner Heinz Brandt. 'Ulbricht was intellectually brilliant,' Oestreicher recalls. 'And Honecker was a pigmy.'\textsuperscript{48} During their meeting which lasted the course of an afternoon, Ulbricht displayed an awareness of the realities of the political situation which amazed Oestreicher, who was accustomed to the propaganda posturing of most GDR politicians and officials with whom he came in contact.

"[I was] very impressed... with his not using the propaganda language of Neues Deutschland. He talked about the Wall as 'diese Schandmauer' [shameful Wall] which we had to build to stop our bourgeois people from escaping... he talked the way we would in the West... They hate me, he said. My people hate me. That is the price I have to pay for the future of communism and a peaceful world... He was completely open. Not a word of what he said could have been printed in any East German newspaper. In other words, he was a total realist. Hardline realist. I am defending the front line of world communism. I can't afford reforms. I can't afford liberalation. He used the imagery from the First World War. A soldier in a trench doesn't light a cigarette... the East Germans made fun of him because he spoke in this horrible Saxon dialect which sounded very uneducated. He was uneducated. He was a working bloke. But very intelligent... He was a brilliant tactician... But he wasn't a real reformer."\textsuperscript{49}

Oestreicher also saw another side of Ulbricht, the side which made him feared by his colleagues and which earned him a reputation as a dictator. When he and his fellow envoy raised the subject of the political prisoner, they saw 'the other Ulbricht'. 'He became... bitter, hardline, angry. What the hell are you doing telling me who we should imprison or not. I thought you were on about peace. Why do you disturb peace by asking us to set free this traitor, this scoundrel.'\textsuperscript{50} Ulbricht was a totally committed communist, according to Oestreicher. 'His dream was a communist world. Individuals did not matter ... if people had to die for the dream, then OK, they had to die... He was very hard and he would be just as hard on himself... the dream required sacrifice. Like war.'\textsuperscript{51}
Even at the time of Ulbricht's death, there appears to have been an awareness in the
West that Ulbricht was a more complex figure than Western propaganda allowed for. The
Times, describing Ulbricht in his obituary as 'the unquestioned dictator of the DDR', also
noted that although Ulbricht had a reputation as a 'ruthless Stalinist', he 'was more pragmatic
that he was commonly thought to be' and showed 'great skill in adapting himself and his
methods to changing circumstances'. This trait apparently became more noticeable as
Ulbricht grew older. The Times remarked that 'in his later years [Ulbricht] showed that he
was less dogmatic than was commonly assumed'. Grieder has commented: 'Unlike most
communist leaders, Ulbricht became more inclined to experiment as he grew older.' The
signs of this flexibility appear to have been evident as long ago as 1947 when a Soviet report
on Ulbricht noted that he was an 'able organiser who can find his way around difficult
political questions and resolve them'. British observers in the 1960s noted that Ulbricht
'played his hand with cunning', that

"... his skill at sensing the quarter of the prevailing wind and trimming his sails accordingly
is surely unequalled in the Communist world. He now poses as leader of the de-Stalinising
processes... and as patron of the younger generation within the SED.”

The precise manner in which Ulbricht is described varies according to the viewpoint
of the commentator. Supporters would say 'flexible' when other might say 'cunning'. Some
would say 'skilful' when others would say 'devious'. But regardless of moral judgements,
there is a convincing body of opinion to substantiate the argument that Ulbricht was a
political leader with the mental agility to adapt his policies and his strategies to meet the
needs of the time as he saw them, heedless of dogma and in the knowledge of the
ideological heresy he was pursuing. The man who could advocate private enterprise in a
socialist state was certainly capable of tolerating Western Christian influence in his atheist
state.

**Evidence and Sources**

The issue of the GDR's relations with the West, and Britain in particular, is an area
which comes under examination in this thesis. In common with studies of the GDR in the
1960s in general, scholarly research on Anglo/GDR relations has so far been lacking. Klaus
Larres has devoted a chapter to the subject of Anglo/GDR political and economic relations in a recently published volume in which he has referred to the fact that the 'comparatively unimportant' attempts by the GDR regime to enter into contact with British political parties, trade unions, churches and other organisations has been neglected. While obviously taking issue with Larres' relegation of these contacts to the category of 'unimportant', there is no disputing his observation that scholarly literature on Anglo/GDR relations 'has attracted very little attention'. In Germany, the subject of Anglo/GDR relations has recently been included in a study of the GDR's policy towards the West. An earlier work examined the GDR's relations with the West during the final two decades. But our knowledge of Anglo/GDR relations remains, in the words of Stefan Berger, 'minimal'. The deficit is in the process of being rectified with the publication later this year of Henning Hoff's doctoral thesis on Anglo/GDR relations covering the 1960s. In addition, an edited volume on the subject of Anglo/GDR relations is due out this year in Germany. In terms of more detailed studies of contacts between Britain and the GDR, there are two in existence. The first, submitted as an MPhil thesis in 1977 and, as yet, unpublished, is Marianne Bell's (now Howarth) useful thesis on Anglo/GDR relations which includes references to the Coventry/Dresden connection. More recently, Bert Becker has published a work along similar lines. On the subject of the Coventry/Dresden project almost nothing has been written other than a chapter by W E Rose in his book about Coventry. The Provost of Coventry Cathedral compiled a draft of his memoirs before he died.

Literature on the topic of the Protestant Church in the GDR and of its relationship with the Stasi has been prolific in Germany since the beginning of the 1990s. However, there has been a tendency towards navel-gazing which has failed to take account of events in the context of the wider world. As John Conway has observed in his excellent overview of scholarly research, the debate in Germany has been 'introspective and Germano-centred' and would benefit from being placed in a wider context. There appears to have been no attempt so far to examine the influence of other Western Christian organisations on the Church in the GDR, a gap which this thesis will, in part, fill.
Again, the 1960s has been a Cinderella decade with scholars having a tendency to move smartly on from the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 to the creation of the **Bund der Evangelischen Kirchen**, the independent GDR Church administrative body, in 1969, with only brief references to such significant events as the publication of the *Zehn Artikel* (Ten Articles), the Church's guidelines to its congregations on how to live in an atheist state. The exception is Gerhard Besier who has produced three useful reference volumes on the subject of the Church in the GDR, one of which covers the first half of the 1960s. In the English language, the chief reference work is that by the American Robert Goeckel which covers both the 1960s and the 1970s. Even less attention has been paid to the diocese of Saxony and the activities of its bishop. Josef Schmid, in his recent book on Church and state in Dresden, has noted that despite the proliferation of studies on the Church very little has been published on Dresden and the diocese of Saxony. His own book covers the period from 1975 to 1989 and makes no mention of Gottfried Noth, the bishop of Saxony from 1953 to 1971. Frédéric Hartweg, who has published two interesting volumes of documents relating to Church/state relations, makes little reference to Noth's role as a leader of opposition. Peter Maser refers to Noth once in his chronology of significant dates in GDR Church history.

Besier, together with Stephan Wolf, has published a massive study of the *Stasi*’s infiltration of the Churches in the GDR, not without controversy, since the book has been accused of being one-sided with no attempt being made to consider the situation from the point of view of those churchmen who were caught up in the dilemma of living in an atheist state. A more balanced survey of the interaction between Church, Party and *Stasi* has been provided in a recent volume edited by Clemens Vollnhals. In order to obtain some insight into the workings of the British intelligence services I have drawn on the works of specialists in the area of Western intelligence such as Anthony Glees and, more recently, Frances Stonor Saunders.

The primary sources on which this thesis is based are both documentary and oral. Initially, my archival researches focused on specific governmental departments and private organisations which either had been closely involved with the project or were likely to have
been, as well as people known to have taken leading roles. In the GDR, these were the *Staatssekretariat für Kirchenfragen* (SfK) (Department of State for Church Affairs), the *Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten* (MfAA) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), and the SED's *Arbeitsgruppe Kirchenfragen* (Church Affairs Working Group). The archive of *Aktion Sühnezeichen*, the German organisation which partnered Coventry Cathedral in the project, was also an invaluable source. In Britain, I consulted the records of the British Foreign Office and the archive of Coventry Cathedral. When it became apparent from these latter sources that the MP Richard Crossman had also been deeply involved with the project, I turned to his private papers in the care of the Modern Records Centre of Warwick University. These sources dispelled the illusion that the Coventry/Dresden project had been a non-political affair. But they did not answer the main question as to why the project should have been allowed to take place. Although the initial consultations regarding the project had been reasonably well documented, official records in both countries came to an abrupt halt more than 12 months before the project actually took place. Suddenly it was as though the Coventry/Dresden project had never happened.

Private archives, however, revealed a different story. In particular, the archive of *Aktion Sühnezeichen* provided the name, but not the status, of the East German who had given permission for the project to proceed. It was apparent that he was a senior figure in the GDR. Strangely though, he did not appear in any of the usual sources of GDR officialdom. Inquiries drew a blank until I put the name of Hans-Joachim Seidowsky to Horst Dohle, a former civil servant with the SfK in Berlin. He reacted with surprise and some apprehension. He informed me that Seidowsky was a senior *Stasi* figure, that he was still alive and that he was known to Oestreicher. His exact words were that he was 'the most secret figure in GDR Church politics' and that he was 'shady' (zweilichtig). This information cast a different light on the matter.

The **Bundesauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienste der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik** (BStU) which houses the files of the GDR security service, the *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit* (MfS) (Ministry of State Security) or *Stasi*, became the focal point of my research. Here I found numerous files relating to...
Seidowsky's activities. Accounts of Seidowsky's meetings with one of the leaders of *Aktion Sühnezeichen* were of special interest. However, there were large gaps in the information available. There were only a few references to the Coventry/Dresden project and the BStU could trace no files at all on the leading British participants who had been so active in the GDR.

This lack of information, together with the knowledge that Seidowsky had operated in the area of foreign relations, led me to believe that the files for which I was searching, if they existed, would have been held within the *Stasi* department responsible for foreign affairs. Although the mountain of files released after the demise of the GDR is a source of joy to researchers, there are significant limitations to this availability of information. The main limitation is the absence of most of the files relating to the foreign espionage service of the GDR, the department run by Markus Wolf, known as the *Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung* (HVA). In a twist worthy of the best spy writer, during the upheavals which followed the fall of the Berlin Wall these files found their way into the possession of the US intelligence service, the CIA. It is impossible to say how this came about although a number of theories have been put forward. These range from Wolf's own assertion that a former HVA agent sold the files to the CIA to accounts in various newspapers which suggest that they were snatched by an undercover squad directed by the Soviet Union, the CIA or both working together. There is no doubt that it would have been in the interests of the world's intelligence services to prevent the files from becoming public as if they had done so the information they contained would have blown the cover of agents around the globe. Since 1999, negotiations have been taking place between the German government and the CIA in order to obtain the return of at least some of these files to the country from which they came. A form of agreement has been reached, codenamed Operation Rosewood, under which files relating to German spies are being returned to Germany. This process began in 2000.

For the purposes of this thesis, however, the files of the HVA are as inaccessible as those of the British intelligence organisation MI6. A request for access to British documents made to MI6 was politely refused. Even where intelligence files are available, the researcher faces further difficulties. In the *Stasi* archive all files are censored before being
given to the researcher, in order to protect the innocent who are still alive. This means that names and other details, sometimes whole paragraphs, which could reveal an identity, are frequently blacked out, leading to a situation where the content is sometimes incomprehensible. British Foreign Office files, as Hoff has noted, are not always complete. Material that is connected to the British secret service can be withheld.

In addition to the sources mentioned above, I have also had recourse to the archives of Church and local government organisations within the GDR. Chief among these was the Evangelisches Zentralarchiv (EZA) in Berlin which houses the archive of the Protestant Church within Germany, including the former GDR. This archive contains files relating to the Coventry/Dresden project which had passed through the Church’s ecumenical office. In addition, it also holds files relating to Aktion Sühnezeichen, these having become incorporated within the EZA during the course of my research. I had also intended to examine the Church archive of the diocese in which Dresden is located, the Evangelisch-Lutherisches Landeskirchenamt Sachsens Landeskirchenarchiv, but was unable to gain access due to a rebuilding programme and staffing difficulties. I was able to use the archive of the Dresden Diakonissenkrankenhaus at which the Coventry/Dresden project took place.

Difficulties also arose in relation to the local government archives in Dresden, these being the Landeshauptstadt Dresden Stadtarchiv, the archive of Dresden city council, and the Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden, which houses the regional and political party archives. I was particularly interested to examine the files of both the city and the regional Kirchenfragen (Church affairs) departments. In the case of the city, I was informed that these files were not present and their whereabouts were unknown. Many of the regional Kirchenfragen files were also unavailable for administrative reasons. Such problems are not uncommon at a time when much rebuilding and reorganisation is still taking place within the former GDR. However, I was also aware that interest in Church files in Dresden was a sensitive area. In 1997, during my first exploratory trip to Dresden a local priest and his wife were murdered, shot in a wood outside the city. Oberlandeskirchenrat Roland Adolph had been a member of the committee investigating Stasi activities in the city, particularly in relation to the Church. Press reports linked his murder to this activity. Whether there was a
connection has not been established. The significance of the tragedy was that in the minds of
the inhabitants of Dresden it did not seem unreasonable to suggest that there might have
been. In addition, there was a general reluctance to pursue investigations into the past.

As has already been noted, I have made use of oral evidence in my research in order
to fill some of the gaps which exist in the documentary evidence available. I have conducted
interviews with a number of people who were involved with the Coventry/Dresden project.
They include the Stasi agent Hans-Joachim Seidowsky, the former Aktion Sühnezeichen
leader, Franz von Hammerstein, the leader of the British volunteer group in Dresden, Martin
Turner, the British Cold War non-governmental envoy Paul Oestreicher, the former
Oberbürgermeister of Dresden, Gerhard Schill, and others. In relation to the oral history,
there are two problems arising from the involvement of the intelligence services which need
to be borne in mind. One is silence and the other is the possibility of deliberate attempts to
mislead.

A major difficulty when researching matters relating to intelligence and GDR history
is that almost without exception those who were involved prefer to remain silent. The British
participants are frequently bound by the Official Secrets Act. Former East Germans are, on
the whole, only prepared to reveal that which is already in the public domain or which may
be about to be so. The silence of all concerned is usually couched in terms of forgetfulness.
Former GDR politicians may fall over themselves in their eagerness to give their side of the
story.84 Those concerned with intelligence matters do not. If they do speak, it is impossible
to know if they are speaking the truth, unless the interviewer already knows the answer.
Poor memory has been a recurring affliction in researching this thesis.

**Presenting the Jigsaw**

This study is not a chronological narrative. Rather, it is a picture of events and the
policies behind them during a small and specific time period. These events and policies are
either connected to or are significant in relation to the Coventry/Dresden project of
reconciliation. The project is the thread which binds them together. Separately they might
appear to be unconnected or insignificant. It is only when they are slotted together, in the
manner of inserting pieces into a jigsaw in order to make a picture, that they make a whole which is comprehensible.

The criteria for the order in which these pieces are presented, in the form of the chapters in this thesis, is based upon the premise that the complexity of the events under examination cannot be understood unless they are set within the context of the intelligence services operation of which they were a part. I have, therefore, devoted the first chapter to this aspect. It explains the manner in which covert activities are used not only to gather information but, more importantly, to influence the course of events. Influence, not information, was the aim in this particular case, as one of the intelligence agents involved has stressed. This man, Seidowsky, was the Stasi agent who controlled the project. My assessment of the importance of the project in political terms is partly based upon Seidowsky's importance in the GDR. Since he is and always has been a shadowy figure, almost unmentioned in GDR history, I have given over much of this chapter to documenting his career, providing evidence of the fact that he worked directly to the top political leaders on matters relating not only to the Church (of which Stasi department he was officially a member) but also foreign affairs. This chapter also provides evidence, as far as is possible, of the involvement of the British intelligence services in the Coventry/Dresden project. In the absence of documentary evidence, this involvement can only be an assumption. I have also touched upon a second covert operation in which Seidowsky played a leading role and which involved Coventry Cathedral's partner in the project, Aktion Süßezeichen. This is significant not only because it provides an example of the manner in which the West sought to manipulate events in Soviet bloc countries, but also because it demonstrates the important role played by Christian organisations in covert operations.

In the following chapter, I have moved on to a detailed examination of Aktion Süßezeichen. Although this organisation and its leaders are not widely known outside Christian circles, an appreciation of their importance in world affairs is also essential to an understanding of the significance of the Coventry/Dresden project and the role it played in the British and GDR scheme of things. Aktion Süßezeichen leaders had secret talks with the Soviet leader Khrushchev in 1963. Aktion Süßezeichen leaders were in close contact with
West German political leaders. *Aktion Sühnezeichen* leaders were at the forefront of *Ostpolitik* long before it became official West German policy. *Aktion Sühnezeichen* leaders were thought by the *Stasi* to be working for the CIA, spearheading an underground movement to infiltrate Soviet bloc countries. *Aktion Sühnezeichen* was Coventry's partner in the reconciliation project, deliberately placed there by the GDR regime. This was a puzzle - one of many. Why should this organisation, which the GDR believed to be subversive and which was not officially sanctioned in the GDR, be called upon to play the role of intermediary?

The answer to that question lies in the following two chapters which deal with the position of the Church in the GDR. The first of these two chapters looks at the concept of Christian/ Marxist dialogue, a concept which dominated theological thinking in East and West during the first half of the 1960s. It was a concept supported by Ulbricht who saw a means of using it to persuade the Christian population of the GDR to co-operate with the socialist state. The chapter provides an overview of Church/state relations during the previous few years, describing the major areas of conflict that had arisen between Church and state, such as the state confirmation ceremony. It examines the manner in which Ulbricht decided in 1960 to adopt a different strategy towards dealing with the problem of the Church, which represented a fifth column in the socialist state. This strategy involved advocating a policy of co-operation between Christians and Marxists on the one hand, and through the use of the *Stasi*, fomenting divisions among Church leaders in order to weaken their influence, on the other. Finally the chapter examines the way in which Ulbricht's policy of co-operation dovetailed with liberal theological thinking in Britain where there was strong support for the concept of Christian/ Marxist dialogue. In particular it looks at the work of Oestreicher, one of Britain's most vocal supporters of this concept. It reveals the manner in which he operated as an unofficial envoy in Eastern Europe, and particularly the GDR, with the support of the British Foreign Office. Finally, it concludes that oppositional Church leaders in the GDR were put under pressure to conform, not only by their own government but also by their Christian brothers in Britain in the interests of harmony.
The second chapter on GDR Church/state relations focuses on events during 1963 and 1964, the two years in which the Coventry/Dresden project was formulated. It looks in detail at the diocese of Saxony and its bishop, Gottfried Noth. Both Noth and his diocese have been overlooked by historians, despite the fact that Noth was a powerful opponent of the regime and the leader of the GDR's largest diocese. The chapter argues that contrary to the view of some historians that the Church was beginning to recognise the need to live in harmony with socialism, Ulbricht's policy of co-operation with Christians was in fact running into difficulties. The policy faced strong opposition from some Church leaders who, recognising the tactics which were being employed, did not wish to see their congregations used to promote the regime. Two landmark events are examined. First, the drawing up of guidelines by the Church, known as the Ten Articles, which advised Christians on the ethical rights and wrongs of their behaviour as citizens of an atheist state. Second, the issuing of an order in the diocese of Saxony instructing Christians not to allow themselves to be used by the state for propaganda purposes. This instruction was known as the Order for Silence. This chapter argues that opposition to the regime was particularly strong in Saxony. Relations between Church and state in Saxony were so strained during 1964 that there was almost no contact between the two sides. Noth was regarded as \textit{persona non grata}. Ulbricht recognised that Noth stood in the way of the success of his policy and that it was necessary to neutralise his influence. The chapter concludes that one way in which this was achieved was through the Coventry/Dresden project. Noth was reined in by his own clerical colleagues; firstly, by the GDR leader of \textit{Aktion Sühnezeichen} who was a powerful personality in Church circles and who, it will be argued, was deluded into believing that using his influence to control Noth was essential to the success of the project; and secondly, by the British leaders of the project, all of whom were in any case committed to the concept of Christian/Marxist co-operation.

The issue of Anglo/GDR relations and its significance in relation to the Coventry/Dresden project are examined in the following two chapters. The first of these chapters provides a general overview of the international situation, and, in particular, the policy of non-recognition which was the dominant issue at the time. It raises the question of whether the Coventry/Dresden project can be explained in terms of the recognition issue, of
whether it was permitted to take place by the GDR in order to promote its recognition policy, and concludes that this was not the case. On the basis of the evidence available, this chapter argues that the project was not seen by the GDR to be a foreign policy matter. On the other hand, the British did see the project as impinging on foreign policy and were, therefore, officially opposed to it. The chapter then proceeds to examine the difference between official policy and unofficial policy. It puts forward the view that, unofficially, pragmatic arguments for maintaining the status quo in Europe took precedence over the official dogmatic arguments against recognition of the GDR. It suggests that in a situation such as the one which existed between Britain and the GDR where there were no diplomatic ties, it was unofficial policy, closely allied to the intelligence services, which was more significant and probably a truer reflection of reality, than official policy. Unofficial policy requires unofficial envoys. In this context the chapter examines the activities of the MP Richard Crossman who, it will be argued, was probably the British government's main link with the GDR during the second half of the 1950s and the early 1960s. It looks in some detail at Crossman's political philosophy, wartime intelligence work and German connections. In addition, it examines his link with the Coventry/Dresden project, of which he was the secret initiator. The chapter argues that Crossman's involvement with the Coventry/Dresden project supports the theory that the British gave tacit support to the project, despite the fact that it was at odds with official foreign policy.

The second chapter on Anglo/GDR relations moves from national to regional level. It examines the links which are known to have existed between the two countries, in particular the GDR policy of kommunale Auslandsverbindungen (international contacts at local government level). In this context, the chapter looks at the city twinning arrangements between Britain and the GDR, particularly that of Coventry and Dresden and poses the question of whether the Coventry/Dresden project was connected to these inter-city arrangements. As with the conclusion in relation to the GDR's recognition policy in the previous chapter, the documentary evidence again indicates that the reconciliation project was not a part of the GDR's foreign policy strategy. Indeed, as the chapter demonstrates in the case of Dresden Oberbürgermeister Gerhard Schill and British refusal to permit him to visit Coventry, when foreign policy and the Coventry/Dresden project did become
entangled, it became very evident that those in charge of foreign policy were not privy to the machinations which had been going on behind the scenes in both Britain and the GDR in relation to the conduct of the project. Overall, the conclusion to be drawn from both chapters is that the obvious explanation for the existence of the Coventry/Dresden project, that it was related to recognition policy, is incorrect.

The final two chapters provide a detailed examination of the almost two years of negotiations which preceded the Coventry/Dresden project. Having in the previous chapters surveyed the context of the project - GDR Church/state relations and domestic policy, Anglo/GDR relations, and the intelligence factor - these two chapters demonstrate through a scrutiny of oral and documentary evidence the actuality at ground level of the policy decisions being made at government level. This account of the protracted negotiations, which involved all those institutions and individuals which have already been referred to, demonstrates the interconnection of different policy areas and the vested interests which different parties sought to preserve and foster within these differing policy areas. Within this microcosmic portion of history, a picture of the complex nature of governmental and international relations emerges which fails to be appreciated in studies which confine themselves to one particular area or another. It is an example of the manner in which an analysis of the specific provides the key to an understanding of the general. In addition, this in depth study of events, which draws on a variety of contrasting sources, demonstrates the validity of the theory which has been postulated throughout this thesis. In so much as it is possible to prove that Britain and the GDR entered into a form of co-operation between 1963 and 1965, and that this co-operation, steered by the intelligence services, was intended to maintain the stability of the Ulbricht regime, this analysis of the Coventry/Dresden project provides that proof.

Finally, I would like to stress that this thesis recognises that all countries use their intelligence services in order to further their own aims. It is not my intention to cast aspersions on the conduct of anyone who may have been so occupied.
The Evangelische Kirche is often referred to in English as the Evangelical Church but I have preferred the description 'Protestant Church', the word 'evangelical' having connotations in English which are not present in the German. However, since this thesis deals only with the Evangelische Kirche and not with any other denominations, it is frequently referred to as 'the Church'.

Aktion Süntzeichen was usually translated by the British as Action Reconciliation. However, a more accurate translation of the word 'Süntzeichen' would be 'atonement'. In this thesis, the organisation is referred to by its German name.

Martin Turner's private papers, his article about the project in a pamphlet entitled Outlook, November 1966.

Michael Butterfield's private papers, report on the first stage of the Coventry/Dresden project, undated, circa 1965.

Michael Butterfield's private papers, report on the first phase of the Coventry/Dresden project, undated, circa 1965.

Michael Butterfield's private papers, information for all members of the Working Party, undated, circa 1965.

Ibid.

Martin Turner's private papers, his article about the project in a pamphlet entitled Outlook, November 1966.

Interview with Turner, 18 to 21 February 1999.

Ibid.

Mike Carmody’s private papers, Dresden Diary, 15 March 1965.

Interview with Turner, 18 to 21 February 1999.

Mike Carmody’s private papers, Dresden Diary, 8 May, and general account of activities throughout 1965.

Interview with Schwester Margarete Herold, 3 February 1997.

Interview with Pfarrer Werner Fink, 7 February 1997.

Mike Carmody’s private papers, Dresden Diary, 27 March 1965.

Michael Butterfield’s private papers, report on the first phase of the Coventry/Dresden project, undated, circa 1965.

Ibid.


The rebuilding of the hospital continued slowly and intermittently over a number of years, using East German labour and resources, only finally being completed in 1991.

CCA, letter written by the Provost for use during the launch of the appeal for the Coventry/Dresden project, November 1964.


The economic changes, together with Ulbricht’s tendency to bypass the old guard in favour of younger technocrats, have been analysed in detail by Peter Ludz. See The Changing Party Elite in East Germany, (Cambridge: Massachusetts, 1972). More recently, the 1963 liberalisation programme has been examined by Monika Kaiser in Machtwechsel von Ulbricht zu Honecker. Funktionsmechanismen der SED-Diktatur in Konfliktssituationen 1962 bis 1972, (Berlin: Akademie, 1997), and by Peter Grieder in The East German leadership 1946-73. Conflict and crisis, (Manchester: Manchester University, 1999).

Kaiser, Machtwechsel von Ulbricht zu Honecker.

SAPMO-BArch, D04 2526, Ulbricht’s speech to the Volkskammer on the relationship between state and Church, 4 October 1960.


Grieder, The East German leadership, p.116.

Ibid., p.55.

Ibid., p.53.

Ibid., p.116. Both Schirdewan and Oelssner were removed from power as a result of their critical stance.

Carola Stern, Ulbricht: A Political Biography, (London: Pall Mall, 1965). Stern was born in 1925 and taught in the GDR until 1951 when she went to live in West Germany. Since the Wende, two
other biographies have been written: Norbert Podewin, Walter Ulbricht. Eine neue Biographie, (Berlin: Dietz, 1995) and Mario Frank, Walter Ulbricht. Eine deutsche Biographie, (Berlin: Siedler, 2001).


33 Kaiser, Machtwechsel von Ulbricht zu Honecker.


35 Patrick Major and Jonathan Osmond (eds.), The Workers' and Peasants' State: Communism and Society in East Germany, 1945-71, (Manchester: Manchester University, 2002).

36 Kaiser, Machtwechsel von Ulbricht zu Honecker, p.18.

37 Ibid., pp.12/13.

38 Ibid., pp.13/14.

39 Stern, Ulbricht, p.42.

40 Ibid., p.206.

41 Podewin, Walter Ulbricht, p.15.


43 Ibid., pp.457/458.


46 Ibid., p.177.

47 Ibid., p.178.

48 Interview with Paul Oestreicher, 30 May 2000.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.


53 Grieder, The East German leadership, p.213.


55 PRO, FO 371/182997, annual review of the GDR for 1964, 13 August 1965.

56 Klaus Larres with Elizabeth Meehan, Uneasy Allies. British-German Relations and European Integration since 1945, (Oxford: Oxford University, 2000), p.64.

57 Ibid., p.65.


63 Marianne Bell, Britain and East Germany; The Politics of Non-recognition, unpublished MPhil thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham, October 1977.


65 W E Rose, Sent from Coventry.


The Order for Silence, which this thesis considers to have been a significant act of opposition in 1963, is accorded only a footnote. See Volume 1, 1946-1967, p.313. The volume contains about 18 references to Noth compared to more than 50 lengthy references to the neighbouring bishop of Thuringia, Moritz Mitzenheim.


The reference is to Noth's election to the second most senior position in the Church leadership of the GDR in 1962. No mention is made of the Order for Silence.


Interview with Horst Dohle, 13 April 1999.

I have generally referred to the MfS as the Stasi in this thesis, being the term by which it is more commonly known.


Letter to the author from MI6, 12 February 2002.

Since this research was undertaken the German government has passed a new law further restricting access to the Stasi archive. The precise manner in which this will affect researchers is not known at the time of writing.

Hoff, ‘... "Largely The Prisoners Of Dr. Adenauer's Policy"’, in Ulrich Pfeil (ed.), *Die DDR und der Westen*, p.192. Hoff has noted that many of the Foreign Office files relating to the GDR have been 'thinned out'.

*Bild*, 7 February 1997; *Dresdener Neueste Nachrichten*, 7 and 8 February 1997.


Interview with Hans-Joachim Seidowsky, 4 July 2000. The Coventry/Dresden project provided the opportunity, from the English side, 'to know and to influence'. Seidowsky said, emphasising the word 'influence'.

Oestreicher was surprised that Seidowsky’s name had surfaced and said that he 'liked to keep in the shadows'. Telephone interview with Oestreicher, 11 May 2000.
CHAPTER 2

The Intelligence War: The Missing Dimension

Introduction
The Cold War was an intelligence war, a war of mental agility rather than brute force. An account of Cold War history must, therefore, attempt to explain events in terms of the intelligence activities which were taking place at the time. Just as military historians aim to explore, analyse and describe battles that were fought on the ground, at sea and in the air, so it is the aim of an historian dealing with intelligence matters to examine the tactics and strategies of those who directed the intelligence war. The latter, however, is usually handicapped by the fact that the aim of an intelligence operation is to leave as little evidence as possible of the event. As Frances Stoner Saunders has noted in connection with the activities of the CIA, activities such as covert operations and propaganda must be 'so planned and executed that any U.S. government responsibility for them is not evident to unauthorised persons, and that if uncovered the U.S. government can plausibly disclaim any responsibility for them'. That which was recorded at the time is usually withheld from the public gaze. A peculiarity of the Cold War, however, is that, when it came to an end, the state archives of one of the front-line participants, the GDR, were made available to researchers, including, to a certain extent, the archives of the GDR intelligence service, the Stasi.

The chief limitation of this archival source relates to the Stasi's foreign espionage service, a limitation which applies in equal measure to the British equivalent, MI6. However, written and oral evidence does exist and is available relating to the non-domestic activities of the intelligence services of both countries during the first half of the 1960s. The material is patchy and scattered. On its own, each piece is fairly meaningless. But when the pieces are slotted together a picture emerges, a picture of intelligence services at work. When this is placed alongside the relatively public knowledge of political and diplomatic
activities taking place concurrently, it is possible to illuminate some of the dark corners which hinder the historian's interpretation of events. As Anthony Glees has remarked in his study of the impact of intelligence on British foreign policy between 1939 and 1951, '...it is an understanding of intelligence, its successes and its failures that provides ... the "missing dimension" to why what happened actually did happen.'

This chapter will deal with conspiracies and subversion. If talk of such matters appears to bear too much resemblance to popular spy fiction, it must be remembered that this aversion to believing in the reality of intelligence activities is a peculiarly British phenomenon. This oddity was noted by the one-time communist Arthur Koestler who was disturbed by the difference in attitude between the British and their Continental neighbours.

"There [on the Continent] conspiratorial cunning and underhand methods were in keeping with the political atmosphere created by Hitler, Mussolini, Franco and Metaxas. By force of contrast, England appeared an island of innocence, where plotting was confined to memories of Guy Fawkes and to Victorian melodrama, and where fair play was taken for granted even by members of the ridiculously small and provincial Communist Party." This attitude has continued. In general, conspiracy theorists are denigrated while the British media reserves its excitement for occasional stories of 'spies' who 'sell their country's secrets' rather than the behind the scenes manipulation which is the bread and butter of intelligence services.

Glees has described the way in which, during the Second World War, the Soviet Union used informal networks with which to infiltrate British society. '...the informal networks were the most devastating route that Communist subversion took', he wrote. It should, therefore, not be too surprising that the British and their American cousins decided to use similar tactics when faced with the problems of combating what they perceived to be the evils of communism during the Cold War era, particularly after the débâcle of the overt insurrections which took place in East Berlin in 1953 and more particularly in Budapest in 1956. They had the Soviet pattern from which to work. Describing the manner in which the Soviet Union planned to subvert Britain during the 1940s, Glees wrote:

"The means adopted consisted of the laying-down of moles whose labours would increasingly bear fruit over the years ahead, by their gaining access to the leadership élites of British society in the political parties, the high offices of State, the press, the BBC, and above all the secret services."
As this chapter will describe, this has all the appearances of a blueprint for the scheme devised by Western intelligence services to infiltrate, subvert and tame the GDR and its Soviet bloc neighbours during the 1960s. A Stasi report of a conversation between one of its undercover agents and an unnamed Western conspirator quotes the instructions given for setting up just such an underground network. The agent concerned was Hans-Joachim Seidowsky.

"Your [Seidowsky's] place is in the university. To begin with a group must be got together consisting of a three to four-man subgroup, which is so created that not everyone knows everyone else. Everybody must be pledged to bring in a new person within a specific period of time so that, skilfully hidden, the university is covered with a full-blown net. The thing is risky but has advantages. The university is one of the most significant powers in East Berlin. I undertake to guarantee that in the West such a development will be carefully observed and that untimely Western contacts which could be the death of the group will not happen."

Seidowsky was the Stasi agent at the centre of the conspiratorial web which enfolded the Coventry/Dresden project, together with its associate organisation Aktion Sühnezeichen, allied bodies and their leaders. He was the linchpin at the time, and remains so in terms of this thesis, because it is from an examination of his activities that it is possible to reconstruct the intelligence jigsaw and create coherence out of chaos. Archival references to the Coventry/Dresden project are thin on the ground and it must be assumed that the bulk of relevant material is contained within the files of the HVA and MI6. The most that can be determined is that the Stasi, through Seidowsky, was behind the project in the GDR and that it was assumed, according to Seidowsky, that MI6 was fulfilling a similar role in relation to the project in Britain. In passing, it must be said that it would be hard to imagine that in the atmosphere of the Cold War either intelligence service would have been disinterested in the fact that a group of British people intended to cross through the Iron Curtain and live for several months among the citizens of communist East Germany. However, the thrust of the Coventry/Dresden project, as this thesis will argue, was political. The main purpose of both Ulbricht and the British government was to use the project in order to preserve the stability of the GDR. It became an intelligence operation purely in the sense that the participants were not aware of the role that they were playing. They were being steered by the intelligence services but they did not know that that was so. The not knowing was essential to their credibility.
However, an examination of the Seidowsky Stasi files reveals that running concurrently with the Coventry/Dresden project was a second conspiracy, much more in keeping with the popular concept of an intelligence operation. Superficially this conspiracy seemed to be at odds with the purpose of the Coventry/Dresden project in that it was an operation, steered by Western intelligence, designed to undermine the regimes of the GDR and other Soviet bloc countries and replace them with governments of a more liberal nature. The apparent contradiction on the part of the West can be seen not to be so if the two operations are viewed within the different time scales to which they belonged. The Coventry/Dresden project was designed to maintain stability in the short term. The larger subversive operation was envisaged as a long-term goal, not expected to reach fruition for up to 20 years. The West, having been rocked by the events in Budapest in 1956 when an uprising had been quelled by Soviet tanks, had switched to the tactic of working for gradual and controlled change within the Soviet bloc. Revolution was not on the agenda.

In order to achieve this goal, a number of organisations with credible bona fide were used to infiltrate Soviet bloc countries and build up underground networks. Two of these organisations were the West Berlin Evangelische Akademie and Aktion Sühnezeichen, both of which were involved either actively or through personal links with the operation of the Coventry/Dresden project. Many of the same people were associated with both operations, chief among them being Erich Müller-Gangloff, the head of the West Berlin Evangelische Akademie and member of the leadership circle of the West German branch of Aktion Sühnezeichen. Müller-Gangloff was a close friend of Lothar Kreyssig, head of the East German branch of Aktion Sühnezeichen and nominal organiser of the project in East Germany. The GDR was aware of this operation, which I will refer to as the Müller-Gangloff conspiracy, because it had been infiltrated by Seidowsky. Posing as a disaffected young Marxist student, Seidowsky had become acquainted with Müller-Gangloff in around 1957 and Müller-Gangloff had accepted him as a protégé, a potential valuable recruit to the underground movement. Thus Seidowsky stood at the centre of the interconnecting web which encompassed the Coventry/Dresden project and the Müller-Gangloff conspiracy.
In the absence of detailed archival references to the Coventry/Dresden project, analysis of its significance in the broader political context hinges to a great extent on an understanding of Seidowsky's activities and his role within the GDR power structure. That Seidowsky was a Stasi agent is recorded in the archives of the BStU. He was the most powerful German figure known to have been involved in the operation of the project in that it was he, according to the written testimony of Kreyssig, who gave permission for the project to proceed. It is this fact which places the project squarely in the intelligence arena. One of the questions which has to be asked is from whom was Seidowsky taking his orders? In Kreyssig's opinion, Seidowsky was acting on the instructions of the highest state leadership, or at the very least an office or person very close to that leadership. Was Kreyssig correct? According to Seidowsky's post-unification comments, he was. All decisions were made by Ulbricht, Seidowsky has said recently. But he has put great stress on the fact that the Coventry/Dresden project was not purely an intelligence operation. He claims that a major role was also played by Willi Barth, the leader of the Arbeitsgruppe Kirchenfragen, a political figure. This may well be so, but there is no documentary evidence to substantiate the claim other than a resolution emanating from the Arbeitsgruppe Kirchenfragen in May 1965 which recommended that the project be terminated and all British participants to be expelled. The order was not carried out, indicating that the Arbeitsgruppe Kirchenfragen was over-ruled by a higher authority. No further documentary evidence about Arbeitsgruppe Kirchenfragen involvement has surfaced. Nevertheless, it is accepted that intelligence involvement in the project was mounted for political purposes, the aim of this analysis of intelligence participation being to assist in determining the nature of the political purpose.

Seidowsky is the only senior intelligence figure on either side, East or West, for whom documentary evidence of participation in the project exists. He is not prepared to elaborate on his role. On the other hand, he does not contradict the hypotheses contained within this thesis, reserving his criticisms for the fact that, in his view, the analysis is one-sided.

"You cannot say it was a war but only talk about one side. There are officers and weapons on both sides. If you write a sports report and only explain what one team was doing, their
strategy and the way they played the game, everyone will want to know about the other side. Or wonder why the first team was on the field at all.¹³

While this is a valid criticism, it is one which cannot be totally rectified in the absence of access to British intelligence sources. However, through an examination of the evidence relating to Seidowsky's activities it is possible to part the curtains of secrecy in order to provide glimpses of the activities of the opposing intelligence services. This technique is not without its difficulties. There are problems relating to documentary evidence and problems relating to oral evidence.

In the case of documentary evidence, as has been noted, the East German files are incomplete. It can be assumed that much relevant material is contained within the files of the HVA. There are three reasons for this assumption. Firstly, as this chapter will show, Seidowsky operated on an international basis and his activities would have come within the HVA's area of responsibility. Seidowsky himself has suggested the HVA as a source.¹⁴ Secondly, Seidowsky's chief British contact, Paul Oestreicher, has claimed that he most definitely had two Stasi files and that accounts of his most interesting activities are contained within the files of the HVA.¹⁵ In addition, BStU archivists have been unable to trace any files belonging to any other major British player in the Coventry/Dresden project. There are no files relating to the Provost of Coventry Cathedral, Richard Crossman MP or the leader of the project in Dresden, Martin Turner, in the archives of the BStU. These three people were all regular visitors to the GDR over many years, in Turner's case up until the demise of the state. They were in contact with leading political and Church figures within the GDR. The total absence of any material about them suggests most strongly, not that they did not have files but that these files were housed with the HVA, if only because they related to British people.

None of the major participants who are still alive have been able to answer any of the more complex questions relating to the Coventry/Dresden project. Almost without exception they have universally poor memories. For example, Paul Holmer, who represented the British Foreign Office in West Berlin during the Coventry/Dresden negotiations and had several meetings with the Provost of Coventry Cathedral both in Germany and in London,
had no memory of ever having met him or known him. Nor did he have any memory of the Coventry/Dresden project. Oestreicher also claims that his memory is poor. He has said that he remembers very little about the Coventry/Dresden project, did not know that Seidowsky was involved and does not know why the project was allowed to take place. Referring to Seidowsky he said: 'He won't give away anything he does not want to and, if he does not want to talk about any of it, he can say he cannot remember...and it may be true'. Having acknowledged poor memory to be a useful ploy, when asked about his own role in the Coventry/Dresden project, Oestreicher said that he could not remember the degree of his involvement almost half a century ago and without written records. He has no recollection, he says, of being present at the reception given for the British group when it first arrived in East Berlin. 'It is fascinating to be reminded of these things', he says disingenuously. Seidowsky, on the other hand, said of Oestreicher in the context of the Coventry/Dresden project negotiations that he was the man 'who did it', that is to say it was Oestreicher who handled the behind the scenes negotiations.

There would appear to be little doubt that Oestreicher was deeply involved with the project. One of the project's volunteers, writing about his experience in an article in a Christian newsletter, spoke of Oestreicher meeting the group as it entered East Berlin for the first time. The article quoted Oestreicher as saying: 'Just thought I'd like to meet you' - a remarkably nonchalant comment for any British citizen to make when greeting compatriots on the Eastern side of the Berlin Wall in 1965. Towards the end of the 1965 stage of the project, Oestreicher is reported to have commented:

"...I was immensely impressed and deeply moved by the spirit of everything I saw there [Dresden]. Martin Turner could not possibly have done his job better. His openness and friendly directness has impressed everybody, in a situation where, even among Christians, unfortunately reserve that borders on distrust is the more common thing. Martin has clearly been backed up by a splendid group of young people, and the impression they have left behind will be of great importance for future inter-church relations."

These are the words of a man who obviously had close contact with, and took a great interest in the affairs of the Coventry/Dresden project and who felt able to comment on its success or otherwise with authority.
Oestreicher and Seidowsky are still in contact. Oestreicher has been accused of having worked for British intelligence during the many years in which he was active as an unofficial Cold War envoy, but he denies these charges. He has said that he was suspected by both East and West of working for the other side. He has acknowledged that he worked closely and in cooperation with the British diplomatic service. But, at the end of the day, Oestreicher has insisted that: 'I was no one's agent'. Seidowsky, on the other hand, argues that only one side of the story is to be found in the archive of the BStU. 'I am only one side. I am the mirror. There is also a reflection. The reality of Anglo/German policy is to be found in the files of MI5 and MI6. If you ask, they [the British] say that nobody was working for them. It is not true.'

Faced with this impasse, it is necessary to return to the one undisputed fact, that being that Seidowsky worked for the GDR intelligence service. Allowing for the pitfalls in obtaining oral evidence and the skewed availability of documentary evidence, the purpose of this chapter is to assess Seidowsky's career in intelligence, with the intention of shedding some light on a significant corner of the Cold War intelligence conflict and its implications in relation to domestic and international policy making.

**Hans-Joachim Seidowsky**

Seidowsky worked behind the scenes for the *Stasi* for 32 years, serving both Ulbricht and Honecker. He is a man who has led not only a double life, but also probably a triple life. The public life was that of an academic, a clever man who spoke several languages, an expert on Christianity and Church matters, a civil servant and later a senior executive in the GDR television industry. To his colleagues in the *Stasi* department responsible for dealing with Church matters, he was an unofficial informer (*Inoffizielle Mitarbeter (IM)*), who used his knowledge of Church affairs and Christian contacts to assist the East German state. To others in the GDR hierarchy, in both the intelligence and political world, he was a man of influence whose stage was the secret world of unofficial international diplomacy.

Seidowsky was born near Leipzig in 1932, just over a year after the birth of Oestreicher in the same area. He now lives in relative obscurity in the former East Berlin.
His parents were Jewish and came originally from Lithuania. They were also communists and Seidowsky's own commitment to the GDR seems to have been rooted in his family background and his childhood experiences of the war. He is not forthcoming on personal matters, limiting himself to the comment: 'I experienced Germany at war. They say that Germany was liberated from Hitler. That is wrong. 95 per cent of the people felt defeated. But my family was happy. Our dream was to build a better Germany.' According to Oestreicher, Seidowsky's parents died in a concentration camp. Describing his relationship with Seidowsky, Oestreicher says: 'We had a lot in common...he had a Jewish background like I did'.

From 1952 to 1957 Seidowsky was a student of philosophy at East Berlin's Humboldt University. He used his time at university not only to study but also to familiarise himself with the Church and its relationship with the state. He also spent some time as a student in Leipzig under Professor Ernst Bloch, one of the intellectuals at the centre of opposition to Stalinism during the 1950s, and became involved with oppositional groups although without taking an active role. It seems as though Seidowsky had decided at an early age on the area in which he could be of most use to the young communist state and that he had set about acquiring the contacts and knowledge which would make him a valuable asset to the authorities. In 1957, Seidowsky began working for the SfK, first as information officer and then as personal assistant to the then Secretary of State, Werner Eggerath. In his late 20s, he returned to Humbolt to complete a PhD on the relationship between the Vatican and the Kremlin between the two world wars. He then made a career for himself in the East German film and television industry, becoming head of the foreign relations department of GDR television. Following the reunification of Germany, Seidowsky worked for an international film company in Berlin.

Seidowsky's career with the Stasi Church department ran parallel to his public career. In 1957, he was recruited to HA V/4, later known as HA XX/4, as a Geheimer Informator (GI), the name given to IMs before the 1960s. He had proved his worth before becoming an IM by working for a short period as a Kontaktperson (KP), impressing the Stasi with his knowledge of Church matters and the contacts he had established. Thus began his multi-
faceted career which was to continue until the demise of the GDR in 1989. His job as personal assistant to Eggerath put him in an excellent position not only to reinforce his contacts among Church leaders but also to report on his boss to the Stasi. It was noted by the Stasi that Seidowsky's value lay not only in the contacts he had in Church circles but also in his ability to 'exert influence on the activities of the Secretary of State for Church Affairs' by virtue of his position there. The trappings of a secret agent were established. Seidowsky was given a codename - 'Gerhard'. A password was created for telephone communication. The caller was to ask: 'When are we going to play skat again', to which Seidowsky would reply with a time and place for a meeting. Treffs, or secret meetings, were held in konspirative Wohnung (KW) (either a home owned by the Stasi for such purposes but with a disguised use, or a room in the home of a Stasi employee), and only in bars in extraordinary circumstances.

Seidowsky was provided with a Legende, a form of cover story for the purposes of infiltrating Church circles. He created the impression that he was an idealistic young Marxist, dissatisfied with the current political situation and, later, that he was a member of a secret revisionist group within the GDR. Apparently Seidowsky was blessed with the ability to persuade people of his sincerity. The Stasi described him as having an 'open and honourable' character with good 'social adaptability and empathy' which made it possible for him to establish easy and rapid contact with a variety of different sorts of people. In addition, Seidowsky showed a particular 'aptitude for discourse with clergy from both Churches [Protestant and Roman Catholic] by virtue of his good political and factual knowledge and his analytical abilities.

During his first three years with the Stasi, Seidowsky's main task was to provide information about major political-clerical events and institutions in West Germany, particularly relating to the Evangelischen Akademien, the Gossner Mission and student Christian associations. He established close links in Church circles in both Germanies, largely as a result of his involvement with the heated debates which were taking place about Dibelius and his role. Seidowsky showed himself to be a rising star. In 1960, he became a member of the Stasi Church department Auswertergruppe (evaluation and analysis group)
charged with the 'systematic evaluation of Church newspapers, publications, reference books, both domestic and foreign, the setting up of an extensive factual and personal card systems, and the drawing up of detailed information reports'. 39 Seidowsky's particular target was Eugen Gerstenmaier, President of the Bundestag from 1954 to 1969. As a result of Seidowsky's work, the Stasi gained its first insight into the

"...secret service connections inside the political-clerical organisations in West Germany which led on later to the concentration on work against the special political-clerical centres which were conducting underground activities against the GDR". 40

By 1961, Seidowsky's named list of contacts had grown to include Paul Oestreicher. 41 This is the first recorded evidence of contact between the two men and is significant in view of the fact that it establishes that Seidowsky and Oestreicher knew each other before Oestreicher obtained his quasi-official post with the British Council of Churches. It was in 1961 that Oestreicher began his work with the BBC religious affairs department, having previously been a curate in Dalston, East London. Oestreicher agrees that he may well have met Seidowsky in 1961 on his first trip to the GDR on behalf of the BBC. 42 In 1962, Seidowsky began to concentrate his attentions on the Evangelischen Akademien. A particular target was the Berlin-Brandenburg Evangelische Akademie which was suspected of being a Feindzentrale (centre of enemy activities). In the course of this mission, Seidowsky met with Erich Müller-Gangloff frequently, often more than once a week. Seidowsky's official career with the Stasi Church department came to an end in 1974 when a new unspecified function brought him under the instructions of the Central Committee of the SED. The Church department's closing report on Seidowsky remarked on the fact that his field of operations had crossed departmental areas of responsibility. 43

Seidowsky's first two lives, those of the secret Stasi IM and the public academic, civil servant and television executive, are documented and in the public arena. The BStU is in possession of 17 thick files relating to Seidowsky's work with the Stasi department responsible for Church affairs, HA XX/4. 44 The fact that there is a third version of Seidowsky's life can, however, be detected from a combination of three factors: circumstantial evidence; the testimony of Oestreicher, his close British contact over many years; and a small number of brief archival references to work outside the normal remit of
an IM contained within *Stasi* reports. During the life of the GDR there were many thousands of IMs registered with the *Stasi* and the importance of the work they did varied enormously. Some, like the leading Thuringian cleric *Oberkirchenrat* Gerhard Lotz, played influential roles in helping to shape the course of events within the GDR. But the majority was engaged in feeding information to the *Stasi* which was often no more than tittle-tattle. The role Seidowsky played in GDR politics over more than 30 years' service with the *Stasi* suggests that the designation IM was probably as much a camouflage of his true role as was the cover he used to infiltrate Church circles in the 1960s.

Given the length and nature of his service, it can be argued that Seidowsky was one of the *Stasi's* most important agents. The evidence points to the fact that he was a highly placed foreign secret agent. Indeed, Seidowsky appears to have been the undercover agent *par excellence*, a chameleon so convincingly changing colour with his surroundings that even the upheavals of 1989 did not disturb his camouflage. According to Oestreicher, he was 'a complete figure in the shadows. He never turned up at anything official. He kept a totally low profile during the communist years and he has kept it since the communist regime collapsed'. There are, to date, few references to Seidowsky to be found in works documenting the GDR. He is notable for his absence from directories in which he would appear to have merited inclusion by virtue of his positions as a senior civil servant and television executive. Recently he has been footnoted in works by Bernd Schäfer and Clemens Vollnhals for his role as an IM in the Church department. Seidowsky was so convincing in the roles he played that he fooled not only his close contacts within the Church leadership but also at times his own colleagues within the *Stasi* Church department who suspected on more than one occasion that he was a double agent. On a personal level, people who knew Seidowsky during his GDR years remember him in differing ways. For Oestreicher he was 'a friendly rascal'. For Waltraud Hopstock, an East German Christian who was a colleague of Müller-Gangloff and one of those under surveillance, Seidowsky was 'a fox'.

The BStU possesses a small amount of documentary material generated by the department responsible for counter-espionage, HA II, which confirms the assumption that
Seidowsky's remit was wider than that of an IM. This consists of brief reports from the 1980s, heavily censored by the BStU, dealing with suspicions that Seidowsky was a double agent working for the West Germans. In the last of these reports, written in 1988, the reader is able to obtain a glimpse of the reality of Seidowsky's status in the intelligence world of the GDR. After summarising Seidowsky's work with the Church department and the manner in which he later used his professional position in the film and television world to travel in capitalist countries, the report noted: '[Seidowsky] fulfilled the orders of leading Party and government functionaries. On Party instructions, he prepared the way for Honecker's visit to Italy in 1985 and to West Germany in 1987.' It is this sentence which makes it clear, in the absence of other documentary evidence, that Seidowsky was no mere informer. He operated at the very highest levels. The meeting between Honecker and the West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl was the political high spot of Honecker's career. The figure in the background was Seidowsky.

Seidowsky's high standing in GDR political circles is confirmed by Oestreicher's testimony. Oestreicher has read the Seidowsky files in the BStU, and also his own. He publicly acknowledged his relationship with Seidowsky in a talk to a small group of Christians in 1999.52

"...from the sixties onwards I also had a special east [sic] German friend. I use the word advisedly, though I had no doubt that he was instructed to befriend me. He had influence, maybe even power... If his job was to impress me, he succeeded... He was and is a clever, even outstanding Jewish intellectual...Under cover he was an expert analyst of western religious policy and was, as I later learnt, the GDR's designated ambassador to the Vatican...[the GDR ceased to exist before this appointment could be made]."

In an interview with the author, Oestreicher elaborated more fully on the role that Seidowsky played within the GDR. Recalling the early years of their relationship, he said:

"I was never in any doubt at all that my conversations with him [Seidowsky] were conversations with the East German state. It was never said in so many words, but it was quite plain to me that we were not just talking in private...He wanted me to think he was very influential in the regime. And he was... the word Stasi was never mentioned but I assumed he was an agent of some branch of East German intelligence. And he wanted me to assume it. In other words, there was no pretence about it. He wanted me to know."53

During the later years of the GDR, Seidowsky was 'very close' to Honecker, according to Oestreicher. Whether he 'had a personal line' to Ulbricht as well is something
which Oestreicher says he does not know. Nevertheless, Oestreicher acknowledges that he always knew during the Ulbricht period that Seidowsky was 'a channel' to those with power within the GDR. In addition, what documentary evidence there is points to the fact that Seidowsky was operating at a very high level even in the early years of his Stasi career, during the 1960s and early 1970s. In 1970, when Ulbricht was still First Secretary, Seidowsky was involved with the organisation of the Olympic Games due to be held in Munich in 1972. Records show that he requested DM200 for a week-long trip to Munich to investigate problems associated with the Games. In 1971, a report made mention of Seidowsky strengthening his links in order to discover more about the 'new Bonn Ostpolitik'. In 1968 and 1969, he was rewarded for work he had carried out in relation to the CSSR. The citation for 1968 read:

"...he [Seidowsky] has done a very good job...and always resolved his difficult and complicated mission for the MfS successfully...In this connection, through the valuable connections he has created to the intelligence services and organisations of western countries, West Germany and West Berlin and through the operational exploitation of which the plans and intentions of the enemy in the area covered by XX/4 could be ascertained, successful counter-intelligence measures could be taken against them. The IM particularly distinguished himself by obtaining valuable information for the leadership about the preparation of the counter-revolution in the CSSR by the enemy intelligence services of the West working together with anti-socialist forces in the CSSR."

It is evident, therefore, that throughout his long intelligence career Seidowsky was involved not merely with domestic Church matters but with external influences, particularly those emanating from West Germany and Britain. These were not the activities to be expected of an IM in the Stasi Church department, a section which was, on the whole, concerned with internal matters. Seidowsky's main and most important contacts were West German or British, not East German: people such as Erich Müller-Gangloff, head of the West Berlin Evangelische Akademie; Hans-Jakob Stehle, a West German journalist working for Die Zeit and the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung who provided a link to Roman Catholicism; Oestreicher, Anglican priest and unofficial Cold War envoy. Seidowsky's work took him to a number of countries including France, Britain, Italy, Switzerland, West Germany and the Soviet Union. It is quite apparent that his duties overlapped, at the very least, with the area which came under the control of the foreign intelligence service, the HVA.
A watershed which probably marks the point at which Seidowsky crossed into the arena of international espionage came in 1961 when he made a remarkable two-week-long trip to Italy at the invitation of and in the company of Müller-Gangloff. From the Stasi's perspective, the purpose of the trip was to obtain more information about Müller-Gangloff's links to West German state and intelligence organisations and to make contact with Eduard Waetjen, a former agent of the Nazi Abwehr who had worked with Allen Dulles, one time head of the American CIA, both during and after the war. Müller-Gangloff and Waetjen were close and Seidowsky's introduction to Waetjen was made by Müller-Gangloff. The Stasi suspected that Waetjen continued to operate as a CIA agent. Müller-Gangloff, on the other hand, had made the invitation hoping to recruit Seidowsky to the undercover oppositional network he was building up in the GDR and other Soviet bloc countries. The journey took Seidowsky to Munich, Rome, Naples and finally Sicily where he met Waetjen at Palermo. Seidowsky wrote:

"During the course of the trip, Müller-Gangloff tried to convince me with great perseverance that the orthodox Marxism of East Berlin was running into a dead end and that one should, therefore, not get involved in it. Rather, one should prepare for a later time which would offer the possibilities of constructive co-operation, even a rearrangement of GDR foreign policy. The time would then come when the GDR would be recognised diplomatically. This trip would definitely serve to prepare me. Waetjen believes that new GDR policy should be formed not by the fathers but by the sons, by the young intelligentsia...He valued the fact that he could speak openly with me because he and I, unlike Müller-Gangloff, are both Marxists. Waetjen thought that now it had become generally quite usual in the West to work with Marxists."

The Italian trip was presumably regarded as an intelligence coup for one side or the other, or both. In the context of this analysis of Seidowsky's career, however, it is significant because it marks the point from which Seidowsky's colleagues in the Church department began to distrust him. From this stage on, Seidowsky began to operate in a manner more akin to that of a foreign intelligence agent than a domestic informer. The Church department, puzzled by Seidowsky's behaviour, began to suspect that his Legende had become reality, that he was operating as a double agent. Shortly after the Italian trip, the department mounted an in-depth investigation in order to establish whether there was any foundation for its suspicions.

The investigation began in July 1962 and Seidowsky was not cleared until the end of 1963. It was suspected that Müller-Gangloff had been more successful than had been
intended when Seidowsky was allowed to make the Italian trip and that he had indeed been recruited to the West German intelligence agency, the *Bundesnachrichtendienst* (BND).*\(^{62}\) The investigating officers noted the ease with which Seidowsky had managed to obtain a second passport in Munich in order to travel on to Italy. They doubted the veracity of his report of his conversations with Waetjen and Müller-Gangloff, suspecting that they had been less trivial than Seidowsky had led them to believe. They believed that the reason why Seidowsky travelled all the way to Sicily may have been connected with their suspicions that a secret training centre for intelligence service frogmen had been established on the island. They were even perturbed by the fact that since his return from Italy, Seidowsky had expressed an interest in obtaining some racing pigeons. 'The whole trip must be seen as a journey for the purpose of recruiting or instructing 'Gerhard' by a secret service', wrote the author of the report into the Seidowsky investigation.*\(^{63}\) Seidowsky was put under observation by his own colleagues. They noted that he had surreptitious meetings with an unknown woman, that he lied about *Treffs* which were also being recorded by other agents.*\(^{64}\) As the evidence seemed to become more incriminating, a massive surveillance and investigation operation against Seidowsky was mounted. His phone was tapped and his whole life, including school and family, were put under the microscope.

At this point reports of the investigation peter out. Without explanation, it was recorded that Seidowsky had been exonerated and awarded a medal for his work.*\(^{65}\) The files do not reveal what caused Seidowsky's superiors to change their minds. They merely noted that 'the examination proved that the GI had reported honestly and reliably on the enemy activities of the political-clerical forces'.*\(^{66}\) The fact that Seidowsky was officially back in favour was confirmed in January 1964 when, a few days after the Coventry/Dresden project negotiations began with the meeting between Hans Seigewasser, the Secretary of State for Church Affairs, and Williams, the Provost of Coventry Cathedral, Seidowsky was awarded the bronze medal of the *Nationale Volksarmee.*\(^{67}\)

However, despite being cleared by the investigation, it seems that the mantle of suspicion was never completely lifted. In all probability, the fact that Seidowsky was distrusted by his colleagues in the Church department merely demonstrated that he was an
efficient operator, that his cover as a dissident was extremely convincing. The internal structures of intelligence services usually operate on the basis of watertight compartments, with different sections acting in ignorance of each other.\textsuperscript{68} But in 1984, the more serious doubts about Seidowsky's loyalties surfaced again. On this occasion the investigation was carried out by department HA II which dealt with counter-espionage.\textsuperscript{69} The report noted that Seidowsky had been permitted to travel in 'non-socialist countries' since 1960 and that the amount of travelling he did had doubled since 1978. He visited most of the main European countries as well as travelling to Japan and Australia. He was also a regular visitor to West Germany. The report described Seidowsky's background and the manner in which he was recruited to the \textit{Stasi}. The previous investigation was noted. In 1970, responsibility for overseeing Seidowsky's work was taken over by Hans Ludwig, deputy leader of the main department HA XX, because his special operational contacts at that time fell outside the departmental responsibilities of HA XX/4.\textsuperscript{70} These conditions continued until 1974, the report noting that no information was available about this period. The investigation by HA II also showed that despite the fact that Seidowsky's career with the Church department was officially terminated in 1974, he continued to work with Ludwig and HA XX/4 after that date, providing information from capitalist countries. The report concluded that it must be taken into consideration that Seidowsky had a variety of different types of relationships with the \textit{Stasi}, particularly with regard to the special tasks which he carried out for the Party.

A year later, in September 1985, another report by department HA II/6 shows that he was still being kept under close observation.\textsuperscript{71} Finally in 1988, yet another report on Seidowsky was compiled by department HA II/6 based on continuing suspicions that Seidowsky was working for the West German intelligence services.\textsuperscript{72} The Seidowsky file in the possession of the BStU ends without any conclusions being drawn, overtaken by the events of 1989. However, based on the evidence available, it is unlikely that Seidowsky was a double agent. The probability is that the cause of the suspicions was the fact that Seidowsky was operating outside departmental boundaries, that he was in fact, unknown to most of his colleagues, a highly placed foreign agent. The significance of these investigations in terms of this thesis is that they demonstrate firstly that Seidowsky was an
enigma within the *Stasi*, and secondly that he acted under instructions from the leadership of the SED.

Looking back over the many years he has known Seidowsky, Oestreicher has expressed his belief that Seidowsky was not a double agent, although he has qualified the statement with the enigmatic rider that "... the world of espionage is a strange world..." But Oestreicher is also certain that Seidowsky genuinely believed in reform.

"...although he [Seidowsky] was a real servant to the East German regime... he also had certain liberal leanings... He was not a hard-line Stalinist in my opinion. He was completely devoted to the East German state. No question about it. But he would have liked to see that East German state more liberal that it was."  

The issue of liberalisation within the GDR was the main area of contention during the first half of the 1960s, both politically and in relation to intelligence matters. The Müller-Gangloff conspiracy fed off the belief that there was support within the GDR for a more liberal state. But plans to replace Ulbricht with a more liberal leader suffered a setback when Ulbricht himself adopted the mantle of liberalism between 1963 and 1965. It seemed as though the conspirators had been conspired against.

**Erich Müller-Gangloff**

While the Stasi files available to researchers are remarkably thin on the subject of the Coventry/Dresden project, the opposite is so in the case of the Müller-Gangloff conspiracy. This unusual wealth of material relating to an intelligence operation provides an opportunity to gain an insight into the intelligence strategies of both East and West during the Cold War in the 1960s. Although, as has been noted, the material is obviously one-sided, in that it stems only from the communist archives, its existence in the public domain allows the historian a rare insight into the mindset of both protagonists. To use Seidowsky's own analogy, if he is the mirror then Müller-Gangloff is the reflection - or at least a part of the reflection, for Seidowsky was a busy man and his intrigues were not confined to one person or one conspiracy. Müller-Gangloff, according to Seidowsky, was a CIA agent. The difficulty of verifying this claim, a difficulty inherent in almost any claim that a person is or has been a secret agent, has been compounded by the fact that the *Stasi* files in the BStU have been censored so that any reference to which intelligence service Müller-Gangloff was
working for have been deleted. There are, however, frequent references to the fact that he
was acting for one of the Western intelligence services, with the balance of probability being
that it was the CIA. He was known to have American contacts and to be in touch with
others thought to have been CIA operatives.

The BStU Stasi files contain numerous reports of conversations between Seidowsky
and Müller-Gangloff, with Müller-Gangloff frequently being quoted verbatim. While the
accusation may be made that there is no proof that these accounts are truthful, there are
grounds for believing that they probably are. On occasion, the reports consist of verbatim
transcripts of Müller-Gangloff's comments, apparently secretly recorded. They have the ring
of truth in that the spoken word reported is garbled and incoherent. In addition, Oestreicher,
who has read similar reports of his own conversations with Seidowsky, has commented that.
'...the reports I have read which he wrote about me are absolutely accurate. I always thought
they would be because he [Seidowsky] was so intelligent.'

The Muller-Gangloff conspiracy was not static. Initially, before 1963, Muller-
Gangloff was optimistic that Ulbricht would be deposed within the near future. After 1963,
the goal became more long-term with the emphasis being placed on a gradual and controlled
undermining of the GDR regime, so that ultimately it could be replaced with a system of
government more conducive to Western desires. In addition, it was planned to build up
networks which would lead to change in the neighbouring Soviet bloc countries. The
conspirators did not wish to ferment violent revolution. Müller-Gangloff often referred to
not wanting to see another Budapest. For example, in 1962 he told Seidowsky: 'The danger
in the GDR at the moment exists in the fact that previous cases of "removal" (Ablösung)
-Poland and Hungary - were on both occasions followed by bloody clashes.' In January
1963, he said: 'A way must be found which would exclude the Budapest result. It would
depend... on whether there was a group of young people who could carry out a "replacement
in the ranks" so that the situation does not occur where the way is opened up but there is no-
one there.'
The philosophy behind the Müller-Gangloff conspiracy was that of co-existence between East and West. This was in sharp contrast to the West's official political and diplomatic policy which was directed towards the demise of the GDR and the reunification of Germany under the West German capitalist system. The policy of co-existence did not become official until after the acceptance of Brandt's Ostpolitik in the early 1970s. In 1963, Müller-Gangloff had been pleased by President Kennedy's apparent willingness to talk to Khrushchev only to have his hopes dashed with the 'Ich bin ein Berliner' speech. Earlier in the year, Müller-Gangloff had himself met Khrushchev, acting as a stand-in for the West Berlin mayor, Willy Brandt, when political pressure prevented Brandt from going through with the meeting. Shortly after the Kennedy speech, Müller-Gangloff confided in Seidowsky: 'It is flabbergasting... I look upon it [Kennedy's speech] as one of the biggest defeats of my life...there is still a bit of Dulles lurking in this Kennedy. Just as there is always a bit of Stalin hiding in Khrushchev.'

It appears that Müller-Gangloff was convinced that Seidowsky was genuinely dissatisfied with the situation in the GDR and saw him as a valuable recruit to his underground network. In 1962, the Stasi mounted an operation against Müller-Gangloff, largely as a result of the information that Seidowsky provided. This indicated that Müller-Gangloff was using his position as head of the West Berlin Evangelische Akademie to establish a network of small groups of influential people within the GDR, known as Hauskreis, which were linked to the West. According to a Stasi analysis of the Müller-Gangloff conspiracy drawn up in 1964, it was designed to bring about a substantial change in the structure of the GDR leadership which would be more in keeping with Western desires. This change would incorporate the younger generation of Marxist intelligentsia within the GDR, with the aim of introducing a broad liberalisation programme, including the destruction of the Berlin Wall. The time scale envisaged in which these changes would take place would be in the region of ten to 20 years. During this period, specific individuals within the GDR with long-term Western connections would be placed in 'appropriate leading or middle-ranking positions' in the Party, economic and state organisations. These people would be brought together in underground groups. The whole process would be supported by the intelligentsia, most of whom would be won over by 'hostile ideological
influences' emanating from the *Hauskreise* of the *Evangelische Akademie* and the *Gossner Mission*. At the same time, through organisations such as *Aktion Sühnezeichen*, contact would be established with people in other Soviet bloc countries who were considered to be *aufweichbar* (politically susceptible). In order to bring about the realisation of all these plans, Müller-Gangloff travelled to the GDR usually every week and made trips to other Eastern bloc countries about once every three months.\textsuperscript{84}

Müller-Gangloff was born in Bavaria in 1907 and died in 1980. As a young man, he used more than one alias, either plain Erich Müller or Christoph Obermüller. This practice was fairly common among the politically active in the turbulent years of the 1920s and 1930s.\textsuperscript{85} According to the *Stasi*, his sympathies lay with a variety of nationalist splinter organisations during the early days of the Third Reich.\textsuperscript{86} Having studied philology at university he developed an interest in the concept of Germanness and this, in turn, led to an interest in the sensitive subject of German borders. In 1940, he published a book under the name of Christoph Obermüller entitled *Die deutschen Stämme - Stammesgeschichte als Namensgeschichte und Reichsgeschichte* (The German Tribes - Phylogeny as the History of Names and State).\textsuperscript{87} The *Stasi* researches into Müller-Gangloff's past indicate that his nationalism may have turned to racism and that he did eventually support fascism. His activities during the Second World War are unclear. In *Wer ist Wer XIX* for 1976/77, Müller-Gangloff has a brief entry which lists him as having been in the army and then a prisoner-of-war between 1940 and 1946. The entry is followed by the word 'Flucht' in brackets. The *Stasi* version is that Müller-Gangloff became an SS officer in 1940. It then placed him in unoccupied France around 1942, apparently on an unknown Nazi mission. Later he became associated with the 20 July 1944 conspiracy to assassinate Hitler and had close contact with Adam von Trott zu Solz, who was executed for his part in the plot, as well as other conspirators. The July 1944 connection was significant for two reasons. Firstly it provided Müller-Gangloff with influential contacts in the post-war years. Secondly, the *Stasi* believed that Müller-Gangloff's Cold War underground network was based on a similar pattern to that used by the July 1944 conspiracy.
At some point, the *Stasi* being unclear about when or how, Müller-Gangloff was taken prisoner by the Americans and ended the war as a prisoner in the USA. He remained in America until about 1946. From the point of view of Müller-Gangloff's later activities, which the *Stasi* suspected were directed by the CIA, this event was extremely significant since it was commonly thought by East Germans that those Germans who had spent time in either British or American prisoner-of-war camps could no longer be trusted. Even if they were committed communists it was feared that they might have been contaminated by attempts to subvert or recruit them. There is little concrete information about this period except for a *Stasi* report of a tape-recorded conversation during which Müller-Gangloff is reported to have said that when he was released from prison in 1946, he 'skedaddled' home from America and went to live with his mother in the Soviet Zone of Berlin but immediately became an object of interest to the Russians. During the following four years or so, he lived sometimes in the Soviet zone, sometimes in West Berlin and sometimes in America, where apparently things were 'a little dicey'. Müller-Gangloff does not appear to have had any connections with the *Evangelische Kirche* before the war. Nevertheless, he started working for the West Berlin *Evangelische Akademie* in 1949 and became its head in 1952.

Müller-Gangloff was politically well connected in West Germany. In 1964, the *Stasi* considered his most important contacts to be: Eduard Waetjen, to whom Seidowsky had been introduced in Italy; West German Foreign Minister Gerhard Schröder; Theodor Steltzer, a recent business manager of the *Deutschen Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik* (German Society for Foreign Policy) in Bonn which advised the West Germany Foreign Minister; and Willy Brandt's adviser, Egon Bahr, credited with the formulation of *Ostpolitik*. Both Waetjen and Steltzer had been members of the July 1944 conspiracy. Steltzer had also been a co-founder of the CDU in West Berlin, Minister President of Schleswig-Holstein from 1946-47, and a consultant on financial development aid to the West Germany intelligence service. He was said to be closely connected to several US charitable foundations, such as Ford, Rockefeller and Carnegie. Before the war, Steltzer had been a member of the Nazi resistance group, the Kreisau Circle, along with Müller-Gangloff and a host of people who came to prominence after the war, including Gerstenmaier and leading Churchman Harald Poelchau. Schröder and Müller-Gangloff knew each other before
1945, Müller-Gangloff describing him as a 'personal friend'. Bahr had been in regular contact with Müller-Gangloff over the negotiations to allow West Berliners to visit their relatives in East Berlin during the Christmas period of 1963.  

The period of greatest activity in the Seidowsky/Müller-Gangloff relationship, judging by Stasi reports, were the years 1963 and 1964. The two men met frequently in East Berlin, sometimes on a weekly basis. The building of the Berlin Wall had inconvenienced them, in that Müller-Gangloff had at first found it difficult to cross into East Berlin. However, within a matter of months he had been able to obtain a West German passport in the name of Erich Müller which provided him with freer access to East Berlin than if he had been identified as a resident of West Berlin. The Stasi described Seidowsky and Müller-Gangloff as having 'a relationship of trust'.  

During 1962, Müller-Gangloff told Seidowsky that shortly Ulbricht would be removed and that, therefore appropriate successors should be put into position in order to avoid a 'bloody conflict'. In November 1962, Müller-Gangloff is quoted as saying that both the USA and the Soviet Union had 'got tired of "their Germans"', Adenauer and Ulbricht, and gave specific dates later that month on which the two leaders would be 'put straight' by the two super powers. Waetjen was expected in East Berlin at the beginning of 1963 in order to 'effect the realisation' of the goal of removing Ulbricht. Ulbricht must disappear, Müller-Gangloff had said and the West would put a new government in the GDR on its feet economically. People named as possible successors included Fritz Selbmann, who had supported the Schirdewan opposition to Ulbricht in the 1956/57 but who survived to be appointed deputy chairman of the economics council in 1961, and Bruno Leuschner, chairman of the state planning commission and the son of a member of the July 1944 plot against Hitler. Müller-Gangloff gave Seidowsky the task of establishing a line of contact with potential successors.

Ulbricht's policy U-turn at the 6th Party Congress in January 1963 took Müller-Gangloff by surprise and cast him into despondency. Ulbricht had wrong-footed the conspirators with his announcement of more liberal economic and social policies by taking
the wind out of the sails of those who denigrated him as the last of the Stalinists. As Müller-Gangloff told Seidowsky in March 1963: 'Everything is a bit grim what with the Party Congress. The old rehash from previous centuries polished up again'. This was said in the course of a long rambling outpouring by Müller-Gangloff which Seidowsky recorded on a hidden tape recorder. Müller-Gangloff went on to say that those loyal to Ulbricht had been 'fused together'. The conspirators were not beaten but it was a 'trial of their patience'. Hopefully people would not become resigned to the new situation.

In order to elicit more information, Seidowsky, under Stasi instructions, altered his strategy during the course of 1963. He told Müller-Gangloff that the 6th Party Conference in January 1963 had changed attitudes in the GDR. Opportunities for open discussion with trusted friends had been reduced. Hopes of change had diminished. There was no longer any point in existing in the GDR in the hope of 'becoming better communists'. Seidowsky needed to know to whom he could turn to support the conspiracy. 'Not everyone was bent under the yoke', Müller-Gangloff told Seidowsky. '...there are those who know that a point in time will come when those who bent under the yoke will be seen as weak'. From this point on the Stasi tactic was for Seidowsky to continually encourage Müller-Gangloff to introduce him personally to other members of the underground groups, or Hauskreise, within the GDR.

Although this tactic had some success, it is evident from the Stasi reports that the need for action against the Müller-Gangloff conspirators became less pressing during the course of 1963 as the implications of Ulbricht's unexpected transformation into a liberal became apparent. At the beginning of January 1964, Müller-Gangloff summed up the new situation during a meeting with Seidowsky. Müller-Gangloff had just come from a meeting with Kurt Mattick, the chairman of the West Berlin branch of the SPD, during the course of which, as he related to Seidowsky, the following political assessment had been made:

"There are 'political non-dealers (Ladenhüter)' in both German states at this current stage of reduced tension, for example Walter Ulbricht in the GDR and Lemmer [probably Ernst Lemmer, a former Minister for All-German Affairs] in West Germany. The discussion with Mattick shows that the 'non-dealers' on both sides are being forced to make corrections partly in order not to commit political suicide. He (Müller-Gangloff) and his political friends, such as for example Foreign Minister Schröder, have observed such a 'liberal wave' at the present time in Walter Ulbricht. With him, a 'sort of mood of going-along with things"
(Art Einschwenken) can be detected. To quote him [Müller-Gangloff]: "When Ulbricht functions in this way, it would be better for him to be there than for him to be overthrown, because his overthrow could set off a reaction similar to events in Hungary in 1956."\[^{102}\]

A few weeks later, Müller-Gangloff was again showing signs of optimism, albeit hedged around with fears that political forces in both East and West might harm the delicate shoots of liberalism that were beginning to surface in the communist countries.

"There really is a liberal wing in communism today, although it sounds like a paradox. It is amazing the way that liberalism has broken out in the CSSR, which used to be the most pig-headed country in the Ostbloc...Hungary is also a liberal stronghold today. It is a paradox when one compares it with 1956. And all these things are being developed further. Firstly there is a younger generation there which says: 'What are the dopes (Nachtwächter) up there wanting, who don't seem to realise that things must change'. And this development, which is necessary, is now inhibited by the hard line of the West, because the hard people in the East are only waiting so that they can make further use of their hard slogans...Today the old functionaries are no longer in the position to be able to overcome with their views that have had their day and their obsolete methods, especially in the economy. Walter Ulbricht said that to the ZK...He [Müller-Gangloff] also referred to the Youth Communiqué...That such things should happen here in the GDR is interesting and one must see with hope, if it happens, that tomorrow everything is not shattered.\[^{103}\]

From around this time, the beginning of 1964, Müller-Gangloff and his colleagues began to concentrate their efforts on strengthening their links with the GDR's socialist neighbours and building up underground networks in these countries. The use of Aktion Sühnezeichen as a means of infiltrating Soviet bloc countries was an integral part of the Müller-Gangloff conspiracy. According to the Stasi's analysis of the conspiracy, Müller-Gangloff used the organisation 'in order to establish contact in the other socialist countries'.\[^{104}\] In June 1963, Müller-Gangloff took Seidowsky into his confidence concerning his plans to integrate Aktion Sühnezeichen into the Christian Peace Conference and draw the Poles into the organisation.\[^{105}\] From that point on, Müller-Gangloff reported the development of these plans on a regular basis to Seidowsky. He also introduced Kreyssig, the head of the East German branch of Aktion Sühnezeichen to Seidowsky. During the course of 1964, several meetings between Kreyssig and Seidowsky are recorded, some in connection with Aktion Sühnezeichen activities in Poland and the CSSR and some relating to the Coventry/Dresden project. Judging by Stasi records, contact between Müller-Gangloff and Seidowsky waned during the latter half of 1964. It must be assumed that by this time Müller-Gangloff knew that Seidowsky was a Stasi agent since Kreyssig warned the Provost of Coventry Cathedral about him - albeit in cryptic terms.\[^{106}\]
Conclusion

This analysis of the documentary and oral evidence relating to Seidowsky and the operations in which he was involved on behalf of the GDR intelligence service during the first half of the 1960s demonstrates that Seidowsky was a most influential Stasi agent. He acted on the instructions of the Party, the SED, carrying out tasks which were of national and international importance. He was a part of the political machinery of the GDR. He was a link between intelligence operations and policy decisions, the personification of the interaction between these two branches of government activity. Seidowsky’s role in the organisation of the Coventry/Dresden project is the most important pointer to an understanding and interpretation of the significance of that project in both a domestic and an international context. The myth that has grown up over the years that the Coventry/Dresden project was an act of Christian idealism carried through by the determination of the Provost of Coventry Cathedral, a totally non-political event, is immediately shattered once Seidowsky’s involvement is revealed. In the void that is left there hangs a huge question mark. Obviously the Coventry/Dresden project was not a ‘non-political’ act. The fact that it was controlled by a senior Stasi agent such as Seidowsky signifies that it was in some way a part of an intelligence operation. But what kind of intelligence operation? And for what purpose?

In the absence of archival evidence to link Ulbricht directly to the project, the most important evidence for this supposition is that permission for it to proceed was given by Seidowsky, a fact which almost certainly means that Ulbricht was the man in charge. Not only has Seidowsky himself claimed that it was Ulbricht who made the decision but, in addition, all the evidence demonstrates that Seidowsky acted on instructions from the highest level. This being so, events surrounding the Coventry/Dresden project are, therefore, an illustration of an intelligence service being used in order to bring about the realisation of a political goal. The goal was to persuade GDR Christians of the merits of co-existence with the communist state. It is necessary, therefore, to examine Ulbricht’s policy regarding Church/state relations in order to understand where and how the Coventry/Dresden project
fitted in to the overall scheme. The intelligence link has to be seen as a reflection of that policy.

On the other side of the divide, the assumption that the British government was also involved in this project in an unofficial manner is supported by evidence of the long-term relationship which existed between Seidowsky and Oestreicher, Oestreicher's role as an unofficial Cold War envoy and supporter of Christian/ Marxist dialogue, and Seidowsky's assertion that the Coventry/Dresden project was indeed an intelligence operation masterminded by Oestreicher. The reasons why the British government should wish to promote the scheme and the manner in which it did so will be examined in detail in later chapters. However, it is apparent from the second intelligence operation under analysis, the Müller-Gangloff conspiracy, that during the period under examination the West was more concerned with the maintenance of stability in Central Europe than with the overthrow of a communist leader. The sense of urgency to remove Ulbricht disappeared as a result of the liberalisation measures introduced by the GDR leader at the 6th Party Congress. As Müller-Gangloff is reported to have said, it became wiser to maintain the new Ulbricht in power than risk the instability of a new leader and possible violent insurrection. The British government's tacit support for the Coventry/Dresden project would have been in keeping with this pro-Ulbricht policy. The Foreign Office would have had an interest in quietly stage-managing the project behind the scenes, of necessity secretly through the medium of its intelligence services.

At the same time as the West's plans to depose Ulbricht fizzled out, the Müller-Gangloff conspiracy directed its energies towards the other Soviet bloc countries, particularly Poland and the CSSR. The success and failure of the Müller-Gangloff underground networks were reflected in the events of 1968 in Prague, when the liberalisation movement within the CSSR was brought to a violent end. The evidence relating to the Müller-Gangloff conspiracy demonstrates the manner in which Western intelligence services involved themselves in directing the course of events behind the Iron Curtain. It shows the way in which the networks of Christian organisations, in particular Aktion Sühnezeichen, were used to provide a means of infiltrating Soviet bloc countries. By
doing so, the intelligence services were running in tandem with political developments taking place in West Germany. While Brandt and his close adviser Egon Bahr were tentatively paving the way for the acceptance of Ostpolitik, Müller-Gangloff and Aktion Sühnezeichen were actively building the links which would nourish the political policy. But Aktion Sühnezeichen was not simply the messenger. It also attempted to shape the message.

6 Ibid., p.182. According to Glees, the British attempted an operation along similar lines in Albania in 1949. It turned into a 'fiasco' but its interest for Glees lies in the fact that it was 'a conscious attempt by British Intelligence to learn from the examples provided by the Soviet Union during the Second World War', p.218.
7 BStU, MIS AIM 3654/71 Teil II Band 8, analysis of the operation conducted by Seidowsky against Müller-Gangloff, 25 November 1963.
8 Hubertus Knabe has noted the relationship between Müller-Gangloff and Seidowsky in his book *Die unterwanderte Republik: Stasi im Westen*, (Berlin: Propyläen, 1999), pp.295-297. He has come to a different conclusion about its significance. It is his assessment that Müller-Gangloff, while not being an agent of the Stasi, was used by the SED to propagate policies which were in the interests of the GDR. Müller-Gangloff was being steered by the Stasi in relation to his work towards East/West dialogue. However, Knabe acknowledges that there is a paradox evident in the files, this being the extent to which the SED also mistrusted Müller-Gangloff. This thesis disagrees with Knabe's interpretation of Müller-Gangloff's role and argues that this paradox is explained by the fact that Müller-Gangloff was actually working for the West. Knabe has not examined Seidowsky's role as a Stasi agent, but it is this factor which completes the picture of the complex intelligence operations in which these two men were involved.
9 BStU, MIS AIM 3654/71 Teil I and II, the Seidowsky personal and working files.
10 ASA, letter from Kreyssig to Williams, undated, circa first week of September 1964.
11 Telephone interview with Seidowsky, 9 September 2001.
12 SAPMO-BArch, DO 4650, resolution of the Arbeitsgruppe Kirchenfragen, 18 May 1965.
14 Ibid.
15 Interview with Oestreicher, 30 May 2000.
16 Interview with Paul Holmer, 4 September 1998.
17 Interview with Oestreicher, 30 May 2000.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Interview with Seidowsky, 4 July 2000.
21 Martin Collins, in *Nimbus* (Quarterly Newsletter of the Christian Movement for Peace), No.9, Easter 1965, quoted by Rose in *Sent from Coventry*, p.67.
22 Rose, *Sent from Coventry*, pp.68-69. Rose extracted this quote from a letter sent by Oestreicher on 24 August 1965. He does not say to whom the letter was addressed, but it was probably the Provost of Coventry Cathedral.
23 Interview with Oestreicher, 30 May 2000.
Interview with Oestreicher, 30 May 2000 and Oestreicher’s lecture delivered to the Churches East-West European Relations Network (Cewern) entitled *My Cold War Life in no Man’s Land*, October 1999.

Interview with Seidowsky, 4 July 2000.

Ibid.

Interview with Oestreicher, 30 May 2000.

BStU, MfS AIM 3654/71 Teil I Band 1, information report on Seidowsky, 24 March 1960.


BStU, MfS AIM 3654/71 Teil I Band 2, information report on Seidowsky, 20 December 1963.

BStU, MfS AIM 3654/71 Teil I Band 1, information report on Seidowsky, 24 March 1960. KPs were used in a similar manner to IMs but were not registered.

Ibid.

BStU, MfS AIM 3654/71 Teil II Band 3, information report on Seidowsky, 28 May 1963.

Ibid.

BStU, MfS AIM 3654/71 Teil I Band 1, information report on Seidowsky, 24 March 1960.

Ibid.

BStU, MfS AIM 3654/71 Teil I Band 2, information report on Seidowsky, 20 December 1963.

Clemens Vollnhals, ‘Die kirchenpolitische Abteilung des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit’ in *Die Kirchenpolitik von SED und Staatssicherheit*, p.89.

BStU, MfS AIM 3654/71 Teil I Band 2, information report on Seidowsky, 20 December 1963.

BStU, MfS AIM 3654/71 Teil I Band 4, information report on Seidowsky, 3 September 1961.

Interview with Oestreicher, 30 May 2000.

BStU, MfS AIM 3654/71 Teil I Band 4, closing report on Seidowsky, 10 December 1974.


Interview with Oestreicher, 30 May 2000.


Interview with Oestreicher, 30 May 2000.

Interview with Waltraud Hopstock, 5 July 2000.


Interview with Oestreicher, 30 May 2000.

BStU, MfS AIM 3654/71 Teil I Band 4, Seidowsky's expenses claim, 21 September 1970.


BStU, MfS AIM 3654/71 Teil I Band 4, proposal to award Seidowsky a bonus in recognition of his work, 24 December 1968.

Wolf with McElvoy, *Man Without a Face*.


BStU, MfS HA XX/4 520, Seidowsky's report of his trip to Italy, 15 August 1961. There is more than one copy of this report in the files of the BStU. I have quoted from different versions on occasion because these reports, when presented to me, had been censored by the BStU in different ways so that in one version I was able to read names and indeed whole paragraphs which had been concealed in another version.
Waetjen was involved with an Italian organisation set up by Daniele Dolci in Sicily in order to alleviate poverty in southern Italy.

Gehlen, who ran the West German foreign intelligence service, has described the manner in which a secret service is organised.

For example, in the context of German Church leaders who had been in prisoner-of-war camps, a particular example being Bishop Friedrich-Wilhelm Krummacher, the head of the Evangelische Kirche in the GDR during much of the 1960s, Seidowsky said: 'Many priests were prisoners of the Soviet Union. They came back and some were the agents of the KGB and some were ready to help... It was the same thing with the British agents and the US agents.'
Adenauer retired in October 1963 having lost the support of the Americans. For more on Selbmann and his opposition to Ulbricht see Peter Grieder, *The East German leadership 1946-73*, pp. 137-138.

BStU, MfS AP 21497/92 Band 1, transcript of a taped conversation between Müller-Gangloff and Seidowsky, 21 March 1963.

ASA, letter from Kreyssig to Williams, undated, circa first week of September 1964.

Rose, *Sent From Coventry*, p.64.
Chapter 3

Christian Networks in the GDR: Aktion Sühnezeichen and the Seeds of Ostpolitik

Introduction

Aktion Sühnezeichen was an organisation which played an important role in both the Coventry/Dresden project and the Müller-Gangloff conspiracy. Based on this evidence alone, it would appear to be an organisation of more significance than its small size and relatively obscurity would warrant. This chapter will examine the significance of Aktion Sühnezeichen on the international world stage, the manner in which it was founded, and the ways in which it operated. The analysis will reveal that it was an organisation which did indeed punch above its weight. It will demonstrate the way in which Christianity and Christians were recognised by those on both sides of the Iron Curtain as important unofficial links through which a dialogue of some sort could be attempted between East and West. In the case of Aktion Sühnezeichen and its leaders, this was a proactive role.

During the early 1960s, in addition to the mainstream administrative bodies of the Church which were central to its relations with the GDR state, a number of prominent Christian organisations were active behind the scenes of public discourse. One such organisation was Aktion Sühnezeichen. Others included the Christian Peace Conference (CPC), based in Prague; the Evangelischen Akademien, a part of the Evangelische Kirche organisation which provided centres for the exchange of ideas on fundamental contemporary issues;¹ and the Gossner Mission, a missionary organisation which within the GDR carried out projects in conjunction with Aktion Sühnezeichen but which targeted workers rather than young people.²

These organisations, although founded to pursue Christian-based ideals, were by no mean divorced from worldly matters. Global politics, and in particular Cold War European
politics, were very much at the forefront of the lives of the men who ran them. Their leaders were veterans of the war years. They had received their political schooling during the Nazi era and had learned the art of survival in a hostile environment. Some had risked their lives for their beliefs. In doing so, they had become practised intriguers. They were, in many ways, as politically professional as the politicians. Their membership of and involvement with the various organisations overlapped so that, for example, some of those who were influential within the CPC were also members of the leadership circle of Aktion Sühnezeichen; some of those who led Aktion Sühnezeichen also ran some of the powerful branches of the Evangelischen Akademien; and some of these same people were also connected to the Gossner Mission.

Although all these organisations were influential, the CPC particularly so in an international context, it is Aktion Sühnezeichen which was the most significant organisation in the context of this thesis and which, therefore, I propose to examine in detail. In the process, its connections to other organisations will be established as will the manner in which it worked to its own political agenda, in advance of the mainstream Church of which it was a part. Although those who ran Aktion Sühnezeichen were senior and influential Church leaders, they did not follow the dictates of general Church policy in relation to Cold War politics. Theirs was an independent furrow which frequently crossed with official policy. Just as Cold War foreign policy was conducted on more than one level, so there were substrata of political activity within the Church and affiliated organisations. Aktion Sühnezeichen, for example, made strenuous and successful efforts to establish links with the CPC at a time when many established Church leaders in both East and West boycotted it, considering it to be a Soviet front. Aktion Sühnezeichen also made repeated attempts to establish links with East European countries, particularly the Soviet Union and Poland, although such contact was considered by many to be taboo.

Aktion Sühnezeichen was founded in 1958 by an East German Church administrator, Lothar Kreyssig, ostensibly to enable acts of atonement for Nazi crimes to be carried out in the countries which had suffered. It was regarded as a subversive organisation by the GDR but was also on occasion held at arm's length by the West German government. The East
Germans considered it to be working in the service of the reactionary capitalist West, probably steered by the intelligence services. The West Germans disapproved in the early 1960s of the organisation's links with Soviet bloc countries. During this period *Aktion Sühnezeichen* fell between two stools.

An analysis of *Stasi* reports relating to *Aktion Sühnezeichen* reveals that the GDR's grounds for regarding it as a dangerously subversive organisation were somewhat schizophrenic. On the one hand, the *Stasi* had a deep distrust of Kreyssig and sought to vindicate its analysis by establishing that he was linked to members of the West German intelligence service, a network possibly tarred with fascist sympathies. This was the right-wing conspiracy theory. On the other hand, the *Stasi* was well informed about the activities of the West German leaders of *Aktion Sühnezeichen* who had belonged to the wartime Hitler opposition and, during the Cold War, were instrumental in working towards contact with socialist countries. These people did not appear to be right-wing reactionaries but were potentially a greater threat in the eyes of the *Stasi* because they used more subtle means to weaken Soviet bloc countries internally. Their use of *Aktion Sühnezeichen* as a vehicle for the creeping infiltration of Soviet bloc countries for subversive purposes was monitored by the *Stasi* through its agents, such as Seidowsky. Increasingly, *Stasi* reports indicated an understanding of the dangers of what was to grow into *Ostpolitik*, a view which appeared to be vindicated by events in the CSSR in 1968. But it is debatable whether its warning signals were sounded clearly enough to be heard. As the former Soviet diplomat Juli Kvitzinsky has remarked in his memoirs, the Soviet Union did not perceive the dangers of *Ostpolitik* until it was too late.³

When it came to conspiracy, the leaders of *Aktion Sühnezeichen* were no novices. During the war, they had, in the main, been involved with or sympathetic to the 20 July 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler. They were skilled at working underground, at subterfuge and plotting. They were also well-connected, many of their friends and colleagues from the war years ending up in powerful positions within the West German establishment. One contact, for example, was Gerstenmaier. The GDR security service made a point of tracking down the interconnecting webs which linked these men together. Its suspicions that *Aktion*
Sühnezeichen and other related organisations merely provided cover for more nefarious activities hostile to the GDR regime were largely based on the personal network surrounding the leaders of the organisations. In 1969, a Stasi officer attempted a visual analysis of these links by producing a chart illustrating the complex interconnections between Aktion Sühnezeichen and numerous other people and organisations. The chart showed nearly 70 contacts ranging from the Quakers, the Brethren Service Committee and the United Church of Christ in the USA to the Soviet youth organisation, Comsomol, in the USSR. 'Coventry, England' is one of the contacts named.4

**Aktion Sühnezeichen**

'Wir bitten um Frieden' (we ask for peace) were the words used by Lothar Kreyssig to launch his call for the formation of an organisation which would seek to atone for the crimes that Germans had committed against other nations during the Second World War. He made his appeal at the EKD synod held in Berlin in April 1958. The atmosphere was tense and peace was not high on the agenda. The synod was under pressure to unite against the West German government's recent approval of the proposal that West German troops might be armed with nuclear weapons under the Nato umbrella.5 It failed to come down firmly against the proposal, one side arguing that the threat of mass extermination posed by nuclear weapons was sinful, the other arguing that they were a sad necessity to preserve peace.

It was in this divisive atmosphere that Kreyssig made his plea for unity. He told the synod:

"We Germans began the Second World War and are therefore to blame more than any others for the unmeasurable suffering that has been inflicted on humanity... Germans have killed millions of Jews. Those of us who did not want this annihilation did not do enough to prevent it. For this reason we are still not at peace. There has been too little reconciliation...We are requesting that all peoples who suffered violence because of us, allow us with our hands and using our own means to perform good deeds in their countries...as an act of atonement...The service should unite Germans from the Federal Republic and the GDR...We ask the governments of the GDR and the Federal Republic to permit and promote this action."6

This was a motion behind which the divided synod felt it could unite. One of those present, the West German theologian Helmut Gollwitzer, said that, after all the arguments, those who had been opposing each other were very happy to find something to unite them.7 Of the 120
synod members, 79 supported Kreyssig’s motion. They included influential Church leaders such as Bishop Krummacher and Gustav Heinemann, who was elected West German President in 1969. Thus was Aktion Sühnezeichen founded.

In his speech, Kreyssig described the manner in which young volunteers would work on construction projects as acts of atonement. He singled out Poland, Russia and Israel as the countries which had suffered most and which should, therefore, be given priority. However, enthusiastic though young Germans were to volunteer for these projects, the host countries were slow to issue invitations. According to Karl-Klaus Rabe in his history of Aktion Sühnezeichen, by 1959 there had been no positive or concrete response from the USSR, Poland or Israel. The first project, therefore, took place in the Netherlands. It was planned to send 13 volunteers from West Germany and 14 from the GDR, but at the last minute the MfAA ruled that the GDR volunteers could not take part, saying that the GDR bore no responsibility for the crimes of National Socialism. Those who wanted peace should fight against the rearming of West Germany, Kreyssig was told. The GDR regime ruled that GDR volunteers could only work on Church-related projects within the GDR, such as the clearing of bombsites.

The illusory all-German unity of Aktion Sühnezeichen was another victim of the building of the Berlin Wall. After 13 August 1961, the organisation was divided administratively into east and west branches. In the GDR, Aktion Sühnezeichen was led by Kreyssig. In the West, there was a leadership circle, the main members of which were Erich Müller-Gangloff, the head of the West Berlin Evangelische Akademie and Fritz von Hammerstein. In the early 1960s, West German volunteers took part in a variety of projects in Norway, France, Yugoslavia and Crete. In 1961, a group of young West Germans began work on creating what became known as the International Centre within the ruins of the old Coventry Cathedral. GDR volunteers continued to be restricted to summer camps within their own country. Their most notable project was the clearing of rubble from church sites in Magdeburg. Within the GDR, emphasis was placed on the ecumenical nature of Aktion Sühnezeichen, with Catholics and Protestants working closely together.
Under Kreyssig's strong leadership, the GDR branch of *Aktion Sühnezeichen* continued its attempts to fulfil its founding mission in East European countries. Although official *Aktion Sühnezeichen* groups were not allowed to travel outside GDR borders, young volunteers did go as individuals to countries such as Poland, where they worked on small and unofficial projects. Eventually, in 1965 and 1966 permission was granted for groups to take part in projects in places such as Auschwitz and Wroclaw in Poland, and Theresienstadt and Lidice in the CSSR. But the shutters came down again in 1967 and the trips were stopped. Restrictions remained in force until 1972 when visas were no longer required for GDR citizens travelling to Poland and the CSSR.

Following the *Wende*, the two halves of *Aktion Sühnezeichen* were reunited and the organisation's work has continued. In 1968, its name was changed to *Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste* to reflect a fundamental change in policy from looking back to atone for the war to looking forward in order to preserve and create peace. The organisation is currently involved in projects in Israel, Western and Eastern Europe and the USA. In addition it is active in 'confronting German history, challenging right-wing extremism and anti-Semitism, lobbying for the recognition of "forgotten" victims of the Nazi oppression and participation in peace groups and initiatives'.

The picture of *Aktion Sühnezeichen* as presented by those currently involved in its administration, tends to be superficially one-dimensional. Rabe, who used to work for *Aktion Sühnezeichen*, does refer to the political nature of *Aktion Sühnezeichen* in his history of the organisation, but his interpretation is handicapped by the lack of access to GDR archives at the time of publication. *Aktion Sühnezeichen* has always been political' and did not seek to hide this, he recorded. As an organisation, it argued that Christian faith was at the centre of its actions but did not erect a boundary around them. It asked the question how one could be a real person without political interest. Although this is a reasonable defence for a Christian organisation taking a political stance, the reality is that in the early 1960s *Aktion Sühnezeichen* 's involvement in political issues was much more proactive than the picture presented by Rabe of the organisation as observer. Weiss has recently described the organisation as 'a school for opposition'.

On the other side of the coin there is the *Stasi's view of Aktion Sühnezeichen* as a front for Western intelligence services. In several lengthy analyses of the organisation carried out in the early 1960s, it put forward detailed reasons for coming to this conclusion. It claimed, for example, that *Aktion Sühnezeichen* did not depend on voluntary contributions but was partially funded by Bonn, other 'reactionary' organisations and West Germany industry.\(^{19}\) Although this would appear to be true, it did not mean that the organisation was awash with money. For Kreyssig in East Berlin, funding seems to have been a perpetual problem. In February 1965, he wrote to the EKD to ask for more money, noting pointedly that up to that time he had only received firm promises of support from the Catholic Church and the Protestant members of the EKU.\(^{20}\)

However, it was the *Stasi's jaundiced view of Kreyssig himself* which in large part accounted for its perception of *Aktion Sühnezeichen* as a subversive and reactionary organisation. In 1964, the *Stasi* drew up a report on *Aktion Sühnezeichen* which said:

"*Aktion Sühnezeichen*, which was founded with the aim, above all, of working in the Soviet Union, Poland and other socialist countries, requires special secret service attention because its founder, leader and staff are controlled by secret services or have close contact with representatives of imperialist secret services."\(^{21}\)

This report was compiled about three weeks after the Provost of Coventry Cathedral and Seigewasser agreed to use *Aktion Sühnezeichen* as the intermediary for the Coventry/Dresden project. It was no doubt based to a large extent on the information which had been supplied by Seidowsky on the activities of Muller-Gangloff and *Aktion Sühnezeichen* in the conspiracy to destabilise Soviet bloc regimes. It demonstrates beyond doubt that the GDR consciously and deliberately involved known subversives in the organisation of the Coventry/Dresden project. A detailed analysis of the negotiations surrounding the Coventry/Dresden project will reveal that the *Stasi* intended to manipulate Kreyssig for its own purposes. Muller-Gangloff, as a citizen of West Berlin, was outside their control. Kreyssig was not.

Just as there is a stark contrast in the manner in which *Aktion Sühnezeichen* is perceived, depending on the standpoint of the observer, so does posterity's view of Kreyssig
range from saint to devil. To many who worked with him in *Aktion Sühnezeichen*, he was a brave man, an outspoken opponent of Nazism who in later years devoted much of his life to working for peace and helping the less fortunate of the world. To the GDR regime, he was a hypocritical schemer with fascist sympathies. Both sides agreed that he was, as the GDR put it, an enemy of communism. In recent years, his reputation as an opponent of Hitler has been questioned by some historians although he has been lauded by others.^^

Kreyssig was born in 1898 and brought up in a disciplined middle-class Prussian household in Saxony. His father was a grain wholesaler and merchant.^^ Kreyssig studied law and was a *Korpsstudent*, the scar on his cheek being a life-long reminder of those days. He worked as a lawyer and judge in Saxony until the mid-1930s when he moved to Brandenburg and continued his legal career as a judge in the guardianship court. His responsibilities there included the welfare of several hundred disabled children and adults and this role brought him into contact with the Nazi's policy of euthanasia for certain categories of disabled people. Kreyssig's later reputation as an opponent of Nazism is largely based on his activities at this time. According to Weiss and other *Aktion Sühnezeichen* biographers, he stood out against the Nazi policy of euthanasia, writing to *Reichsjustizminister* Franz Gürtner in his capacity as a judge to protest against the euthanasia programme.^^ As a result of this action he was forced to resign. His biographers claim that he was a 'prominent and outspoken member of the Protestant opposition' to Hitler.^^ This version of events has recently been supported by Michael Burleigh who says that Kreyssig threatened to 'instigate charges of murder against officials responsible for the "euthanasia" programme' and that he was 'a man of conviction, integrity and moral substance'.^^

Wolfgang Thierse is less certain about Kreyssig's political views at this time or the strength of his opposition to the Nazis. The only reason that Kreyssig did not join the NSDAP, says Thierse, is because he felt that a judge should not be politically involved.^^ On the issue of Kreyssig's opposition to the euthanasia programme, Thierse raises the question, first raised, he says, by Gollwitzer in the 1970s, of why Kreyssig did not suffer any greater penalty for his opposition than merely being forced to resign his position. Those who spoke
out about other atrocities ended up in concentration camps. Thierse has postulated that the likely answer to the question is that Kreyssig's traditional beliefs in authority and obedience muted his opposition to such an extent that it was hardly worthy of the name. He has quoted another of Kreyssig's biographers, Susanne Willems, as saying:

"Kreyssig himself would not have seen his behaviour as opposition, his declaration of loyalty as a citizen to his leader being stronger in the end...For him the principle of respecting authority remained, even though the Nazi state behaved without legality which he saw as his duty to disobey only in the case of a moral conflict with obedience to God..."^{28}

Nevertheless, the euthanasia incident is well documented, and there is little doubt that Kreyssig did raise his head above the parapet, if only briefly.

Kreyssig was first drawn towards the Church after the death of his father in 1928. During the Third Reich he became a member of the Confessing Church and in 1935 he was elected the first president of the Confessing Church synod in Saxony. He also became a member of the Reich's synod and there, according to Thierse, he made contact with people such as the cleric Scharf, Gollwitzer and Martin Niemöller with whom his path crossed after the division of Germany. After his resignation over the euthanasia issue, Kreyssig's legal career came to an end. He retired to his farm in Brandenburg which he had purchased in 1937 from the director of the Reichsbank, Hjalmar Schacht.^{29} After the war, Kreyssig devoted his energies to the Church. He became a member of the Church administration in Magdeburg, Präs of the synod of the Church Province of Saxony, co-founder and leader of the Evangelische Akademie in that diocese, leader of the EKU and eastern vice-president of the German Protestant Church Congress. From 1949 to 1961, he was a member of the EKD. Kreyssig thus became a very influential figure within the German Protestant Church. Besier, quoting Kreyssig's speech to the EKD in 1958, refers to him as 'no less a person than...'^{30} According to Thierse, Kreyssig first raised the idea of atonement in 1954 but met with little response and it was four years before he tried again. In 1957, together with others he founded in Berlin Aktionsgemeinschaft für die Hungernden der Erde (the Society for Action in Aid of the Hungry of the World), a society without political or confessional boundaries to help the starving around the world.^{31} Those who put their signatures to the founding document included Willy Brandt, Scharf and Ernst Lemmer, West German
Minister for All-German Affairs. In 1971 Kreyssig moved to West Berlin. He died in 1986.

The Stasi view of Kreyssig contrasts strongly with the heroic, saintly and forward-thinking image put forward by his supporters and colleagues. On a personal level, Stasi reports are a supreme example of character assassination. One such report reads:

"Kreyssig is very vain and can be described as a schemer. A feature of his character is an exaggerated devoutness. He takes pleasure in being pious and revels in an atmosphere of prayer. His tendency towards acting can be seen in these aspects of his character."

These aspects of Kreyssig's character are also recalled by Seidowsky. He [Kreyssig] was vain. He wanted to be a bishop. He was an actor. This negative attitude of the Stasi towards Kreyssig was based, however, on more than a dislike of his personality. In March 1965, around the time of the start of the Coventry/Dresden project, a Stasi report on Kreyssig stated:

"Kreyssig is a relentless opponent of the GDR. In his position as leader of 'Aktion Sühnezeichen', he has numerous contacts not only in socialist countries but also in West Germany in particular and in capitalist countries. This Church organisation is partly financed with money from the Bonn state. In this connection, he came to an arrangement with Bonn Foreign Minister Schröder. In his activities with the EKU synod, where he is the Präses, he always tried to push through a united position against the policies of the GDR government. He has often supported the conclusion of the Military Chaplaincy Agreement between the Bonn government and the EKD..."

The GDR regime had categorised Kreyssig as an enemy of the state since its creation. In the 1940s and 1950s he was accused of helping people to flee to West Germany. In 1957, a Stasi report said that Kreyssig had been 'unmasked as an evil intriguer' and a 'scheming theoretician' who worked to 'deliberately undermine the state'. In 1963, the Stasi described Kreyssig as 'one of the most active advocates of co-operation between the Protestant and Catholic Churches in the GDR against socialist development'.

Despite this catalogue of open opposition to the GDR regime, Kreyssig appears to have been allowed to continue his Church activities with relatively little restriction, and was even allowed to hold on to the rural estate which he had acquired before the war from Schacht and which, according to Thierse, was confiscated three times under the socialist land reform schemes, and three times returned. Kreyssig also had a flat in Treptower Park in East
Berlin, thus acquiring the status of a second-home owner at a time when accommodation for most GDR citizens was severely restricted.

But it was Kreyssig's influential West German connections, made before, during and after the war, rather than his actions which made both him and *Aktion Sühnezeichen* so suspect in the eyes of the *Stasi*. In numerous reports, the *Stasi* chronicled Kreyssig's connections which, it claimed, made him an integral part of a web which linked into such networks as that of the survivors of the 20 July 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler, and that run by Reinhard Gehlen, one time head of German army intelligence on the Russian front and, after the war, of the Gehlen Organisation, the Bavarian-based anti-communist intelligence service which was run in co-operation with the CIA and which eventually became the West German BND. The *Stasi* also linked Kreyssig to a number of people who had worked with him in Church administration in the Magdeburg area, a major trouble spot for the GDR, and who had fled to West Germany during the 1950s and taken up influential positions. These colleagues included Friedebert Lorenz who was manager of the *Evangelische Akademie* in Sachsen-Anhalt until 1957 when he fled to West Germany where he worked for the *Deutschen Evangelischen Kirchentages* (German Protestant Church conference) together with Nicolaus von Grote, chairman of the Church conference press office, deputy head of the German Institute of Industry, and a former Gehlen agent, and Heinz Asendorf, who, after fleeing to West Germany in 1956, worked for the *Gesamteuropäischen Studienwerkes* (GESW), a European study centre in West Germany which was, according to the *Stasi*, an espionage centre camouflaged as a Church organisation, aimed against the socialist countries of Eastern Europe. The *Stasi* claimed that the GESW worked closely with *Aktion Sühnezeichen* through Kreyssig's personal link to Asendorf.

Among those named by the *Stasi* in the category related to the 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler, were Franz von Hammerstein, general secretary of the West Berlin *Aktion Sühnezeichen* office, and Harald Poelchau. Poelchau had been a chaplain at Berlin's Tegel prison during the war and had acted as an intermediary between those condemned for the July 1944 plot and the outside world. During the 1960s, according to the Soviet diplomat, Kvitzinsky, he was extremely influential behind the scenes of Cold War politics.
According to the *Stasi*, Poelchau was a close friend of Gerstenmaier and was suspected of being involved in spying activities in the GDR.\(^46\) Von Hammerstein's work brought him into contact with the Protestant Church's industrial chaplain in West Berlin, Brickert, who in turn answered to Poelchau. In 1964, Brickert had a secret meeting with the Soviet Ambassador to East Berlin, Piotr Abrassimov, during which he said that the *Evangelische Kirche* would publicly support recognition of the GDR in return for a pledge to guarantee the continued unity of the Church.\(^47\)

Probably the most worrying to the *Stasi* of all Kreyssig's friends was Müller-Gangloff, the man who, according to the information supplied by Seidowsky, ran the underground network aimed at undermining the GDR and other Soviet bloc countries. The two men were very close although, according to Kreyssig's biographer, Konrad Weiss, they had contrasting personalities.\(^48\) Müller-Gangloff had worked with Kreyssig on the creation of the Aktionsgemeinschaft für die Hungernden der Erde in 1957. From the very beginning, Müller-Gangloff was a 'passionate' supporter of Kreyssig's idea for the organisation which became *Aktion Sühnezeichen*.\(^49\) He was instrumental in choosing the name by which it would be known and helped to launch the organisation with a conference in West Berlin. As well as being the head of the *Evangelische Akademie* in West Berlin, Müller-Gangloff was also the most senior member of the West German *Aktion Sühnezeichen* leadership circle during the first half of the 1960s. Kreyssig described Müller-Gangloff as his 'Akademiekumpan' (Academy chum).\(^50\)

The operation of this network of influential politicians and Church leaders across the divide of the Berlin Wall was facilitated to a great extent by the use of couriers, many of them American Quakers. This was the manner, for example, by which *Aktion Sühnezeichen* succeeded in functioning with a certain amount of unity despite travel restrictions and surveillance. The Quaker movement had a history of contact with countries behind the Iron Curtain, contact which was encouraged by the governments of East and West.\(^51\) Chief among the couriers who worked for *Aktion Sühnezeichen* was the American Quaker, Paul Cates. Von Hammerstein recalls that Cates acted as a bridge between East and West.\(^52\) The *Stasi* noted that Cates was responsible for East European affairs in the West German branch.
of *Aktion Sühnezeichen*.\(^5^3\) Kvitzinsky refers to Cates acting as an intermediary in secret discussions between the Soviet Union and West German Church leaders.\(^5^4\) Cates was close to Müller-Gangloff and the two visited the Soviet Union together.

The Stasi came to the conclusion that *Aktion Sühnezeichen* was demonstrably 'steered by intelligence services' and that the public image of its work was a 'very skilful and refined *Legende*'.\(^5^5\) By the autumn of 1963, the *Stasi* was producing analyses of *Aktion Sühnezeichen* which stressed the dangers of soft infiltration as practised by the likes of Müller-Gangloff and von Hammerstein as opposed to the more openly aggressive attitude of traditional right-wingers. This was around the same time that the course of the Müller-Gangloff conspiracy was beginning to change direction, the priority no longer being the removal of Ulbricht but the infiltration of other Soviet bloc countries. The true purpose of *Aktion Sühnezeichen* was to undermine the GDR and other socialist countries, the Stasi claimed. A 1963 report stated:

"The secret service plans for the exploitation of *Aktion Sühnezeichen* are obviously long-term. Behind them are the interests of the so-called moderate imperialist faction (in the USA, West Germany, here above all Schröder, Bucerius, and so on), which is working towards an internal weakening of socialist countries. Dr Müller-Gangloff has said privately that *Aktion Sühnezeichen* is pursuing a political objective relating to a change in the political atmosphere in socialist countries."\(^5^6\)

The *Stasi* also quoted Müller-Gangloff as saying that the *Aktion Sühnezeichen* diversion of atonement for fascist crimes provided a 'suitable method for obtaining a foothold in Ostbloc countries'.\(^5^7\) In addition, the *Stasi* claimed that *Aktion Sühnezeichen* recruited people in the other socialist countries who seemed suitable for ideological diversionary work. In this context, the *Stasi* named Professor Goldstücker, the Czech literary historian and one of the leaders of the Czech liberalisation movement.\(^5^8\)

**The Khrushchev Connection**

The *Stasi* view of *Aktion Sühnezeichen* as very much more than a simple Christian charity with high ideals is given credence in the light of strange events which took place in the early 1960s involving the leaders of *Aktion Sühnezeichen* and the leader of the Soviet
Union, Nikita Khrushchev. This relationship, which involved Müller-Gangloff and von Hammerstein in particular and Kreyssig to a limited extent, is recorded not only by the Stasi but also by Aktion Sühnezeichen and by the Soviet diplomat Kvitzinsky. Aktion Sühnezeichen's contact with Khrushchev culminated in a meeting between the Soviet leader, Müller-Gangloff and von Hammerstein on 18 January 1963 in East Berlin, a meeting which was reported in the press. The impression created at the time was that Müller-Gangloff and von Hammerstein were granted this audience so that they could discuss with Khrushchev their desire to run Aktion Sühnezeichen atonement projects in the Soviet Union. Von Hammerstein put out a press statement to this effect which stated:

"...[we] explained the aims of Aktion Sühnezeichen to Khrushchev and asked if Aktion Sühnezeichen could be allowed to work in Russia in order for our people to make atonement. Khrushchev said that he had not heard of Aktion Sühnezeichen but he would ask for information. He gave his approval to our goals as a noble task and believed that it would be possible for them to be realised..."

That one of the most powerful men in the world should meet two Church leaders in order to discuss a Christian organisation he had never heard of, is implausible. Whether the media greeted this explanation of the meeting with the scepticism it deserved is not recorded by von Hammerstein. He noted at the time that the invitation to meet Khrushchev, issued with only about 24 hours notice, was not a surprise because '...Kreyssig, Dr Müller-Gangloff and other members of Aktion Sühnezeichen's leadership circle had been making efforts for years to obtain contact with representatives of the USSR, Poland and Israel'. Thirty-seven years after the event, he continues to maintain that Aktion Sühnezeichen was only interested in reconciliation, describing the Stasi's claims of conspiracy as 'pure nonsense'.

Rabe recorded that news of the meeting taking place caused a public sensation. But criticism at the time was mostly directed against the idea of atonement with Russia, implying that, publicly at least, this was accepted as the raison d'être of the meeting. In the intervening years, however, the publication of personal accounts by major Cold War players of some of the behind the scenes dealings that took place has indicated that this meeting linked Müller-Gangloff and von Hammerstein closely to the early stages of what later became known as Ostpolitik. On this occasion they were acting as substitutes for the then West Berlin mayor, Willy Brandt, who was at that time edging towards the belief that
diplomatic ostracism of the Soviet Union and the GDR was a failed policy. This is acknowledged by Rabe who recounted that Khrushchev really wanted to meet Brandt but he cancelled at the last minute because of political pressures and so Khrushchev got, in Müller-Gangloff’s words, ‘ein kleines Häufchen’ of West Berliners (a small bunch of West Berliners) instead. Müller-Gangloff left his own written recollections which confirm that the two men were standing in for Brandt.

According to Brandt's own memoirs, Khrushchev was in East Berlin in January 1963 attending the SED's 6th Party Congress when he made it known to Brandt that 'he was available for discussion.' At that time Brandt was interested in establishing contact with the Soviet Union in order to ease the situation in Berlin, but was under pressure from the ruling West German CDU to abandon these efforts. '...my sole course was to decline at the last minute,' Brandt wrote. 'I found it hard. Khrushchev must have taken my refusal as an affront.' Brandt called off the meeting on 17 January. The two Aktion Sühnezeichen leaders met Khrushchev the following day. In an essay written around the time, entitled Is one able to talk with the Russians, Müller-Gangloff wrote:

"It cannot be disputed that it was a great propaganda victory for the East, not least for the GDR regime, when the cancelled Brandt visit to Khrushchev literally fell into their lap. It was an expensive experience for the future of East propaganda, which cannot be measured in terms of money, that a quiet knock on West Berlin's door - for Khrushchev's willingness to talk with Brandt was truly no more - startled the whole coalition there and almost brought it to the point of disagreement."

Müller-Gangloff also recorded that the Khrushchev meeting entailed much more than von Hammerstein had revealed in his press statement. The subject of Aktion Sühnezeichen did indeed come up, but the agenda was far more wide-ranging. The future of West Berlin was discussed, with the two West Berliners expressing concern for its security and Khrushchev responding by saying that 'a great power was not about to stick West Berlin in its pocket like a thief'. According to Müller-Gangloff, Khrushchev gave the firmest guarantee of freedom for West Berlin yet delivered when he said that West Berliners must trust him 'as he had to trust Kennedy to respect the independence of Cuba'.

But Müller-Gangloff was totally aware that the most significant aspect of the meeting was the message that the two West Berliners were able to give Khrushchev that in
West Germany at that time, and in particular in West Berlin, there were Germans who were prepared to consider adopting a less confrontational attitude towards the Soviet Union. As Müller-Gangloff described it, a German 'who is friendly without taking him [the Russian] in a bear hug and who risks saying the disagreeable truth without sticking a knife in his clothes'. There can be little doubt that the leaders of *Aktion Sühnezeichen* were in the vanguard of the move towards rapprochement with the East. This is confirmed by Kvitinsky who was working in the Soviet Embassy in East Berlin during this period. He has recalled in his memoirs how *Aktion Sühnezeichen* and von Hammerstein above all were deeply involved in the unofficial Cold War diplomacy of the time. Kvitinsky is dismissive of *Aktion Sühnezeichen's* protestation that it was purely interested in Christian reconciliation, saying that the Soviet Union was not interested in *Aktion Sühnezeichen's* stated aims of atonement and, in addition, it suspected that this was purely a ruse, an attempt to infiltrate the Soviet Union. Kvitinsky wrote:

"*Aktion Sühnezeichen* had found no access to the Soviet Union despite great efforts. We would not let them in because we suspected an ambush. Why should we agree to reconciliation with the German Church? To what end did we need a couple of clubs or hospitals?... No, better to let them carry on feeling guilty. Of course, we were also afraid of the machinations of enemy secret services. The American Peace Corp had just been 'unmasked'. Now the enemy was trying to penetrate us through the German Church."  

But, according to Kvitinsky, the Soviet Union also recognised that it could be useful to cultivate contact with Church leaders. It was aware that the Church, through people such as von Hammerstein, was either being used as a political channel by those who wished to foster early attempts at *Ostpolitik*, or was even leading the way itself.

"They [representatives of the Evangelische Kirche] were more prepared to talk to us than the worldly authorities and rejected possible doubts with the argument that clergymen should proclaim God's word to everyone. Therefore they could foster contact with Soviet diplomats...Without doubt the Church was not simply interested in bringing the word of God to the Soviet people. As preparers of the way for contact with the Soviet Union, the Church awoke the attention of all those who themselves wanted such a possibility. There were quite a few, for, among the Germans, efforts were growing to find a way to normalise relations with the people of the USSR. The Church was a channel for this...Of course, it was also to do with politics because the Church has always been political, although they do not like to admit it."  

In July 1963, shortly after Khrushchev's meeting with the *Aktion Sühnezeichen* leaders, Brandt's close adviser, Egon Bahr, made a speech outlining what was to become the SPD policy of co-operation rather than confrontation with socialist countries, and which
became known as *Wandel durch Annäherung* (change through rapprochement).\(^7^4\) Although the Soviet Union did not realise it at the time, this policy was, according to Kvitzinsky, designed to bring about the dismantling of the socialist regimes through 'constant internal pressure'. What could not be achieved through force would be achieved by encouraging intellectual and material needs which could not be met by the ruling regimes. In the post-\*Wende* years, Kvitzinsky wrote:

"Today one has to recognise that he [Bahr] foresaw far into the future. Hardly anyone in Moscow saw the danger of his plan. 'What nonsense,' we said, 'that the CPSU should dismantle its power itself? That will never happen. But Bahr was right. Soon the USSR and the GDR were to become the main goal of this strategy.'\(^7^5\)

*Aktion Sühnezeichen* continued to nurture its links with Khrushchev after the 1963 meeting. In a letter to Khrushchev in July 1964, Kreyssig wrote in general terms about reconciliation and the desire to undertake projects in the Soviet Union.\(^7^6\) This letter was sent to Khrushchev by Müller-Gangloff, together with one of his own which referred to the 1963 meeting.\(^7^7\) Little appears to have resulted from this assiduous cultivation of Khrushchev, the Soviet leader being ousted from office in October 1964. However, Cates was allowed to visit the Soviet Union in March 1963, as a result of which it was agreed that two *Aktion Sühnezeichen* volunteers would be permitted to go to the Soviet Union to take part in an international summer camp.\(^7^8\)

*Aktion Sühnezeichen* and its leaders were walking a political tightrope in their attempts to foster contact with the Soviet Union. Conspiratorial theories aside, it was a role which made them unpopular with both German governments. The East Germans were not impressed with the organisation's desire to establish links with their Soviet brothers. Khrushchev's move towards détente with West Germany made Ulbricht nervous. He did not trust the Soviet Union not to sacrifice the GDR in the interests of world stability.\(^7^9\) Kreyssig was aware of this when he warned Williams in September 1964 that it would not be helpful for von Hammerstein and Wilm to be too obviously involved in the Coventry/Dresden project because

"...it is here, of course, that GDR politicians have their greatest reservations and apprehensions. The fact that von Hammerstein has conferred with Khrushchev and Wilm a little while ago with Adjubei, does not remove their basic fears but in some respects strengthens them, certainly with regard to remaining alone in the game."\(^8^0\)
The West Germans, although toying with the idea of rapprochement, still had a long way to go before they became committed to the idea. In 1964, for example, Rabe noted that the West German government cancelled the financial help it gave to *Aktion Sühnezeichen* because of its disapproval of *Aktion Sühnezeichen*'s contact with the Soviet Union.\(^1\) An *Aktion Sühnezeichen* document suggested that the West German government was putting obstructions in the way of *Aktion Sühnezeichen* work.\(^2\) Nevertheless, in January 1965, *Aktion Sühnezeichen* leaders were awarded the Theodor-Heuss-Preis, a non-partisan award for excellence in political or social fields named after the first West German President. The award went to Kreyssig in the GDR office and 11 people in the West including von Hammerstein, Müller-Gangloff and Cates.\(^3\)

**Aktion Sühnezeichen and the Prague Spring**

It is possible that the *Stasi*’s paranoia about Western conspiracies may have caused it to see more intrigue than existed in all that *Aktion Sühnezeichen* or its leaders did. However, the theory that *Aktion Sühnezeichen* and other related organisations were secretly building up an oppositional network in socialist countries seemed to be vindicated by events in Prague in 1968. According to the *Stasi*, the German organisations which had been most active in promoting 'ideological diversion' within the CSSR were the *Evangelische Akademie* in West Berlin, of which Müller-Gangloff was head, *Aktion Sühnezeichen*, of which Müller-Gangloff was a leading member, the *Gossner Mission*, with which *Aktion Sühnezeichen* was closely associated, and what the *Stasi* called the *Hauskreise*, small groups of intellectuals which had been established around these organisations.\(^4\) The *Stasi* claimed that the GDR section of *Aktion Sühnezeichen* relied heavily on the *Gossner Mission* to help it organise its activities and sent teams to work on joint projects, thus creating *Aktion Sühnezeichen* bases throughout the GDR.\(^5\) Within the GDR, the *Gossner Mission* particularly targeted the workers. A report to the *Arbeitsgruppe Kirchenfragen* in the 1960s noted that the *Gossner Mission* was at the forefront of Church groups which were trying to infiltrate factories to win converts to the Church and that it did so in a 'conspiratorial' manner.\(^6\) In Prague, the *Gossner Mission* established a sister organisation called *Neue Orientierung*.\(^7\)
The CPC, based in Prague, also provided a meeting place for many of the liberal left-wingers who supported the political thaw in the CSSR. Here again there were strong connections with *Aktion Sühnezeichen*. Viewed by many as a front organisation supported by Moscow in order to counter-balance the influence of the World Council of Churches, the CPC was actively cultivated by *Aktion Sühnezeichen* leaders and supported in Britain by liberal theologians such as Oestreicher. The CPC and *Aktion Sühnezeichen* were linked not only by a common philosophy but also by the fact that several influential members of *Aktion Sühnezeichen* were also prominent participants in the CPC. Klaus Wilm, West Berlin's *Aktion Sühnezeichen* office manager, said that contacts had been established when he took part in the CPC in 1962. Müller-Gangloff was a regular visitor to the CPC and, in addition, in his role as head of the West Berlin *Evangelische Akademie*, he was responsible for organising conferences attended by leading Czech liberals such as Goldstücker and Milan Machovec. In 1963, he was responsible for *Aktion Sühnezeichen* becoming an organisational member of the CPC. The *Stasi* believed that Müller-Gangloff and others used these contacts to help them penetrate Soviet bloc countries and that the CPC played a particularly important part in this scheme. In 1967, Müller-Gangloff intensified this work by founding the Comenius Club. According to *Stasi* reports, he decided to set up the organisation because 'Aktion Sühnezeichen is failing to produce the results required'. The Comenius Club was intended to further the work of the *Evangelische Akademie*, the *Gossner Mission* and *Aktion Sühnezeichen* in the CSSR. It was to be a German/East European society which would reach out to Germans in East and West, as well as to the CSSR, Poland, Hungary and, in particular, the Soviet Union. When drawing up his plans for this organisation, Müller-Gangloff wrote:

"We cannot allow this abyss between East and West left over from the war... to be tolerated in a fatalistic manner or to be blurred by illusory expectations of reunification or European integration... It must be actively overcome with a new policy with concrete objectives. Because the government is firmly entrenched in its Cold War position, we want to use our freedom, our private initiative, to open up in the public arena that which cannot be done officially."

**Conclusion**

There can be little doubt that *Aktion Sühnezeichen* together with associated organisations was actively involved in attempts to infiltrate the communist countries of
Eastern Europe. The aim was not to cause a sudden and dramatic revolution but gradually to undermine the existing political structures and create the environment where change could take place. The fact that these conspiratorial activities were well known to Ulbricht and his colleagues enables two major conclusions to be drawn about the mood of the GDR regime during the early 1960s, when viewed in conjunction with the role that Aktion Sühnezeichen played in the Coventry/Dresden project with the connivance of the GDR itself. The first conclusion relates to the degree of confidence felt by the GDR regime at this time. The second relates to the degree of priority the GDR attached to its policy of winning the support of ordinary Christians.

As we have seen, the GDR regime was aware of the background activities of Aktion Sühnezeichen and was kept well informed of developments. Initially, Stasi analyses of these activities seemed to be uncertain as to whether the threat came from the political right or the left. But by around 1963, the weight of opinion had moved towards the view that Aktion Sühnezeichen and other organisations were allied to the liberal left (or as the Stasi called it 'the so-called moderate imperialist faction') and that this was where the danger lay. Nevertheless, despite its knowledge of the hostile networks Aktion Sühnezeichen was attempting to build in Soviet bloc countries, it is apparent that from around 1963 onwards the GDR regime deemed that the organisation was either not a threat, or was a threat which could be contained. This is evident from the fact that not only did the GDR agree to use Aktion Sühnezeichen as an intermediary during the Coventry/Dresden project, but also in 1965 and 1966 it relaxed its restrictions on Aktion Sühnezeichen carrying out projects in Poland and the CSSR. These were the actions of a self-confident regime, of men who believed they were well on their way to achieving their goals. The state, which in its early years had suffered from the belief, probably well-founded, that it was under attack from all sides, had reached a state of maturity following the building of the Berlin Wall which led it to believe that it was strong enough to withstand these subversive and conspiratorial activities. This self-confidence was noticed by GDR citizens. Werner Fink, who was a young priest at the Diakonissenkrankenhaus at this time, has remarked that 'the government felt strong in 1965'. Small 'holes' were being made in the Wall, but the regime did not consider it dangerous. It thought it could withstand such breaches. A Stasi report of 1968,
for example, stressed that it would not be possible for the developments that were taking place in the CSSR at that time, to happen in the GDR.\textsuperscript{99} The writer argued that the GDR had progressed further towards a pluralistic society than other socialist countries and that this was evident from public discussions taking place at that time about the new GDR constitution.

The overriding aim of Ulbricht's Church policy during the early 1960s was to gain the support of the Christian man and woman in the factories and on the farms of the GDR, an objective which was to be partly achieved through the Coventry/Dresden project. He was not prepared to jeopardise that goal because of fears about the activities of an esoteric fringe group, however well connected that group may have been. \textit{Aktion Sühnezeichen}'s work with intellectuals and theologians within the GDR and other countries was in a different and, as it appeared at that time, less relevant category. In order to achieve the objective of crushing opposition from the mainstream Church and winning over its flock, Ulbricht needed to obtain some leverage with which to increase the pressure he could exert on mainstream Church leaders to conform. He could see a way in which \textit{Aktion Sühnezeichen} leaders could be used to provide that leverage and was prepared, albeit briefly, to give them the legitimacy they desired despite the \textit{Stasi}'s analysis of the organisation's secret intentions and its condemnation of its leaders as enemies of the state.

By 1966, though, with the end of Ulbricht's period of liberalisation, and with the appreciation growing as events in the CSSR came to a head that \textit{Aktion Sühnezeichen} and other groups posed a very real threat, GDR priorities and policy changed. The Coventry/Dresden project came to an end and \textit{Aktion Sühnezeichen} was once again restricted to domestic activities. Ultimately history proved Ulbricht's self-confidence to have been misguided. The extent to which future developments hinged on the activities of organisations such as \textit{Aktion Sühnezeichen} remains to be established. However, there can be little doubt that \textit{Aktion Sühnezeichen} was influential beyond its remit and that it too, like Oestreicher, Seidowsky and others associated with the Coventry/Dresden project operated in the shadowy world of behind the scenes diplomacy.
This analysis of Aktion Sühnezeichen's activities provides another example of the manner in which Cold War international relations were conducted on two levels - the public and the secret. At a time when the mere suggestion of a West German politician holding talks with the Soviet Union was unthinkable, Aktion Sühnezeichen leaders were providing that conduit through which policy needs to flow. As Brandt and Bahr were hesitatingly mapping out their philosophy of Ostpolitik, a policy which superficially seemed to be a rational acceptance of the state of affairs but which, as Kvitzinsky has described, proved to be a poisoned chalice, Müller-Gangloff and Kreysig were tunnelling their way beneath the ideological barriers of the Cold War in the name of reconciliation. During the first half of the 1960s, Ulbricht and liberal Christian leaders were using similar tactics to win the ideological battle of the Cold War. Both sides rejected frontal attack in favour of slow psychological encroachment. Both sides held out the hand of friendship to their enemies. The GDR called it Christian/Marxist dialogue. The West was to call it Ostpolitik. Both policies were designed to kill off the enemy.

1 Evangelische Akademien Web site www.ekd.de/akademien. Evangelischen Akademien continue to operate throughout Germany.
2 Gossner Mission Web site http://members.aol.com/gossner/homepage. The Gossner Mission was founded in 1836 by Pfarrer Johannes Gossner as a missionary organisation, particularly in India. After the Second World War, the organisation took up missionary work within Germany, especially among the workers. Today it works in countries such as India, Nepal and Zambia.
3 Kvitzinsky, Vor dem Sturm, p.190.
4 BStU, MfS HA XX/4 520, chart of Aktion Sühnezeichen contacts, 30 September 1969.
5 See Konrad Weiss, Lothar Kreysig, Prophet der Versöhnung, (Gerlingen: Bleicher, 1998), Chapter 16, for an account of the launch of Aktion Sühnezeichen and its early history.
6 Lothar Kreysig's call for the founding of Aktion Sühnezeichen at the EKD synod, 30 April 1958, quoted in full in Weiss, Lothar Kreysig, pp. 455-456.
7 Weiss, Lothar Kreysig, p.335.
8 Ibid. pp.334-335.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Rabe, Umkehr in die Zukunft.
18 Weiss, Lothar Kreysig, p.367.
19 BStU, Mfs HA XX/4 301, Stasi analysis of Aktion Sühnezeichen, 15 February 1964. Also MfS HA XX4 502, analysis of Aktion Sühnezeichen, 3 September 1963 notes that the minutes of the standing committee of Aktion Sühnezeichen for the financial year 1963 list contributions from the West German Foreign Ministry, the military bishop's office of the EKD and the World Council of Churches.
EZA 104/618, letter from Kreysig to the EKD, 24 February 1965. The letter gives an indication of Aktion Sühnezeichen's financial situation in the GDR. In 1964, the sum needed to finance projects in the GDR was MDN 64,207. In 1965, it was anticipated that MDN 93,000 would be required.

BStU, MfS HA XX/4 301, Stasi analysis of Aktion Sühnezeichen, 15 February 1964.


Weiss, Lothar Kreysig, p.11.

Weiss, Lothar Kreysig, Chapter 9; Rabe, Umkehr in die Zukunft; and Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste Web site www.asf-ev.de.


Thierse, 'Als Wanderer zwischen den Welten'.

Ibid.

Weiss, Lothar Kreysig, p.108. Weiss makes the point that Kreysig's relationship with Schacht was purely a business matter. Some of Kreysig's GDR detractors have implied otherwise.

Besier, Der SED-Staat und die Kirche, p.282.

Thierse, 'Als Wanderer zwischen den Welten'. Thierse credits Kreysig with being one of the first people to think in terms of sustainable support in global terms, concepts now at the centre of environmental thinking.


BStU, MfS AP 20983/92 Band 1, Stasi report on Kreysig, 23 September 1959.

Interview with Seidowsky, 4 July 2000.

Ibid., Stasi report on Kreysig, 26 March 1965.

Ibid., Stasi report on Kreysig, 12 November 1963.

Ibid., Stasi report on Kreysig, circa 1957.

Ibid., Stasi report on Kreysig, 12 November 1963.

Thierse, 'Als Wanderer zwischen den Welten'.


Mark Allinson, Politics and popular opinion in East Germany 1945-68, (Manchester: Manchester University, 2000), p.92. Clergy voting figures for elections from 1957 to 1963 show that in Magdeburg the number voting was well below that in neighbouring areas or those of Catholic clergy. These figures indicate the strength of opposition to the GDR in the Magdeburg area.

BStU, MfS HA XX/4 301, Stasi analysis of Aktion Sühnezeichen, 15 February 1964. According to Kreysig's biographer, Weiss, Lorenz was 'Kreysig's right hand' in Magdeburg, p.255.

BStU, MfS HA XX/4 301, Stasi analysis of Aktion Sühnezeichen, 15 February 1964.

BStU, MfS AP 20983/92 Band 1, Stasi report on Kreysig, 12 November 1963. Von Hammerstein is a member of a prominent German family. His father was Kurt von Hammerstein, a senior general who was relieved of his command because of opposition to the Nazis. His brother Ludwig was also involved in the July 1944 plot against Hitler, survived, and, according to the Stasi, worked for the West German Interior Ministry.

Krivitzinsky, Vor dem Sturm, p.208.

BStU, MfS HA XX/4 520, Stasi analysis of Aktion Sühnezeichen, 3 September 1963.


Ibid., p.336.

Ibid., p.339.

John Miller, No Cloak. No Dagger: Recent Quaker Experience in East-West Encounters, (London: East West Relations Committee, Society of Friends, 1965). This booklet provides a summary of Quaker involvement in East/West contact from the late 1940s to the mid 1960s.
Interview with von Hammerstein, 8 July 2000. Cates married Elizabeth Gürtler, who was the secretary in the East Berlin office of *Aktion Sühnezeichen*, and the couple subsequently made their home in the USA.


54 Kvitzinsky, *Vor dem Sturm*.


56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.


59 EZA 102/329, von Hammerstein's report of the meeting with Khrushchev, 18 January 1963.

60 Ibid.

61 Interview with von Hammerstein, 8 July 2000.

62 Rabe, *Umkehr in die Zukunft*.

63 Ibid.


70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 Kvitzinsky, *Vor dem Sturm*, p.207.

73 Ibid.

74 Bahr's speech was delivered at the Tutzing Evangelische Akademie in West Germany, described as 'one of those church academies which played a remarkably important role in the intellectual background of West German politics in general and Ostpolitik in particular', by Garton Ash in *In Europe's Name*, p.54.

75 Kvitzinsky, *Vor dem Sturm*, p.191.

76 LABB, S10 Band II, letter from Kreyssig to Khrushchev, 28 July 1964.

77 Ibid., letter from Müller-Gangloff to Khrushchev, 29 July 1964.


79 See A James McAdams, *East Germany and Detente: Building Authority after the Wall*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1985) for an analysis of Ulbricht's relationship with the Soviet Union at this time.

80 ASA, letter from Kreyssig to Williams, undated, circa September 1964.

81 Rabe, *Umkehr in die Zukunft*.

82 LABB, S10 Band II, leaflet, 15 February 1965.

83 Ibid., *Umkehr in die Zukunft*.


86 SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/14/9, an evaluation of the manner in which the Church influenced the population, undated, circa 1964.


88 Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949-1989*, (Oxford: Oxford University, 1995). The CPC was 'essentially a front organisation designed to co-opt compliant pastors to support the state's [GDR's] official peace policies, p.100. Oestreicher, *My Cold War Life in No Man's Land*, 1999. The CPC was listed in 'Whitehall as a Soviet front organisation'. Besier, *Der SED-Staat und die Kirche*. The CPC was supported by East European leaders and the fact that the CDU newspaper *Neue Zeit* published its communiqués is evidence of the support of the GDR regime. BStU, MfS AP
10667/92, report of IM Karl on a meeting of bishops during which Noth demanded that no bishops should attend the CPC. Mitzenheim had been keen to attend but was persuaded not to.

89 BStU, MfS HA XX/4 301, Stasi analysis of Aktion Sühnezeichen, 15 February 1964.
90 BStU, MfS HA XX/4 520, Stasi analysis of Aktion Sühnezeichen, 3 September 1963.
91 Ibid.
92 BStU, MfS AIM 3654/71 Teil II Band 10, meeting between Müller-Gangloff and Seidowsky, 14 September 1966.
94 EZA, 97/639, Müller-Gangloff's description of the Comenius Club, 13 August 1967. One of the founding members was Müller-Gangloff's old friend, Theodor Steltzer.
95 BStU, MfS AP 7632/79 Band I, various correspondence and reports on Kreyssig's Polish contacts. In 1963, the head of the Stasi, Erich Mielke, himself responded to a query from Polish colleagues about Kreyssig's activities in Poland, describing him as a bitter enemy of the GDR.
96 BStU, MfS HA XX/4 520, Stasi analysis of Aktion Sühnezeichen, 3 September 1963.
97 Interview with Fink, 7 February 1997.
98 Ibid.
CHAPTER 4

Christian/Marxist Dialogue in Britain and the GDR: High Ideal or Political Ploy?

Introduction

The concept of Christian/Marxist dialogue was a subject which dominated international relations in Church circles during the first half of the 1960s. It was this debate which created the environment, both in political and theological terms, which made it possible for the Coventry/Dresden project to take place. The question that was being asked was whether Christians and communists shared enough common ground to allow them to bury their differences, suspicions and hostilities in order to work together for a peaceful and stable world. The debate involved Christians and Marxists in many countries, Britain and the GDR being no exception. There were conservatives and radicals in both countries, the traditionalists of the left and the right clinging to the belief that Marxists and Christians were natural enemies, the liberals arguing that the upholders of both creeds shared common humanistic aims. The debate was heightened by the fear, evident on both sides, that those who argued for rapprochement between Christians and Marxists were merely being manipulated by those who wielded political power.

The idea of an act of reconciliation taking place in Dresden was born at this time when the concept of international brotherhood was at the forefront of Christian thinking. As Oestreicher said in 1965: '...we [Christians and Marxists] have the same basis - we care for people, for humanity. Marxists and Christians both claim to represent true humanism'. Many people in Britain, including the Provost of Coventry Cathedral, shared this view. In the GDR, the general reaction to the concept was more sceptical. Although there were clerics who supported Christian/Marxist dialogue, the idea was by no means as popular among Christians who actually lived side by side with Marxists on a daily basis. However,
in relation to the Coventry/Dresden project it was the support of the regime for the concept which was the significant factor, not the opinions of clergymen or their congregations.

At the beginning of the 1960s, Ulbricht, in an apparent reversal of his previous hard-line policy against the Church, had publicly espoused the cause of Christian/Marxist dialogue and thus created the political climate within the GDR which made the Coventry/Dresden project acceptable, although still surprising. But it was no conversion on the road to Damascus. Ulbricht, the pragmatic politician, saw Christian/Marxist dialogue as a means of harnessing the Church to his view of socialism. On the whole, Christians remained suspicious and sceptical. After the years of suppression and opposition during the 1950s, they doubted the regime's good faith. Turner's personal recollection of the period is that there was an enormous chasm between Christians and communists. Anyone tinged by politics was suspect. All members of the GDR's Christian political party, the CDU, for example, were blanketed as fellow travellers. Ulbricht's problem was to bridge this credibility gap. The Coventry/Dresden project provided him with a means of doing so. By allowing British Christians who believed in the brotherhood of man to live and work alongside GDR Christians, Ulbricht was in effect importing untainted and therefore convincing advocates of his policy.

Although the vocabulary of the Christian/Marxist dialogue debate was couched in terms of common humanity which could not be faulted, the issue was far from being all sparkling idealism. It was also a means of control. At a political level in both East and West it provided a tool with which those in power could manipulate Christians and Christian beliefs. In the GDR, Christian/Marxist dialogue was used at a political level in order to suppress dissident Christian voices. The aim was to silence those opposed to the communist regime by bringing pressure to bear on them from their own colleagues who believed that the way forward was through co-operation. In Britain, Christian/Marxist dialogue was frowned upon at an official level, its supporters being suspected of cavorting with the devil. However, the history of the Coventry/Dresden project suggests that at another level the concept was valued for the way in which its supporters could be used to influence society in
communist countries. Oestreicher, for example, worked closely with British diplomats and was one of the chief British exponents of Christian/Marxist dialogue.

The fact that Ulbricht himself claimed to be a supporter of Christian/Marxist détente probably did as much as anything to arouse the suspicions of GDR Christians. He had set the GDR agenda for the debate in 1960 when he announced his belief that Christianity and the humanist aims of socialism were not incompatible. The divisions that had existed over the decades had arisen from the manner in which Christianity had been abused by the ruling classes, he said. This sort of abuse could still be seen in West Germany where he accused right-wing clerics of supporting the Bonn Government's militaristic aims. But, he went on:

"...The old yearning of Christian people, who pray for peace on earth and goodwill to all mankind in their gospel, can only find fulfilment through the realisation of the high ideals of humanism and socialism"^4

Although most Church leaders in the GDR reacted cautiously to the new tone that the regime was attempting to introduce into its Church/state relations, there were exceptions, the most notable being Moritz Mitzenheim, the Bishop of Thuringia, who publicly espoused the concept of Christian/Marxist dialogue. But the less progressive bishops, to use GDR terminology, hung back, fearing that nothing had changed and the new Christian-friendly Ulbricht was merely a wolf in sheep's clothing.

This fear appeared to have been justified when, following the demise of the GDR and the opening of the state archives, the complexities of GDR Church policy became apparent. In many quarters the Church had continued to be regarded as the enemy. It was infiltrated, manipulated and spied upon.^5 In addition, the Stasi's involvement in GDR Church matters extended beyond surveillance. According to Vollnhals' analysis of the power structure of Church politics, the Stasi was instrumental in the shaping and execution of Church policy. The official Church policy of the SED cannot be detached from the conspiratorial activities of the MfS. The ultimate goal, Vollnhals has argued, was not a shared humanistic future but the destruction of the Church as an institution, an observation which was shared by the British Foreign Office at the time:

"The regime's long-term aims are clear: to isolate the Church in East Germany by cutting its links with the West, then to disarm it or, better still, harness it to 'socialism'; finally to absorb it effectually or - if this is indeed an alternative - to destroy it."^8
This view has been supported by Schroeder. The Church, he said, was seen as a 'foreign body' within the socialist society. The aim was the 'total suppression' of what the head of the Stasi, Erich Mielke, described as 'this legal organisation of the enemy'. Thus, according to this interpretation, the GDR was operating a dual and confusing Church policy, using the softly-softly approach to entice the prey into the lair from where it could be safely devoured.

To add to the complexity of the picture, the Church itself was far from united on the matter of how it should interact with the regime. This situation was partly the result of, and was certainly aggravated by, the regime's own policy of intensifying divisions within the Church, a policy known as Differenzierung. In addition, the Church's own policy towards the GDR regime was neither uniform nor consistent, being to a large extent dependent upon the pressures and influences exerted upon individual Church leaders. It was alleged by the Stasi, for example, that Krummacher, the GDR's senior bishop during the 1960s, had flirted with the intelligence services of the Soviet Union, the GDR and the Third Reich. Krummacher's background not only made him susceptible to having his arm twisted by the state but also weakened his image as a Church leader of conviction at a time when the Christians of the GDR were looking to their leaders for guidance. In the deeply conspiratorial world of the GDR, very few - Christians or communists - remained untarnished.

It is not surprising that, in the circumstances, Ulbricht's policy of Christian/Marxist dialogue did not progress at the pace which he would have wished. There were some breakthroughs, such as the meeting between Ulbricht and the Leipzig theologian Emil Fuchs in February 1961 during which Fuchs handed over a letter supporting GDR policy signed by 32,000 Church employees and laity. But most Church leaders and their congregations remained stubbornly suspicious and hostile. The official change of tone, the softly-softly approach, was also bewil-dering to many grass-roots Christians who were torn between what they saw as conflicting demands made upon them by Church and state. To this end, in 1963 the bishops published a set of guidelines, the Zehn Artikel (Ten Articles), which aimed to advise GDR Christians on the manner in which they could reconcile their faith with the realities of their lives within a socialist state. In Dresden, the Saxon synod went one step
further by issuing a declaration instructing Christians not to allow themselves to be used for political propaganda purposes. It was obvious that additional measures would be necessary if Ulbricht was going to persuade the Christian section of his population to give him the support he wanted and by so doing emasculate the power of the Church.

Among the leftward-leaning religious leaders in Britain there was a greater readiness to grasp the brotherly hand that was being held out by Ulbricht. For them, the concept of Christian/Marxist dialogue represented a form of Cold War rapprochement. Oestreicher, in his role as an official of the British Council of Churches, was instrumental in garnering support for the concept. He became deeply involved with the CPC, the geographic focal point of the debate which had been founded in Prague in 1958 by the Czech theologian Josef Hromádka, together with others. Their aim was to create a Christian organisation...which would make possible a genuine East-West dialogue and which would be committed in both the theological and political fields to making a practical and recognisably Christian contribution to peace and justice in human society.¹²

Oestreicher, as chairman of the British regional committee of the CPC, became its chief British representative. He was among those who refined the idea of co-existence between Christians and Marxists into something he called 'pro-existence' - loosely the belief that Christians and Marxists should not only live with each other but also for each other. His support for the concept of Christian/Marxist dialogue was echoed by Turner, who led the British group in Dresden. What was often forgotten, he recalled later, was that Christians and Marxists had a 'common interest in the well-being of the people of the country'.¹³ Williams shared the same philosophy. At a service to commission the young volunteers about to depart for Dresden, he spoke of the manner in which 'the Christian or the understanding humanist' appreciated that too many current attitudes were the results of hangovers of prejudice from the past, that prejudice becomes public opinion and public opinion becomes political policy.¹⁴ Thus all the senior British figures involved in the Coventry/Dresden project were advocates of the concept of Christian/Marxist dialogue. In that sense, they were, wittingly or unwittingly, Ulbricht's natural allies.

In order to understand why the concept of Christian/Marxist dialogue coloured GDR Kirchenpolitik during the 1960s, why Ulbricht felt it so necessary to win the support of
Christians and why he found it so difficult to convince them of his good faith, it is necessary to examine some of the other issues which dominated Church/state relations during the first 15 years of Ulbricht's rule, years which were characterised, on the whole, by mutual suspicion and hostility. As we have seen, the tensions which existed between Church and state did not simply evaporate when Ulbricht made his declaration about the common humanistic aims of Christianity and socialism. They only served to muddy the waters. Chief among the causes of tension was the existence of the administrative body, the Evangelische Kirche Deutschland (EKD), which governed the Church in both the eastern and the western parts of Germany. Other issues which had aroused passions in the 1950s and continued to do so in the 1960s included the introduction of the Jugendweihe, a socialist ceremony for children of early secondary school age held to mark their transition from childhood to maturity, and the Militärseelsorgevertrag (Military Chaplaincy Agreement) of 1957.

The Church in the GDR

When the Ulbricht group returned from the Soviet Union to Berlin in 1945, little remained of the Germany they had left behind. The country was in tatters, its economy, infrastructure and institutions destroyed by the rigours of battle and defeat. Amid the ruins, however, one powerful institution, the Church, had remained more or less intact, emerging relatively unscathed from the chaos and devastation which followed the end of hostilities. Church membership within Germany as a whole was and is largely divided between two denominations - Roman Catholicism and the Protestantism of the Evangelische Kirche. Within the territory which was to become the GDR, however, Protestantism was the dominant faith. The infant communist state was faced with the fact that about 80 per cent of its people were card-carrying members, not of the SED, but of the Evangelische Kirche.15

The strength of the Evangelische Kirche within the eastern zone of Germany was one of the major problems which confronted Ulbricht and his colleagues at the birth of the GDR and which continued to do so throughout the life of the country. Not only was the Church numerically too strong for it to be outlawed and persecuted, its many institutions were also an integral part of the social fabric of the country. It was reckoned in 1960, for example, that the Protestant Church ran 500 hospitals and clinics, 59 homes for the mentally and
physically disabled and hundreds of children's day nurseries and old people's homes.\textsuperscript{16} Ulbricht needed the Church for the services which it provided. Despite the fact that the two faiths - communism and Christianity - were, in the eyes of many adherents, incompatible, it was a practical necessity for the GDR's first rulers to come to some form of accommodation with the existence of the Church. Wolfgang Leonard, the one-time member of the Ulbricht group of 1945, recounted that when setting up the first administration Ulbricht ordered the group to find some anti-fascist priests for the religious affairs department saying: 'We must get good co-operation with them - that's very important'.\textsuperscript{17} This policy was reflected in the GDR's first constitution drawn up in 1949. Articles 41 and 42 provided for freedom of worship and conscience and stipulated that no-one would be discriminated against in their private and public lives because of their religious beliefs.

The first few years, however, were merely a honeymoon. During the 1950s, the decade in which the socialist regime began to flex its muscles, Church/state relations hardened and were punctuated by a series of flash points. Chief among them was the introduction of the \textit{Jugendweihe} by the GDR regime in 1954 and the ratification of the \textit{Militärseelsorgevertrag} by the EKD in 1957. \textit{Jugendweihe} was a battleground on which communists and Christians fought for the loyalty of the next generation. It was a ceremony during which children were required to pledge their allegiance to the atheist state. It was a direct challenge to the Church and its Christian service of Confirmation, the Church's view being that it was not possible for children to take part in both ceremonies and thus vow to be both Christian and atheist at the same time. The \textit{Militärseelsorgevertrag} highlighted the dichotomy between the unity of the Church and the division of a nation. The agreement stated that the \textit{Evangelische Kirche} would provide chaplains for West German forces. It was seen by the SED as little short of treason. How could the leading churchmen of the GDR give their support to providing spiritual succour for troops whose enemy, if they were ever called into action, would be the Church leaders' own flock in the GDR? It was a bizarre situation, souring relations between the Church and the GDR regime, which intensified its efforts to split the geographical wings of the EKD.
The EKD was the Church administrative body for both parts of Germany. Its existence was a long-term stumbling block to good relations between Church and state. The fact that the Evangelische Kirche was a pan-German organisation, the only such organisation to remain intact after 1945, was a constant irritant to the GDR regime, undermining its struggle to gain international recognition for itself as an independent state.\(^\text{18}\) As the Cold War intensified, the fact that the Church was administered by a central body became an increasingly jarring anomaly. How could the GDR assert its independence when, on a daily basis, the Church was conducting itself as though Germany was one nation? Despite Ulbricht's apparent conversion to a policy of harmonious relations with Christians in 1960, he nevertheless drew attention to this obstacle to Christian/ Marxist dialogue.\(^\text{19}\) It was a warning that there would be stormy waters ahead if the conditions were not met. The separation of the eastern part of the Church from its western colleagues was a main plank of GDR Church policy and efforts to achieve this division continued throughout the period of Christian/ Marxist dialogue.

The building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 was a significant factor in helping Ulbricht to achieve this aim. The Wall made it difficult and eventually impossible for the EKD to function as a single administrative body. Church leaders, like everyone else, were no longer allowed to cross from East to West, other than in exceptional circumstances and these circumstances did not include attending meetings of the EKD. However the Church was not about to give in gracefully to Ulbricht's wishes and Church/state relations were further damaged by the physical barrier that had been erected between its two constituent parts.

The diocese of Berlin-Brandenburg was particularly badly affected since its territory included both East and West Berlin. A British Foreign Office report noted in 1963 that the regime's hope was that 'the passage of time and the continued existence of the Wall will inexorably work for the growing-apart of the two halves of the Berlin-Brandenburg Church, itself a microcosm of the Evangelical Church of Germany'.\(^\text{20}\) The chief administrator of the diocese, Kurt Scharf, who was also president of the EKD synod, personified the struggle by the Church to maintain its unity following the closure of the border and the equal determination of the state to make this an impossibility.
Scharf, who was seen as a Dibelius supporter, angered the regime by signing a telegram to Ulbricht and the East Berlin mayor, Friedrich Ebert in 1961 pointing out the grief that the Wall would cause to Berliners cut off from family and friends. As a result, he was expelled from the GDR and forced to live in exile in West Berlin. The Scharf issue was another aggravating factor in Church/state relations. In 1963, it was reported that Seigewasser had said that Scharf would never be allowed to return to the GDR, this decision being justified by Scharf's 'defamatory and aggressive' attacks upon the GDR. In fact, later events indicate that Scharf was prepared to take a more conciliatory attitude towards the GDR regime than some of his colleagues. In 1964, Church intermediaries were reported to have told Abrassimov, the Soviet Ambassador to the GDR, that Scharf was in favour of a 'normalisation' of relations between West Germany and the GDR. However, this stance did not lessen the attacks against him, according to Goeckel, who has noted that as a result of this conciliatory approach, Scharf was seen as a supporter of West German Ostpolitik, a policy which the GDR regarded as threatening.

Although the building of the Wall created another source of conflict between Church and state, it also had a more positive effect if looked at from Ulbricht's point of view. In common with the population at large, the Church began to realise that it must learn to live in a socialist state which seemed to have a future. The GDR was no longer to be regarded as a temporary aberration, or even one from which one could withdraw if desired by crossing the East/West border. The GDR was there to stay. From this realisation grew the conviction, among some GDR Christians, that the Church must learn to live within socialism.

Ulbricht, on the other hand, was certainly not going to live with the Christians of West Germany. Despite his apparent readiness to bury ideological differences in the early days of creating his socialist state, and the fact that he reverted to this stance with his proclamation of 1960, he remained implacably opposed to the Church in West Germany. His desire to split the EKD and his hostility towards the Militärseelsorgevertrag were examples of this attitude. For Ulbricht, the enemy had been and remained what he called 'political clericalism'. This he defined as the 'ideological concomitant form of imperialism, as the
imperialistic form of the abuse of Church organisations and religious theory in the interests of US and West German imperialism.\textsuperscript{25}

In line with this creed, the \textit{Stasi}, charged with preserving the security of the GDR, saw the Church as an unrivalled form of hostile international intelligence network. Genuine harmonious Church/state relations were impossible in these circumstances. According to Vollnhals, the SED played a double game in relation to Church policy. Side by side with official policy, stage-managed in announcements and summit talks, there was an unofficial policy which was carried out under the most rigorous conspiratorial conditions, he says.\textsuperscript{26} Outwardly, from 1960 onwards the SED line was integration rather than confrontation. But behind the scenes the \textit{Stasi} was following another policy, that of eliminating the Church as an independent social union with institutional autonomy. This double strategy was, according to Boyens, 'second nature for communism'.\textsuperscript{27}

In 1962, the \textit{Stasi} produced a major report on the Church and its organisations which dwelt on the hostile nature of the institution. In its analysis it reached the conclusion that there was probably no other organisation so suited to secret service work as the Church.\textsuperscript{28} It argued that the fact that it had emerged from the war almost intact meant that its network systems were still in operation. Members of those networks included those who had given support to fascism. Indeed, the report came to the conclusion that those running the post-war administration of the Church had almost all been active or acquiescent fascists during the Hitler period.\textsuperscript{29} Those responsible for the report were members of a group of about ten \textit{Stasi} officers and IMs which was established at the beginning of the 1960s, charged with the task of carrying out in-depth investigations into the Church and religious organisations, both domestic and international. The creation of this investigation team, coinciding as it did with Ulbricht's apparent introduction of a more conciliatory attitude towards the Church, points to the fact that his olive branch was at the very least severely circumscribed. Overtures of friendship were being made at the same time as surveillance and investigative measures were being stepped up.
One of the members of the Stasi group was Seidowsky. In his view, although all decisions on Kirchenpolitik were made by Ulbricht, different interest groups, such as the CDU, the SfK, the MfAA and the Stasi, all attempted to influence the nature of his decisions. The Stasi, he says, was different from the other bodies in that it took a more long-term view based on information that other organisations did not possess. It was interested not only in what would happen in the short-term as a result of specific actions but on the effect these decisions would have both nationally and internationally. Significantly and contrary to the view of Schroeder and other historians, according to Seidowsky the Stasi did not believe that the Church could be destroyed. Unlike many other communists, he says:

"...we knew that we must live with the Church and the question was in which way. We knew that the Church would not disappear in about 20 years as some people thought. We knew the history of the Church over the centuries. We were fighting against solutions such as those that happened in the Soviet Union, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. We were talking about living together."

The Coventry/Dresden project, says Seidowsky, was a realisation of the 'living together' concept. There is, however, a difference between living together with Christians and living together with the Church. As Goeckel has noted, Ulbricht's Christian/Marxist dialogue policy was an attempt to woo Christians as individuals. It stressed the role of individual Christians and consciously ignored the role of the Church as an institution. It was and is possible for Seidowsky, or indeed others, to talk about the common aims of Christians and Marxists while still maintaining their views on the fascist influences within the Church. To a large extent, Seidowsky bases his opinion on fascist influences within the Church not so much on conspiracy theory as on the convincingly practical observation that after the war, the Church, as the only surviving powerful institution, presented ambitious Germans with the only means of forging a career. For this, if for no other reason, they moved into it in droves, bringing with them their fascist pasts. The result was that far from the Church taking steps to denazify itself, fascist influence actually increased.

This was a view typical of GDR communists, who saw the Church as an organisation which was, and always would be, tarred with the brush of fascism. In this sense the Church represented a 'foreign body' within the ruling system of real existing socialism and needed to
be contained. The means by which it was to be contained was through a policy known as *Differenzierung*, supported by the surveillance and infiltration techniques of the *Stasi*.

The aim of the *Stasi* was to emasculate the Church, not through persecution, but by creating divisions within the Church, giving encouragement to those clergymen who were prepared to work with the state, whether that be because they genuinely believed in Christian/ Marxist dialogue or whether it be for opportunistic reasons, and by the use of subtle propaganda methods win the ideological battle so that Christians were voluntarily prepared to give their support to the socialist state. The name given to this policy of divide and rule was *Differenzierung*. The complexities of this policy have been summed up by Schroeder as being the use of a variety of measures or activities in order to increase or generate

"...the differences between individual Church employees, between employees and Church leaders, and between individual *Landeskirchen* ...in order to create a climate of isolation and lack of solidarity inside the social area of the Church. The internal loyalties and dependencies of Church relationships were to be broken and blotted out, or replaced by the higher loyalties and dependencies of Church members to the state and the SED."^{34}

The *Stasi* differentiated between what it termed the progressive and the reactionary forces within the Church. According to Schroeder, the progressive forces were 'sympathetic or naive' Church contacts who allowed themselves to be exploited to further the aims and purposes of the Party.^{35} This is a critical view in that it can also be argued that some Christians genuinely believed in the merits of the socialist state and their support was not exploitation. John Conway, for example, says that it should be remembered 'how readily some Christians in the former German Democratic Republic believed that this dictatorship represented a real form of Christian socialism'.^{36}

*Mitzenheim* is probably the best known example of a progressive yet in many respects he was a traditional conservative. His case illustrates how difficult it can be to determine the motivation behind the words and actions of leading GDR Christians in the conspiratorial climate deliberately created by the *Stasi*. Were they manipulated or merely misguided? Were their actions based on genuine Christian beliefs or on self-preservation? Opinions on Mitzenheim's role are divided. In 1963, the British Foreign Office described
Mitzenheim as 'pliant'. Goeckel suggests that Mitzenheim's 'pallyness' with the regime could partly be excused by his age, but that it was more largely due to the influence of his Thuringian colleague, Oberkirchenrat Gerhard Lotz, whose Stasi files have revealed that he served the Stasi as an IM, codenamed Karl, from 1955. Oestreicher, on the other hand, defended Mitzenheim in 1965 saying that 'it is somewhat ironic that this valiant Lutheran and spiritual carer imbued with the love of the Church has been christened Red Moritz by his opponents'. Turner, who met Mitzenheim in 1965, also says that the bishop was a man of 'integrity'.

"He was the bishop that the government wheeled out to show that the Church was lovely and free, but actually he was an old-fashioned Landes bishop. He perceived himself as the patriarch of the country and not just as a Christian."

The debate on the role of the Church in the GDR will continue for many years to come. In the case of Mitzenheim, for example, Goeckel has said that we will never really be able to make out precisely what was more significant - Mitzenheim's political leanings or Lotz's treachery. Similar conundrums apply to the actions of many other GDR Christians, both leaders and led. An analysis of GDR Church/state relations is inevitably circumscribed by the conspiratorial nature of the GDR body politic and the manner in which the regime conducted its relations with the Church in particular. The legacy of the policy of Differenzierung is its historical intangibility.

Given the dual strategy of Kirchenpolitik in the first half of the 1960s, is there any evidence to show that there was anything other than political pragmatism behind Ulbricht's attempt to initiate an era of more harmonious relations between the regime and the Christians of the GDR? Can his more tolerant attitude towards the Church be seen as a part of the move towards economic and social liberalisation, as spelled out in his speech to the 6th Party Congress in 1963? Was Ulbricht's 1960 speech a marked and public shift in Church policy, as it was intended to appear? Was there an element of genuine recognition that together Christians and communists might be able to create the sort of society which both claimed to wish for but never seemed to be able to achieve? Or was it merely a political sleight of hand, a trap through which the Church could be disempowered? What can be said with certainty in an area where very little is certain, is that Ulbricht knew that he needed to reach out to the ordinary Christian in the street if he was to harness the forces of the Church.
to his vision of a socialist German state. As Fulbrook has pointed out, it was at grass-roots level that the regime faced its major challenge in relation to its Kirchenpolitik. Despite the 'much-publicized' dialogues with the theologian, Emil Fuchs, and Bishop Mitzenheim:

"The attempt...to involve GDR Christians in the state-supported Pfarrerbund and to persuade the church to join the Prague-based Christliche Friedenskonferenz, found little general resonance. The continuing 'dialogues' between church and state in the 1960s remained rather stage-managed affairs, in which the officially sanctioned spokesmen for the church were not generally held to be genuine representatives of Protestant views." 42

Ulbricht's new policy was an attempt to win the loyalty of the foot soldiers rather than the generals.

Those looking for evidence of good faith at the time might have seen such signs in Ulbricht's appointment in 1960 of a new man to head the government department nominally in charge of Church affairs. One month after Ulbricht's groundbreaking speech, Seigewasser became the new Secretary of State for Church Affairs. He was a man whose past embodied the new direction in which Ulbricht intended to take Church/state relations. In his previous post as Secretary of the National Front Praesidium, Seigewasser had gained experience of working with mass organisations. This was not insignificant, according to Martin Georg Goerner, now that Seigewasser was faced with working with the largest mass organisation of all.43 In addition, Seigewasser also had close links with a number of Christians, dating back to his days in Sachsenhausen concentration camp during the Nazi period. The significance of Seigewasser's appointment was summed up by a West German commentator shortly after his death in 1979:

"His appointment was a signal for appeasement. He was a man who had a high reputation in the Party, without being a rabble-rouser of any kind. And he was a man who shared, at least with some Church spokesmen, the experience of opposition and persecution during the Hitler period. At the same time, he was, of course, a man who as a socialist and communist from his youth, would never deviate from the Party line." 44

This link between Seigewasser and Christians who had been persecuted under the Nazis is borne out by the words of a leading West German cleric, Präses Ernst Wilm, which were quoted in Neues Deutschland in 1965. Wilm was said to have told Seigewasser at a reception in Berlin: 'We both know that we are linked in comradeship and brotherhood from
the time of our imprisonment in Hitler's concentration camps - you in Sachsenhausen and me in Dachau'. 45

With his concentration camp background, Seigewasser was a personal example of the concept that Marxists and Christians did indeed share a common world outlook. This fact was undoubtedly an asset when it came to convincing cautious and suspicious Christians that co-existence was preferable to confrontation. According to Turner, at that time 'there was still an enormous respect by both Christians and Marxists for those who had been in concentration camps together'. 46 Commenting on GDR Church policy since 1958 and the regime's attempts to 'pursue its atheistic policy by administrative measures and by propaganda among young people and the teaching profession', a British Foreign Office report noted that:

"These more indirect tactics have been particularly pronounced since Herr Seigewasser took up the post of Secretary of State for Church Affairs in November 1960. Though a tested Communist, Herr Seigewasser is a man who gained some insight, during ten years in Nazi prisons and concentration camps, into the minds of Christian fellow-prisoners." 47

However, useful though Seigewasser's background was in providing proof of the regime's new conciliatory approach towards the Church, in the opinion of many analysts his appointment was mere window dressing. In the grand scheme of things, Seigewasser was only a figurehead. He was a man without power. According to Boyens' analysis of the GDR's Church policy power structure, the SfK ranked a poor third behind the other two organisations set up to handle Church policy, these being the SED Central Committee Arbeitsgruppe Kirchenfragen and the Church policy department of the Stasi. 48 'In reality, it was always a matter of Party/Church relations, which took place behind the scenes of the government department.' 49 Vollnhals, too, has described the SfK as a third rank organisation, which was carefully monitored by the Stasi. 50 Seidowsky is scathing about Seigewasser, saying that 'he knew nothing'. 51

Stasi reports compiled at around the time that Ulbricht would have been considering Seigewasser's suitability as the man to put his new policy into practice, indicate that Ulbricht gave Seigewasser the job despite of and not because of the Stasi's assessment. In the eyes of the Stasi, Seigewasser was considered to be politically unreliable. 52 A series of reports on
Seigewasser's period of concentration camp internment linked him to a fellow prisoner, Karl Schirdewan, who had been expelled from the Central Committee by Ulbricht in 1958 following his disagreement with Ulbricht on a number of issues, including the question of reunification. In addition to his alleged political deviations, Seigewasser was also in danger of being compromised by his personal life. His wife appears to have demonstrated an unhealthy independence of mind. Shortly after her husband's appointment, at a time when the GDR's professional classes were leaving the country in droves, she was reported to have told a Republikflucht joke along the lines of: Do you know that now you can go to West Germany twice a year legally - once to see your doctor and once to visit your dentist. Seigewasser himself had close family connections in the West, his mother living in West Berlin. His Stasi files contain an amusing account of a parcel being sent to him from the West containing chocolate, cigars and alcohol. The parcel was opened in Dresden where, apparently, the comrades were astonished to discover that the Secretary of State should receive such things because they thought he could get hold of them anyway.

However, Seigewasser cannot be totally written off. As Ulbricht's appointee, he possessed the influence which comes from patronage. He was the public face of Ulbricht's Kirchenpolitik. He was a part of the strategy to convince GDR Christians of the sincerity of Ulbricht's desire for dialogue. He also made a good impression on British Christians who met him. The fact that Ulbricht appointed him despite knowing that the Stasi considered him to be politically unreliable demonstrates that Ulbricht must have felt that Seigewasser's value as a bridge to the Church was worth any risk posed by his somewhat dilettante lifestyle. At the same time, Seigewasser provided Ulbricht with a form of camouflage behind which he could conveniently hide while carrying out his war against political clericalism. Seigewasser was a puppet with Christian-friendly credentials who would pursue hard-line policies when instructed to do so. The British Foreign Office observed that:

"This urbane attitude, [Seigewasser's welcome to peace-loving clergy] which has been emulated by officials in some of the regional administrations, has not inhibited him [Seigewasser] from pursuing a hard policy in all-German Church affairs. He has consistently worked to weaken existing links between the Evangelical Churches in East Germany and the Federal Republic."
When attempting to analyse the motives behind Ulbricht's *Kirchenpolitik* strategy in the early 1960s, it is also important to note that Ulbricht's advocacy of Christian/Marxist dialogue did not mean that Ulbricht believed that there was a possibility of dialogue on an ideological level. Ulbricht himself made this clear in 1961 when he told a meeting of theologians and lay Christians that: '...a peaceful co-existence between different theoretical opinions and worldviews is not possible. That would mean that one or the other must be silent so that conflict about worldviews would be prevented'.\(^{57}\) The British Foreign Office observed in 1963 that 'the concept of peaceful coexistence rigidly excludes - at present - any element of ideological coexistence.'\(^{58}\) In retrospect, this is a view supported by Oestreicher. Nearly 40 years after Ulbricht's speech, he has noted:

"The East German regime was always implacably opposed to Christian/Marxist dialogue. They were always in favour of what they called co-existence, peaceful co-existence between Christians and Marxists, by which they meant Christians working along with them to do their thing. But ideological dialogue was definitely not on..."\(^{59}\)

**Western Support for Christian/Marxist Dialogue**

Oestreicher had a more optimistic opinion of Christian/Marxist dialogue in the 1960s, when, as a relatively young man, he was deeply involved with the new liberal theology which was arousing passions among Christians in the Western world. He was not alone. Ulbricht's call for Christian/Marxist dialogue found a ready ear among like-minded theologians, Church leaders, and members of religious groups such as the Quakers. At a time when Western peace campaigners were beginning to make their voices heard in organisations such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), many people, Christian and non-Christian, genuinely hoped and believed that dialogue with the communists was the way to save the world from self-destruction. But a deeper examination of British involvement in the Anglo-GDR Christian/Marxist dialogue reveals that British idealists were no more immune from Cold War politics than their eastern brethren. Some, as in the case of Oestreicher, were knowingly involved in the unofficial Cold War non-governmental diplomacy of the time. Others were no doubt unaware of the political implications of their actions.
Oestreicher is a man whose personal life crosses many geographical, theological and ideological divides. His family came from Thuringia in eastern Germany and was of a Jewish background, although his parents became Quakers and he was baptised into the German Protestant Church. Oestreicher was born in Germany in 1931, but was brought up in New Zealand, to which country his parents had fled as refugees in 1939. As a young man in New Zealand, Oestreicher joined the Anglican Church. He returned to Europe in 1955 where he was a postgraduate student in West Germany. During the 1950s he spent some time working with Martin Niemöller, one of the founders of the Confessing Church who after the war campaigned against rearmament and for détente with the East. He was ordained into the Church of England in 1959 and began working as a curate in London. He then turned his talents to broadcasting, becoming a producer in BBC Radio's religious department. By the 1960s, he has said of himself, he was 'a Christian, a socialist and a pacifist'.

It was at around this time that he became involved with the international department of the British Council of Churches, which provided him with a base for his activities in Eastern Europe during the Cold War years. The BCC's Department of International Affairs and its committee, the East/West Relations Advisory Committee (EWRAC), were influential organisations with links to the British Foreign Office. The chairman of the international department in the 1960s was Kenneth Johnstone, a former diplomat and Deputy Director-General of the British Council. Noel Salter, another former diplomat, was the secretary of the EWRAC. This committee was created in January 1961 with the stated purpose of keeping the life and thought of the Churches in communist countries under review and advising those individuals and organisations in Britain who had contact with or were interested in the Church behind the Iron Curtain. Oestreicher was first invited to attend a meeting in July 1961 and became a permanent member in June 1963. About a year later it was agreed that Oestreicher should devote his energies to East/West contact under the auspices of the BCC. It was a somewhat ambiguous role. The minutes of the meeting at which his appointment was discussed describe his first responsibility as being 'the special work for which he had been chosen where there was scope and need for full-time activity'. The post would be 'described' as Associate Secretary of the International Department of the
British Council of Churches with special responsibility for maintaining and developing Christian links with Eastern Europe. However, the BCC was merely to provide office accommodation and services. Oestreicher's salary and travel expenses were provided by the Quaker charity, the Rowntree Trust. It was also agreed that Oestreicher would have 'scope for creative action' and full travel facilities. Oestreicher was stepping into the shoes of Dr Richard Ullmann, a Quaker who, as a member of the EWRAC, had played an active role in the establishment of the Christian Peace Conference and who had died in 1963. Ullmann had become vice-president of the CPC and had persuaded the British Churches to take this work seriously. He formed a British regional committee of the CPC and Oestreicher was his successor as its chairman. In 1964, Oestreicher also joined the executive committee of the CPC.

In addition to the BCC, Oestreicher was involved with a large number of Christian and pacifist organisations in Britain. Around the middle of the 1960s, for example, he was deputy vice-chairman of the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship, an executive of Christian Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), and a representative of Amnesty International. In 1963, Oestreicher had a meeting with Ulbricht when he went to East Berlin on behalf of Amnesty, together with the chairman of CND, Canon John Collins, to plead for the release of Heinz Brandt, an East German political prisoner.

At this time, Oestreicher professed to be an enthusiastic supporter of Christian/ Marxist dialogue and probably did more than any other British Church leader to promote the concept. He was a prolific speaker, broadcaster and writer, expounding his views on Christian/Marxist dialogue to a wide audience in Britain and elsewhere. He told one meeting that:

"...one of the most profound needs of our times, if the tremendous gulf between Communism and religion is to be bridged - and it must be bridged because they are men and we are men, and we must find ways to each other, is first of all for us to start from a position of penitence to find out how we can usefully still speak to our Communist brother...Over the past few years it has been my job in one way or another to seek to create dialogue, to find out what possibilities there are for lessening tension, to find out what possibilities there are for helping the churches who themselves live within Communist societies...we are all in a position to do away with the incredible prejudice that writes off half of the human race as 'The Reds' with whom in the last resort you cannot talk, who have been brain-washed out of humanity.
anyway...together we should recognize that we can build a common humanity, and if we Christians do this the light of Christ can shine into the lives of all men.”

This was Oestreicher the clergyman speaking. But he often stepped outside this role. As a link between East and West he was an important cog in Anglo-GDR non-governmental diplomacy. Anyone operating in the spy-ridden Cold War world of the 1960s was bound to get their hands dirty and he was no exception. In 1999, he said of this period:

"My real enemy was the cold war. I learnt to reject the West's 'free world' rhetoric, as surely as I rejected the East's propaganda rhetoric of 'peace'. But my job was to make friends on both sides with those I admired - the critics - but also with those who were in power. My stance in East and West was one of critical solidarity. I made friends in relatively high places on both sides of the cold war, friends I could trust and who trusted me, despite the heavy clouds of suspicion here, and there."

A very significant part of that making friends in high places was realised in the close relationship he established with Seidowsky. It is this relationship, together with Oestreicher's close connections with the British Foreign Office, which have left Oestreicher's actions open to question in the more transparent years following the demise of the GDR. Oestreicher himself acknowledges that the Stasi always suspected that he worked for the British intelligence agency, MI6 and more recently there have been similar British accusations. Oestreicher denies that he has ever worked for any intelligence organisation but says: 'I can deny it as much as I like and no-one is going to believe me'. On the other hand Oestreicher says he always knew that Seidowsky was a Stasi agent. In retrospect he now has doubts about the merits of some his actions during the Cold War years. With hindsight, he says, he was more conciliatory than he should have been.

But whatever the merits or demerits of Oestreicher's work may be considered to be in the post-Cold War era, there is little doubt that he was given high level support in order to carry out his mission. He worked under the auspices of the BCC, an influential body representing all British denominations other than the Roman Catholic Church, and with the knowledge and indirect support of the British Foreign Office. The Society of Friends also took a great interest in events in the GDR. Oestreicher's work with the BCC was financed by a Quaker organisation and his predecessor had been a Quaker. American Quakers also played a quiet but significant role in generating the desired dialogue between
Christians and Marxists. In September 1963, a group of Quakers, mostly from the USA, visited the GDR and had a meeting with Ulbricht.\textsuperscript{75}

Among British Christians who had experience of the GDR, empathy with Ulbricht's call for Christian/Marxist dialogue in the GDR contrasted with their critical view of the manner in which the dialogue was being hampered by strong traditionalist and conservative elements within the German Protestant Church. As radical thinkers in their own country, they tended to see the chasm between the Church and the regime within the GDR in some ways in terms of their own domestic disputes.\textsuperscript{76} In a broadcast delivered after a visit to the GDR in 1964, Oestreicher criticised the conservative elements within the Protestant Church in Germany, comparing them unfavourably with the progressive elements who were prepared to work with the communists:

"...the old fashioned Christians are there too of course, and they pretty much conform to what the Marxists imagine Christians to be like. They are mainly concerned with preserving what to an outsider must look pretty much like a relic of the past. They present no challenge to Communism. They merely despise it, but have no formula for an encounter with it that has any chance of success. At best they are the hibernating Christians...The Communists are not altogether naive in feeling that this sort of religion can be left to dig its own grave."\textsuperscript{77}

This view was echoed by Martin Turner, who criticised the rigid thinking within the Protestant Church in the GDR. On one occasion in 1965 a local Church affairs official said that in his experience the Church was a hotbed of reaction. Turner's view was that, while he did not find the church was quite as reactionary as the communist official said, he certainly had some justification for saying it.\textsuperscript{78}

\textbf{Conclusion}

Thus were the interested parties lined up in 1963 when the idea of an act of reconciliation in Dresden was first mooted. In the GDR, progressive supporters of Christian/Marxist dialogue stood together with Ulbricht against their conservative brothers. At the same time, the \textit{Stasi} together with Ulbricht, regarding the Church as a centre of subversion, worked to weaken, infiltrate and control it. In Britain, liberal clerics preached the brotherhood of man while condemning fellow German Christians for their stubborn refusal to co-operate with Ulbricht. Meanwhile, behind the scenes, the British establishment
gave its tacit support to people like Oestreicher whose mission was to neutralise the
Church’s opposition to the communist regime. GDR Christians opposed to the Ulbricht
regime appeared to be under attack on all sides.

It was a situation in which truth slipped through the fingers. As Vollnhals has
observed, the conspiratorial nature of the GDR regime destroyed the basis for trust upon
which all societies are built.\textsuperscript{79} Well-meaning people could only peer through the fog, hoping
to find clarity beyond. Turner’s admission of ignorance in a report to the BCC in 1966 has a
ring of honesty. He said:

"The big question is, that though the Communists are taking the Church seriously at the
moment, are they just doing this until the Church is small enough to be ignored completely;
or, does this indicate a real, permanent attitude? I do not know the answer to this question.\textsuperscript{80}

The following chapter throws some light on Turner’s question through an examination of
specific events in relation to Church/state relations and Christian/ Marxist dialogue,
particularly in the diocese of Saxony.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[1] SAPMO-BArch, DO4 2658, transcript of a broadcast by Oestreicher on West German radio, entitled
\textit{Living with Atheists}, 1 September 1965.
\item[2] Martin Turner’s private papers, \textit{Political Impressions}, unpublished personal record of his
experiences in the GDR, undated, circa 1966.
\item[3] SAPMO-BArch, DO4 2525, Ulbricht’s speech to the \textit{Volkskammer} on the relationship between state
and Church, 4 October 1960.
\item[4] Ibid.
\item[5] Besier and Wolf, \textit{Pfarrer, Christen und Katholiken}.
\item[7] Ibid.
\item[8] PRO, FO 371/169324 CG1781/8, report on Church/state relations in the GDR, 10 August 1963.
\item[10] BStU, MfS AP 11321/92, Band 1, \textit{Stasi} information report on Krummacher, 16 February 1962.
\item[11] Robert Goeckel, ‘Von der Mitzenheimpolitik bis zur Anerkennung des Kirchenbundes - Das
Kirchenpolitik im 'real existierenden Sozialismus' in der DDR} (Berlin: Evangelische Bildungswerk,
1993).
\item[12] BCC, BCC/DIA/1/8/10, report by Oestreicher in the \textit{Church Times} on the meeting of the second
Christian Peace Conference in Prague, 10 July 1964.
\item[13] Interview with Turner, February 1999.
\item[14] DDA, Williams’ sermon at the commissioning of the Dresden team in Coventry Cathedral, 14
March 1965.
\end{footnotes}
Goeckel, The Lutheran Church and the East German State, p.9. In 1946, 80.9 per cent of the GDR population claimed to be members of the Evangelische Kirche; 12.1 per cent were Roman Catholics; and 1 per cent belonged to minority faiths.

SAPMO-BArch, DO4 2526, draft StK report on the position of religion and the Church in the GDR, 10 August 1962.


The process of formalising the split between the two geographic wings of the EKD was a long drawn out affair. But the task was finally accomplished in 1969 when the Church in the GDR acknowledged reality and formed its own administrative body, the Bund der Evangelischen Kirchen.

SAPMO-BArch, DO4 2526, in his speech to the Volkskammer, Ulbricht said that ‘the co-operation that had been possible earlier between the government of the GDR and some so-called West German Church leaders has become impossible’ because of the Church’s attitude towards Nato, nuclear weapons and the military chaplaincy agreement, 4 October 1960.


For an account of Scharf’s exclusion from East Berlin, see Besier, Der SED-Staat und die Kirche, pp.423-430.

PRO, FO 371/169324 CG1781, British Foreign Office report on the synod of the Berlin-Brandenburg diocese, 18 February 1963. Despite the hostility of the GDR regime towards Scharf, he was deliberately drawn into the initial stages of the Coventry/Dresden project negotiations by the West German government with British approval. If the GDR had been looking for an excuse to veto the project, this would have been it.

SAPMO-BArch, NL 182/1098, report of a meeting between Abrassimov and Brickert, 15 January 1964.

Goeckel, 'Von der Mitzenheimpolitik bis zur Anerkennung des Kirchenbundes', in Staatliche Kirchenpolitik im 'real existierenden Sozialismus' in der DDR.

BStU, MfS HA XX/4 301, Stasi evaluation of the activities of the Church within the GDR, 15 January 1962.


Armin Boyens, 'Das Staatssekretariat für Kirchenfragen', in Die Kirchenpolitik von SED und Staatssicherheit, p.121.

BStU, MfS HA XX/4 301, Stasi evaluation of the activities of the Church within the GDR, 15 January 1962.

Almost the only Christian opposition to Hitler had come from the Confessional Church, founded by Niemöller and Barth in 1934. After the War, many German clerics claimed to have been connected to this movement.

Telephone interview with Seidowsky, 9 September 2001

Ibid.

Goeckel, 'Von der Mitzenheimpolitik bis zur Anerkennung des Kirchenbundes', in Staatliche Kirchenpolitik im 'real existierenden Sozialismus'.

Interview with Seidowsky, 4 July 2000.

Schroeder, Der SED-Staat, p.474.

Ibid.

Conway, 'Coming to Terms with the Past', in German History, Vol.16 No.3 1998, p.394.

PRO, FO 371/169324 CG1781/8, report on Church/state relations in the GDR, 10 August 1963.

Goeckel, 'Von der Mitzenheimpolitik bis zur Anerkennung des Kirchenbundes', in Staatliche Kirchenpolitik im 'real existierenden Sozialismus' in der DDR. Also see Fulbrook, Anatomy of a Dictatorship, p.98 and Walter Schilling, 'Die "Bearbeitung" der Landeskirche Thüringen durch das MfS', in Die Kirchenpolitik von SED und Staatssicherheit.

SAPMO-BArch, DO4 2658, transcript of a broadcast by Oestreicher on West German radio entitled Living with Atheists, 8 September 1965.

Interview with Martin Turner, February 1999.

Goeckel, 'Von der Mitzenheimpolitik bis zur Anerkennung des Kirchenbundes', in Staatliche Kirchenpolitik im 'real existierenden Sozialismus'.
Mary Fulbrook, 'Co-option and commitment: aspects of relations between church and state in the German Democratic Republic', in Social History (Great Britain) 1987 12 (1): 73-91.


BStU, MfS HA XX/4 357, draft script of a broadcast by Reinard Henkys following Seigewasser's death, 23 October 1979.

SAPMO-BArch, DO4 279, quoted in a Neues Deutschland report of a meeting between Wilm and Seigewasser at a reception in East Berlin, 15 March 1965. This meeting took place the day before Seigewasser's reception for the Coventry group on its arrival in East Berlin. Wilm had been one of the first people to back Kreyssig when he founded Aktion Sühnezeichen and his son, Klaus Wilm, was general secretary of the West Berlin branch of the organisation.

Interview with Turner, February 1999.

PRO, FO 371/169324 CG1781/8, report by Major-General D Peel Yates, General Officer Commanding (British Sector) Berlin, on Church/state relations in the GDR, 10 August 1963.

Armin Boyens, 'Das Staatssekretariat für Kirchenfragen', in Die Kirchenpolitik von SED und Staatssicherheit, p.120.

Interview with Turner, February 1999.

PRO, FO 371/169324 CG1781/8, report by Major-General D Peel Yates, General Officer Commanding (British Sector) Berlin, on Church/state relations in the GDR, 10 August 1963.


PRO, FO 371/169324 CG1781/8, report by Major-General D Peel Yates, General Officer Commanding (British Sector) Berlin, on Church/state relations in the GDR, 10 August 1963.

Interview with Oestreicher, 30 May 2000.

BCC, BCC/DIA/1/8/10, Oestreicher's address to the Cambridge Council of Churches, 9 November 1961. Also Oestreicher's account of his early life delivered to an audience at Coventry Cathedral on the occasion of his 70th birthday, 29 September 2001.

Oestreicher, My Cold War Life in No Man's Land, October 1999.

BCC, BCC/DIA/1/11/20, minutes of the meetings of EWRAC, 24 April 1964

Ibid.

Later, from 1974 to 1979, Oestreicher was chairman of Amnesty International UK. Interview with Oestreicher, 30 May 2000.

BCC, BCC/DIA/1/18/10, Oestreicher speech, undated, circa 1964/65.

Oestreicher, My Cold War Life in No Man's Land, October 1999.

Ibid.

Telephone interview with Oestreicher, 21 November 2000.

Ibid.

Interview with Oestreicher, 30 May 2000.

Oestreicher, My Cold War Life in No Man's Land, October 1999.

The British Council of Churches changed its name when the Roman Catholics became partners in 1990. From 1990 until 1999 it was called the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland. It is now called Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI).

In relation to his contact with the British diplomatic service, Oestreicher said that recently he had been asked if he was working for MI5 '...and the simple answer is I was never approached to work for any British intelligence agency. But British diplomats, British diplomatic representation, the British Foreign Office - I wanted to know what they thought about the situations I was dealing with in
Eastern Europe and they were interested in what my opinions were. I shared them freely. This was because it was my job as a British citizen...", interview with Oestreicher, 30 May 2000.

75 Martin Turner's private papers, Journey through a Wall, A Quaker Mission to a Divided Germany, report of The American Friends Service Committee, circa 1963.

76 Bishop John Robinson's book, Honest to God, created a huge stir when it was published in 1963 and is an example of the nature of the theological debate taking place at that time. In his book he reinterpreted what it meant to be a Christian in terms of the modern world, questioning the 'entire religious frame in which Christianity has hitherto been offered', (London: SCM, 1963).


78 Martin Turner's private papers, Political Impressions, unpublished personal record of his experiences in the GDR, circa 1966.


80 BCC, BCC/DIA/1/1/20, Turner's report to the EWRAC on the Coventry/Dresden project, 17 January 1966.
CHAPTER 5

GDR Church/state Relations 1963-1964: Bishop Noth and the Power of Silence

Introduction

The two years between 1963 and 1965 had the potential to be two of the most significant years in GDR history. They marked the point at which the country could have moved forward under a programme of liberalisation. Ulbricht certainly signalled his intention to do so when he announced his new economic programme and a number of social reforms at the 6th Party Congress in January 1963. By the end of 1965, however, the clock was being turned back and hard-line socialist principles were once again predominating.

Church/state relations during these two years reflected the changes that were taking place in other areas of policy within the GDR. The new liberal mood was evident in the relatively conciliatory attitude which the state and its officials adopted towards the Christian population. It was an attitude which in fact predated the relaxation in the economy and other areas, Ulbricht having made this significant policy U-turn in 1960. As Goeckel has put it:

"...the 1960s was notable for the ending of the frontal attack on the rights and privileges of the Church and an attempt to mobilise Christians in the movement to build up socialism on the basis of common humanistic goals."

What Ulbricht wanted to see in 1963 were some positive quantifiable results from his policy of promoting Christian/ Marxist co-operation. Reflecting the leadership's demands, reports drawn up by officials working in the area of Church/state relations throughout the period constantly stressed the progress that was being made in persuading ordinary Christian citizens to demonstrate their co-operation with the state. In common with officials everywhere, they did not want to be the bearers of bad tidings.
For, despite the optimism of the reports, 1963 was in reality a difficult year for Church/state relations. The Church as an institution demonstrated that it was not going to allow Ulbricht to woo its congregations without putting up a fight. The smooth process of winning Christian co-operation was disrupted by two major policy documents produced by the Church, both of which aimed to curtail the power of the state. The repercussions of these documents rumbled on throughout 1964 and into 1965, casting a blight over Ulbricht's policy of Christian/Marxist co-operation. During 1963 and 1964, Ulbricht and the bishops, above all the Bishop of Saxony, Gottfried Noth, were locked in a battle of words, each side fighting for the support of the vast Christian population who made up the majority of the citizens of the GDR.

Because Ulbricht's policy was aimed at individual Christians rather than the institution of the Church as such, its success depended to a large extent on the commitment and ability of those state officials in the different regions responsible for Church affairs, together with political colleagues. These were the people who had access to and contact with the ordinary Christian community. *Neues Deutschland* and other mouthpieces of the political parties, such as the CDU's *Neue Zeit*, did of course give their support to the concept of Christian/Marxist co-operation. But the main work had to be done at grass-roots level where Christians came into daily contact with their Marxist cousins.

The task confronting state officials at *Bezirk* level varied from region to region. Some areas were more compliant and easier to manage than others. The eight regional *Landeskirchen* or diocese had different characteristics and histories and their bishops were powerful and influential within their areas. So, for example, Thuringia was not regarded as a trouble spot because its bishop, Moritz Mitzenheim, was the most vocal of all the bishops in his support for the state. On the other hand, the regime faced continual problems in the diocese of Berlin-Brandenburg, mostly caused by virtue of its geographical position, straddling the Berlin Wall. The problems encountered here were of a nature peculiar to this capital city diocese.
Probably the most troublesome part of the country, in the terms typically used by the GDR regime to describe those which it regarded to be enemies of the state, was the diocese of Saxony, which included the cities of Dresden, Leipzig and Karl-Marx-Stadt. Saxony was, in the eyes of the regime, a hotbed of pro-Western reactionary clerics. As this chapter will show, the Bishop of Saxony and his colleagues were at the forefront of opposition to the regime. Noth's role as an opposition leader has attracted little attention from historians of GDR Church/state relations, his period in office perhaps being overshadowed by the exploits of his neighbour Mitzenheim in Thuringia and by events in Berlin-Brandenburg which were acted out on a world stage. For example, in a volume which covers different aspects of Church/state relations in the GDR, as well as the Third Reich, there are references to Noth in a chapter by Besier, but only with respect to his relationship with Mitzenheim, the main subject of discussion. There is only one mention of Noth in the Vollnhals volume on Kirchenpolitik and the Stasi, in which reference is made to the fact that Saxon influence was limited by its ecclesiastical history.

Indeed, throughout the life of the GDR, Saxony remained something of a backwater in international terms, cut off from Western television by virtue of its geography. Goeckel has, however, briefly noted the leading role played by the 'conservative bishop Gottfried Noth' and the diocese of Saxony in the Church's opposition to the GDR regime, listing a number of areas in which Noth opposed the regime. These included standing firm on the incompatibility of confirmation and the Jugendweihe, and opposing education reforms which placed the emphasis on socialist at the expense of religious instruction. In addition, the greatest number of conscientious objectors to military conscription came from Saxony. As a result, Dresden became a target of the regime's measures aimed at overcoming opposition from the Church, a fact which has been noted by Hartweg.

Martin Turner, the leader of the Coventry group, who was in the unusual position of being able to observe GDR Church/state relations at first hand during the 1960s, wrote at the time:

"The situation between the church and the State and Communists varied between the different parts of Germany and also varied in different times in different years. The Landeskirchen Saxony [sic] was praised in a West German newspaper for being a bulwark
against the Communists, and perhaps the forces of reaction were stronger in the Landeskirchen Saxony than in other Landeskirchen. Certainly the neighbouring Thuringia followed a very different line, the Bishop of the Thuringia has had the principle, for a very long time, of working with the government, and doing whatever he could with them.\textsuperscript{77}

Despite the fact that within the institution of the Church as a whole, Saxony may not have been regarded as a dominant area, the situation there would have appeared disturbing from Ulbricht's point of view because Saxony also happened to be the largest diocese in the country, in numerical terms. Figures for the end of the 1960s show that the diocese of Saxony had 3,000,000 parishioners compared with 1,900,000 in Berlin-Brandenburg and 1,200,000 in Thuringia.\textsuperscript{8} The next largest diocese was the Church Province of Saxony with 2,100,000, another difficult area.\textsuperscript{9} Based on population alone, therefore, it was vital that Ulbricht should succeed in detaching the Saxon flock from its bishop and herding it into the socialist fold. If this goal could be achieved, a stronghold of opposition to the regime would be removed.\textsuperscript{10}

In 1963, the main political department in charge of Church policy, the \textit{Arbeitsgruppe Kirchenfragen}, drafted a document for further discussion on future direction. The report began, as was common practice, in a self-congratulatory manner. There had been two major positive developments in Church policy over recent months, it said.\textsuperscript{11} Firstly, the success of the regime's attempts to gain the public support of Christians for the GDR's peace policy could be seen in the diocese of Thuringia and also in Berlin-Brandenburg where a recent synod had passed a resolution recognising the existence of the state boundary in Berlin. Secondly, greater co-operation between Christians and non-Christians had been achieved, in accordance with the principles outlined at the 6th Party Congress in January of that year. According to the report, there had been a growth in understanding in GDR Church circles for the GDR's policy towards the West German Church. A further sign of a growing relationship of trust had been evidenced by the 70th birthday congratulations offered to Ulbricht by Mitzenheim and other Church leaders.

These 'positive' signs, however, took up a mere single page of a nine-page report. They have the appearance of clutching at straws when set beside the two truly major developments in Church/state relations in the first half of 1963, both of which demonstrated
the determination of the GDR Church leadership not to allow the regime to recruit Christians to the socialist cause. In March 1963, the Church produced two documents. One, the *Zehn Artikel*, was an attempt by GDR Church leaders to provide guidance to its parishioners on the manner in which they should live in a socialist society. The other was a resolution passed in the diocese of Saxony advising Christians against making statements on political matters. The hand of the Bishop of Saxony could be seen in both these so-called reactionary developments.

**The Church in Saxony**

When the Provost of Coventry Cathedral had his first meeting with Secretary of State Seigewasser in January 1964, he was informed, according to the Provost, that no contact would be allowed with the Bishop of Saxony since Noth was regarded as *persona non grata* by the regime. This was no exaggeration. Noth was one of, if not the main obstacle standing in the way of Ulbricht's desire for some form of accommodation with GDR Christians. If Ulbricht's policy of Christian/Marxist dialogue were to succeed, the problem of Noth would have to be resolved.

Gottfried Noth was an influential man, both at home and abroad. Born in Dresden in 1905, he was ordained in 1930 and during the Third Reich he worked in Saxony, becoming priest at the Trinitatiskirche in Dresden in 1942. In 1945, he was appointed *Oberlandeskirchenrat* for the diocese of Saxony and was elected as bishop in 1953. In 1962, Noth became deputy chairman of the *Konferenz der Evangelischen Bischöfe in der DDR* (Conference of Protestant Bishops in the GDR) which, in effect, made him the second most important bishop in East Germany after Bishop Krummacher, despite the regime's attempts to portray the pliant Bishop Mitzenheim as the senior cleric. Noth was extremely active in ecumenical affairs gaining an international reputation. He was a member of the central committee of the Ecumenical Church Council, attended conferences abroad and in 1957 received an honorary doctorate from the American Capitol University in Ohio. He died in 1971.
Noth's opposition to the regime was long-standing. He opposed the *Gemeinsame Erklärung* between Church and state in 1958 and was described then by the *Stasi* as being 'at the head of the most reactionary group in the GDR'. In 1963, information was passed on to Seigewasser to the effect that Noth was one of the leading opponents of the regime's proposed new Youth Law. However, it is apparent from a character report drawn up by the SfK in 1966 that Noth was a slippery customer whom the regime found difficult to corner. He was a clever and subtle opponent with the ability to match the political wordplay of the regime. The report said that although he often sided with the enemies of socialism, he sometimes advised against being too aggressive. This was purely for tactical purposes.

"Through this behaviour he gives the impression - and this seems to be his intent - that he is politically a waverer and there is a lack of clarity or certainty about his Church leadership. This can be seen, for example in the way he says he supports the peace policy of the GDR but at the same time stresses his refusal to allow the Church to be used in the service of a political goal. He is clever enough to know that in this way he keeps committed Christians away from working together in a positive political and economic manner. He is also clever enough to know that this damages our socialist state and can, therefore, be used by Bonn and the other imperialist powers. His political comments are almost always put so that one cannot tell whether he is talking about the hypocritical peace slogans of the West German government, the USA, Nato etc., or the genuine peace policy of the GDR, the USSR and the whole socialist world...He is no political waverer or undecided Church leader, as might appear from a fleeting observation. He is an enemy of socialist society."

This view of Noth as a clever and determined man who liked to give the opposite impression has been supported by the former *Oberbürgermeister* of Dresden, Gerhard Schill. The paths of Schill and Noth often crossed during the years in which they held office. Noth was a 'hard man', Schill remembered, unlike his successor Johannes Hempel.

Noth's most significant contribution to the Church's opposition to the policy of harnessing Christians to the cause of socialism came in 1963 with the drawing up of a resolution which expressly instructed Christians against making political statements in support of the regime. The need to pass such a resolution had arisen because it had become a major tenet of the regime's policy to inveigle not only Church leaders but also individual Christians to speak out in support of GDR policy. In a precursor to the drawing up of the resolution, the previous year Noth had been pressed to take a position on a proposed peace treaty with the Soviet Union. He had made his own position clear when he had informed *Bezirk* Party authorities in Saxony that it was not within his remit to take an official position
on political matters. He could only speak on matters for which he had been given the responsibility by God.¹⁸

This stance was echoed in the resolution which became known as the Schweigebeschluss (Order for Silence). It instructed both clergy and laity of the diocese of Saxony to remain silent on political matters and was regarded by the regime as an overt act of subversion. The Order was circulated not only within the Church administration but also among the congregations, local clergymen being asked to read it from their pulpits.¹⁹ It is evident from this instruction that Noth wanted to reach as many people as possible and that the Order was a deliberate and conscious attempt to dilute the pressure that the regime was placing on people as individuals to demonstrate their support for the GDR. The fundamental principle of the Order (in keeping with the philosophy of the Confessing Church, as people were reminded) was summed up in the words 'Kirche muss Kirche bleiben' (the Church must remain a Church). It said, inter alia, that the Church was not authorised by God to take up a position on specific proposals, programmes and events in the political arena and must refrain from doing so. The Church must withstand attempts to involve it in things on which it did not have God's authority to comment. It was happy to hold discussions with the state authorities; that was a duty imposed by God, but it could not be enlisted by the Party and other organisations of society. The Church must not be forced to make comments on areas outside its responsibility, even if the silence was misinterpreted or decried as hostility.

"...Above all, freedom of conscience and belief means that one cannot be forced to speak if, because of inner principles, one does not want to speak. That is why we urge all members of our congregations: Stand up as Christians for your freedom of belief and conscience which is ensured in the constitution, if somebody disputes your right to do so! It is God's Will that the preaching of his law and mercy is also passed on by us in the midst of a socialist order."²⁰

The Order was approved by the Saxon synod on 27 March 1963. The regime saw it as an assault on the whole concept of Christian/Marxist dialogue. An SfK report described the Order as a 'serious attack' on the 'perceptions' of GDR citizens, an attempt to persuade people against taking a positive view of the programmes and proposals put forward by state institutions, the National Front and the mass organisations. In addition, it was alleged that it encouraged people to withdraw from active participation in the social life of their community, regional districts and the country as a whole.²¹ The SfK report went on to
describe the Order as 'an attack on citizens' freedom of conscience and worship, as well as being directly connected to an attack on other crucial fundamental rights'. In inflammatory tones, the writer of the report concluded that the Order was:

"...a call to say nothing on Nato's policy of preparing for war and the division of the nation by those in power in Bonn. The demand to remain silent about barbarity and inhumanity is in direct contradiction to the basic clauses of the constitution, which has always stood up for the rights and freedom of mankind, for public justice, social progress, and peace and friendship with all people. The Landessynode expects its Church members to be implicated once again in the cruel barbarity, inhumanity and lawlessness, devastation and mass death of German fascism... With this order the synod will disregard the will of thousands of Christians, members of Church community councils, priests and so on who, through their work, make a valuable contribution to the building of socialism and, because of a deep Christian belief, support the humanistic policies of the GDR."

The nub of the conflict between the regime and the Church institutions is contained in the final words of this condemnation of the Order for Silence. Both sides were fighting for the hearts and minds of the average Christian citizen. Ulbricht wanted public support for the humanistic goals of socialism. The Church in Saxony, through its Order for Silence, was determined to stop its flock from being used as socialist fodder.

The controversy did not go unremarked in Britain. Paul Holmer, the Foreign Office representative in West Berlin, reported that the Order demanded that 'clergymen and churchgoers should refrain from getting involved in political statements or from permitting themselves to be used for propaganda purposes'. London was told that critics of the Order were expressing the view that 'church leaders could not take it upon themselves to silence Christian ideology by commanding people to remain silent'. It was also being pointed out that the issuing of the resolution was a consciously political decision on the part of Noth and his colleagues. Noth, said Holmer, 'has repeatedly shown great reserve towards the regime and towards the East German CDU in particular, and has, on past occasions, demonstratively kept aloof from propaganda'.

Around the time this report was written, the Provost of Coventry Cathedral received a letter from Scharf's office in Berlin informing him that unfortunately it would not be possible for the Provost to visit Dresden and be received by Noth at that time because
...there have been certain tensions between Church and State in the district of Dresden lately.\textsuperscript{25}

"He [Noth] would like to invite you to Dresden, but unfortunately at present that would inevitably lead to a situation which would embarrass you as well as the bishop and his staff; for the communist authorities would try to make use of your visit, mention it in their papers etc. ... At the moment Bishop Noth would have to refuse to attend a reception given by the political authorities. The authorities however would only [sic] grant you a visa under the condition that a reception would be given in honour of your visit. It is a most peculiar world in which we live.\textsuperscript{26}

The description of the situation in Dresden as given to Williams was couched in mild terms, in relation to the events taking place on the ground. The regime had, in fact, mounted a concerted campaign against Noth and the Order for Silence, drawing on support from Christians in political parties and other organisations, particularly the CDU.

Some of the immediate counter measures were described in a document drawn up by the \textit{Kirchenfragen} department in Dresden.\textsuperscript{27} These included mounting a public protest with the help of members of the \textit{Bezirk} executive of the CDU, and publishing critical articles in various newspapers. Pressure was also to be put on individual synod members through the National Front and other state organisations, particularly those members who also happened to be employed by the state. Here teachers were named. However, the major effort was reserved for the organisation of a massive petition against the Order to be signed by ordinary Christians. Significantly, the first paragraph of the six-paragraph document sent to the collectors of signatures attacked the Order because 'it would make co-operation between Christians and Marxists impossible'.\textsuperscript{28} It concluded by saying that it was necessary to make the diocese aware that its 'hostile attitude to the state' was not supported by the majority of Christian people.

This petition, although organised at local level, was directed by the central political Church affairs department, the \textit{Arbeitsgruppe Kirchenfragen} under Willi Barth. In a report on the subject he detailed how the petition had been organised by the executive of the CDU in Dresden, Leipzig and Karl-Marx-Stadt with the support of the \textit{Bezirk} and \textit{Kreis} committees of the National Front.\textsuperscript{29} The petition demanded the withdrawal of the Order for Silence and stressed the common ground between Christians and non-Christians in the
struggle to preserve peace and in bringing about the extensive construction of socialism. A total of 97,200 signatures were collected. In September, it was handed over to representatives of the diocese of Saxony by a ten-person delegation led by Ursula Friedrich, a CDU member of the Volkskammer. It was, according to Barth, not well received. Firstly, the Church representatives asked that there should be no press publicity, a request which was refused. Secondly, one Church representative spent three-quarters of an hour inveighing in an arrogant manner against the methods used to collect the signatures. He claimed that the Order had been misunderstood but was curtly informed by Friedrich that the delegation was being treated like 'stupid children'. The remarkable thing about this discussion, Barth reported, was that the Church leaders were put on the defensive.

The Saxon Church leadership, meanwhile, had circulated its own document, putting forward its version of the situation. According to the reports it had received, people had been asked to sign the petition without being shown the declaration to which they were putting their name and, in addition, in many cases they were told that the petition was being organised by the Church and was 'for peace'. According to information received by the Church, the signature collectors, acting under the instructions of the Party, their workplace or state organisations, were required to obtain a minimum number of signatures from every congregation, factory or workplace. A further criticism was that for the past few months the Order had been attacked in the press, but the Order itself was never reproduced so that people were unable to assess for themselves whether the attacks were valid or not. The accusation that the Order made Christian/ Marxist co-operation impossible was singled out as deliberate 'misrepresentation' of the Order.

Although the Church claimed that the popular outcry against the Order for Silence had been orchestrated by the CDU on behalf of the regime, there does appear to have been genuine disquiet about its contents among some members of the Christian community. The British Foreign Office representative, Holmer, reported that criticisms had been made along the line that 'church leaders could not take it upon themselves to silence Christian ideology by commanding people to remain silent'. He noted that one press report had suggested that the synod was not wholly unconscious of the inconsistency of its silence, reporting that 'it
may, of course, have been a mere coincidence that when members of the Synod attended evening service after passing the Declaration [Order for Silence], the subject of the sermon was: "Be not afraid, but speak and do not hold thy peace".

In the event, public pressure, whether orchestrated or not, did force the Church to reconsider the Order when the synod reconvened in November. An Arbeitsgruppe Kirchenfragen report noted that:

"...Noth attempted to justify the...Order for Silence. However, he did not use an aggressive tone. Without doubt that is a result of the collection of 97,200 signatures on a protest petition against this Order...Bishop Noth as well as the majority of those who spoke in the discussion were forced to fall in with the protest... In a new resolution, the Order for Silence was not repealed but noticeably weakened. Above all an attempt was made to show that the matter had been misinterpreted by the forces of society."

There can be little doubt that the Order for Silence and its repercussions had a deep and lasting impact on the Church in Saxony and the manner in which it conducted itself. The attempt to prevent the Christian population being used for the political purposes of the state appears to have backfired, with the regime demonstrating its ability, in this instance, to muster its forces when required. From the state's point of view, the petition was an overwhelming success. But the defeat continued to rankle in Church circles long after the hue and cry had died away, as demonstrated by the contents of a letter written to the Provost of Coventry Cathedral from Dresden more than two years later. In the letter, a cathedral employee who was visiting Dresden wrote:

"...I was told by a parson how the CDU made itself felt recently. A decision made at a synod stated that a Christian should have the right to keep silent in certain circumstances when he feels it is dangerous to speak, but to speak when he feels it is right. Signatures have been handed in to revise this decision. It became known that works foremen were asked to collect a certain number of signatures. This was done regardlessly [sic] whether the people belonged to the church or not. Even children's signatures were among them. The church refused the recognition. The whole action was taken by the CDU."

The regime determined that there were some useful lessons to be learnt from the events surrounding the Order for Silence. Representatives of the StK, the Arbeitsgruppe Kirchenfragen and the Party and Kirchenfragen offices in Dresden, Leipzig and Karl-Marx-Stadt met in Berlin at the end of 1963 in order to analyse events. The most important lesson to be learnt, it was concluded, was the importance of exerting pressure on the Church hierarchy by working from below rather than by attempting to influence those at the top.
The effectiveness of these sorts of tactics had been demonstrated by the success of the petition against the Order for Silence. Hans Weise, of the SfK, remarked:

"Dresden has shown how fearful the Church is of a mass movement. Now it is necessary to strengthen the CDU, not least through the activation of other Block parties on behalf of our Church policy, for example inside the Church congregation councils themselves. Work from inside and particularly watch out that the Church does not break out of its sphere."^36

Two months later, the Secretary of State for Church Affairs had his first meeting with the Provost of Coventry Cathedral to discuss the proposed Coventry/Dresden project of reconciliation. Although Seigewasser was probably not privy to the tactical planning which would appear to have been taking place behind the scenes, it would have been apparent to those whose job it was to analyse events that the affair of the Order for Silence had drawn attention to two significant factors in relation to Ulbricht's desire for Christian/Marxist dialogue: firstly, the need to bring pressure to bear on Noth; and secondly the vulnerability of the Church to a mass movement in the ranks. In August 1963, Breitmann, the head of the Kirchenfragen department in Dresden, had spoken of the need to gain the support of people for the regime's policy against the diocesan hierarchy. It would, he said, be 'tough work'.^37

The battlefield for Ulbricht's Christian/Marxist dialogue offensive would be Dresden, the centre of opposition and the largest diocese in the country. The Coventry/Dresden project, cleverly used, appears to have been an ideal vehicle with which to tackle the two tasks ahead; curtailing Noth and recruiting his congregations to the concept of Christian/Marxist co-operation.

**The Ten Articles and the Wartburg-Gespräch**

The diocese of Saxony was the only area to confront the regime in this manner. However, the Order for Silence was not an isolated event. It followed closely on the heels of a lengthy document which was agreed by the Konferenz der Evangelischen Bischöfe in der DDR, after much internal discussion, on 8 March 1963. This document, which became known as the Zehn Artikel, was drawn up by the Church in recognition of the fact that their congregations were being put under considerable pressure by the regime to openly support socialism and that many Christians felt that they were faced with the dilemma of whether they should obey their government or their Church. The Zehn Artikel and the Order for
Silence both sought to address this problem, the Order for Silence being a more extreme and overt example of opposition to political pressures.

The two leading advocates of the Zehn Artikel were Krummacher, the Bishop of Greifswald and chairman of the Konferenz der Evangelischen Bischofe in der DDR, and his colleague Noth. The guidelines covered subjects such as faith and obedience, justification and justice, reconciliation and peace, authority, and the Church's life and duty. Although muted in tone, the articles touched on subjects of great political sensitivity. For example, the section on justice advised that it was a Christian duty to protest against 'the misuse or destruction of justice for political or economic ends'. The article on faith and obedience stated:

"...We act in disobedience if in our Church services we acknowledge God to be the Lord of our life while in our daily lives we submit to the absolutist claims of an ideology and retract from the all-embracing validity of God's first commandment. We act in disobedience if we let ourselves be bound by an ethic determined by an atheistic ideology in which the object of education and training is to produce man without God. We confuse consciences if we fail to refute the assertion that God's commandments and the ten commandments of socialist morality serve the same humanistic aims."

Once again, this last sentence was a direct contradiction of Ulbricht's assertion that Christians and Marxists did indeed share common humanistic aims. In this respect, the Ten Articles were, like the Order for Silence, an open challenge to the GDR's policy towards its Christian population.

However, opinion on the significance of the Ten Articles has differed over the years with some commentators seeing them as a major attack on GDR policy and others taking the view that, in the circumstances, they were remarkably tame. Besier has described the manner in which they were published in West German newspapers where attempts were made to present them as an attack on the GDR. But the British Foreign Office reported 'suggestions' that the guidelines had been 'deliberately leaked' to the West by the pro-regime GDR CDU in order to discredit them as having been produced 'in collaboration with West German "NATO clerics"'. Krummacher claimed that he had been opposed to their publication since they were intended for internal guidance only. He argued that the guidelines were a theological rather than political matter. Besier has described them as 'an
enormous provocation' to the SED.43 Within them, he wrote, can be heard a Church 'in
distress', torn by the desire not to give up its independence but at the same time not wanting
to put out a call for the Church to take up arms against the state. The British Foreign Office,
on the other hand, took a less jaundiced view of the significance of the Ten Articles, seeing
in them an attempt by the Church to define the area in which it could co-operate with the
state. It reported that the guidelines could

"...hardly be represented as an intentionally provocative gesture of defiance to the East
German regime. The tone throughout is moderate, calm and reasonable... Its aim is not to
urge resistance to the DDR authorities but to define the areas within which cooperation is
possible and distinguish them from those where no compromise can be tolerated."44

The SfK denounced them as a 'clear attempt to counter the message put out at the 6th
Party Congress for the comprehensive building up of socialism'.45 They were a '...general
attack on socialist justice, socialist ideology, the development of the consciousness of the
people, and the problems of socialist leadership, as well as the questions of socialist morality
and ethics'.46 Nevertheless, the regime chose not to provoke a head-on confrontation with the
Church over the Ten Articles. The SfK issued instructions that a report on the Ten Articles
should be sent to all Bezirk councils but that no action should be taken, the situation varying
from one diocese to another.47 The tactic to be used was to encourage compliant theologians
and Christian organisations to attack the guidelines on behalf of the regime.

The British Foreign Office analysis of the situation noted that it was remarkable that
the SED had not reacted openly and officially to the publication of the Ten Articles and later
to the Order for Silence, but concluded that the regime evidently 'considered it more prudent
to leave it to their "Christian" collaborators to make the running'.48 The tenor of the debate,
according to the Foreign Office report, was 'conciliatory', since the regime was 'anxious to
avoid an open conflict with the Churches'. The attacks on the Ten Articles and the Order for
Silence

"...based themselves not so much on theological grounds as on the assertion that there
already exists widespread practical cooperation between Christians and non-Christians in the
DDR. The conclusion is drawn that since so many East German Christians are playing a full
part in the construction of socialism...there can be no fundamental contradiction between the
aims of 'socialism' and Christianity: indeed the new 'peace-loving society' being created in
the DDR should afford increased scope for the exercise of Christian virtues."49
The controversy over the Ten Articles demonstrates Ulbricht's determination to stand firm on the policy he had adopted of promoting Christian/Marxist co-operation. He evidently believed, as did British GDR watchers, that progress had been made in the three years since he announced his belief in the shared humanistic aims of Christians and Marxists and he was not prepared to have this policy derailed by being provoked into outright attacks on Church leaders. He knew, however, that GDR Church leaders themselves, particularly the two most senior bishops, Krummacher and Noth, were not prepared to stand by and do nothing in the battle for the hearts and minds of Christians. However, both Krummacher and Noth were aware that they were involved in a battle of tactics, that victory would go to whoever played their hand most cleverly. A *Stasi* report on a private meeting between Krummacher and his colleagues around the time of the publication of the Ten Articles revealed that Krummacher was advocating an 'elastic' attitude towards the regime. In an earlier meeting he had confided privately that he was going to 'appear' to be more progressive. Evidently, Krummacher was vying with Ulbricht as a tactician.

It had proved to be a difficult 12 months for GDR Church/state relations during 1963. Both sides had had to tread warily in order to prevent provoking an open confrontation. In May 1964, a report noted that the regime's policy towards the *Evangelische Kirche* had produced mixed results. There had been moves in the right direction in relation to matters such as the GDR's peace policy and the campaign against nuclear weapons. But there had been major problems, particularly the Ten Articles and the show of opposition in Saxony. Ulbricht would have been anxious to see more signs that his conciliatory policy was reaping rewards. He was able to claim such a sign in the middle of the following year when Mitzenheim publicly stated his support for Christian/Marxist co-operation. This statement was the product of a meeting with Ulbricht in August 1964. The discussion became known as the *Wartburg-Gespräch*. Besier has drawn attention to this meeting citing it as a highpoint of Ulbricht's Church policy and Goeckel has also described the *Wartburg-Gespräch* as a most significant development for Ulbricht. It is true that the regime chose to lay great store on the *Wartburg-Gespräch*, frequently referring to it in official documents as probably the most important development of Ulbricht's policy of Christian/Marxist co-operation. But an evaluation of the meeting written at the time by Barth and sent to
Ulbricht adopted a more realistic tone, noting that some clergy had commented that 'once again' it was Mitzenheim who was the regime's discussion partner. Although the discussion was said to have 'opened wide the door', some Church leaders felt that it would have been given more weight if the meeting had been with another Church leader, such as Günter Jacob from the Berlin-Brandenburg bishop's office. Krummacher also said that he would have liked to have been involved. In Dresden, it was noted that Noth had signally failed to mention the Wartburg-Gespräch at all in his recent epistle to his clergy. On the other hand, a number of clergymen from the Saxon diocese attended a CDU conference which gave support to the Wartburg-Gespräch. The true impact of the Mitzenheim/Ulbricht meeting was probably not as great as it may have seemed, in view of the fact that Mitzenheim had lost his credibility with a large section of the Christian community. According to Turner, in 1965 Mitzenheim was 'very isolated' and was regarded as a 'traitor to the church' and a 'fellow traveller'.

Suspicions that Mitzenheim was merely Ulbricht's mouthpiece were possibly more accurate than his detractors guessed, judging from an account of the regime's manipulation of the bishop shortly after the Wartburg-Gespräch. In two letters to Ulbricht, Barth detailed how Mitzenheim, through Seigewasser, had been instructed on the precise contents of a letter he had been requested to send to the West German military bishop, Hermann Kunst. Seigewasser in turn had received his instructions from Barth. Barth had been instructed by Ulbricht. 'Yesterday, I informed Comrade Seigewasser of your instructions for this letter of reply [from Mitzenheim to Kunst],' wrote Barth. A few weeks later he sent Ulbricht a copy of the reply, which Mitzenheim had himself handed to Seigewasser. In the letter, Mitzenheim, as instructed, requested West German Church leaders to speak out against nuclear rearmament. The incident is significant, not only because it provides clear evidence that Mitzenheim was a total puppet of the regime, but because it also demonstrates the clear line of command from Ulbricht downwards on matters of Church policy. On the basis of the manner in which the Kunst letter was dictated to Mitzenheim, it is reasonable to assume that his Wartburg-Gespräch statement originally emanated from the same author. This being so, it is hardly surprising that the regime chose, in current parlance, to talk it up.
Regardless of Mitzenheim's willingness to do as he was bid, Ulbricht in reality was making little headway with the bishop's troublesome next-door neighbour, Noth, a man who was of far greater stature both at home and abroad. It would have been evident to Ulbricht that other measures would be needed to bring Noth into line. The proposal that a British group should be sent to Dresden to carry out an act of reconciliation, under the organisation of men such as Williams, Oestreicher and Turner who strongly believed in the concept of Christian/Marxist dialogue, played directly into Ulbricht's hands. If anyone were able to convince Noth of the need to mute his opposition, it would be the Christians from the West. The fact that Williams was being used for this purpose was raised at a meeting in July 1964 between Kreyssig and SfK staff when Kreyssig reported that the Stasi agent Seidowsky had told him of the intention that Williams should act 'as a mediator between the Church leadership and the Dresden Bezirk council in order to establish better political relations'. In addition, in April 1964, Kreyssig had told Seidowsky, that he himself was prepared to use his influence to bring Noth into line. By November 1964, relations between Noth and state authorities had progressed to a point at which it was possible for the two sides to hold discussions. Seigewasser travelled to Dresden and had a meeting with Noth, a number of his colleagues and some regional officials. Seigewasser reported that he was still not satisfied with Noth's willingness to support the regime. But the fact that the meeting had taken place demonstrates that progress had been made. During the course of the following year, it became apparent that Noth was no longer persona non grata. He was officially spoken of as a central figure in the organisation of the project. Wilke, of the SfK, reported in February 1965 that he had informed Schill that the negotiating partner in the project was Noth's representative and not Aktion Sühnezeichen, as had originally been the case. Henceforth, matters must be dealt with without the involvement of Aktion Sühnezeichen. In November 1965, the Provost of Coventry Cathedral told Walter Pabst, the Oberkirchenrat in charge of GDR ecumenical affairs, that he was grateful for the help of Aktion Sühnezeichen in organising the project but 'the real partner in the project was the diocese of Saxony' and that he would be in touch with Noth about the continuation of work in Dresden. Williams' optimism proved to be ill-founded as, towards the end of 1965, the political climate in the GDR reverted back to a more orthodox form of communism and the Coventry/Dresden project became a victim of that change. Noth continued to cause difficulties in Saxony but
his effectiveness had been blunted. The leaders of the Coventry/Dresden project had succeeded in their mission to a certain extent. It would have been clear to Noth that he could not look to the West for support.

**Conclusion**

It is evident from an analysis of events relating to Church policy in the GDR during 1963 and 1964 that the overwhelming priority was to win the support of ordinary Christians. It is equally evident that this policy did not go unopposed by some Church leaders, in particular the Bishop of Saxony. It was necessary for Ulbricht to obtain some sort of leverage by which he could rein in the recalcitrant cleric while at the same time strengthening what support there was for the regime's policies among the Christians of Saxony. Overt oppressive measures against Noth would have risked widening the gulf between the regime and its Christian citizens. A less blunt instrument was necessary. The Coventry/Dresden project presented Ulbricht with just such an instrument.

It was a few weeks after the controversy over the Order for Silence had broken that the first tentative steps were taken in Britain towards what was to become the Coventry/Dresden project of reconciliation. Archival evidence demonstrates that the news was known in the GDR by May 1963, as the result of a letter written by the historian David Irving to a contact in Dresden. It is possible that it may have been known before that, if the British MP, Richard Crossman, the driving force behind the project in its early months, had been in contact with any of his GDR friends. Since it appears that Barth kept Ulbricht well informed about Church matters, it is reasonable to suppose that he would have been informed about such a plan, with its major implications in the areas of both foreign and Church affairs.

The manner in which the negotiations for the Coventry/Dresden project were carried out in both Britain and the GDR is addressed in detail in other chapters. Suffice it to say that although initial reaction towards it was hostile in both Britain and the GDR, these attitudes changed fairly quickly. Why this should have been so is, in some cases, a matter of assumption and in others of documentary evidence. Neither the thought processes of
Ulbricht nor the British Foreign Office have been spelled out for public consumption. However, the evidence in existence points to the fact that in the eyes of the GDR the beneficial purpose of allowing Williams and Kreyssig to proceed with their organisation of the project was to use them as a means of bringing pressure to bear on Noth in an attempt to normalise relations between Church and state in Saxony. In this they were successful, at least in the short term. This is the aim which was acknowledged by Kreyssig in discussions with both the SfK and with Seidowsky. It was the aim which, according to Wilke, had been achieved by early 1965. It is an example of the manner in which Anglo/GDR bilateral relations strayed into the area of GDR Church/state relations, with Noth being forced to temper his opposition to the Ulbricht regime and its attempt to harness Christians to the socialist cause, not through the strictures of the regime itself but through the efforts of those whom Noth might have considered to be his allies. In this non-military conflict, it was akin to being shot down by friendly fire.

In addition, the man chosen to be the leader of the group of volunteers, Martin Turner, was a known advocate of co-operation between Christians and Marxists. He was encouraged to travel the length and breadth of the GDR preaching the gospel of Christian/Marxist dialogue. Commenting shortly after returning from the GDR, Turner wrote:

"... the gap between the Christians and Communists was very large, and needs crossing. I believe it needs to be crossed from the Christians side because the Holy Spirit gives us the internal freedom to meet the other person where he is... Also the propaganda picture from the West: Communist equals atheist, equals militant against God, equals you can have no truck with them; tended to make some people feel that it was their Christian duty to be firm and vigilant against the Communists."

Turner concluded that he and the British group had been sent to Dresden by God with the purpose, not only of removing physical rubble but also the 'rubble in men's hearts... the suspicion and distrust which poison the relation between Christian and Communist. One of the other volunteers wrote on his return to Britain about the manner in which Turner had travelled around the GDR preaching dialogue.

"An important visit that was started by Martin Turner... was that of giving Coventry lectures. This was a lecture about Coventry Cathedral and its ministry with the aid of slides. It began as a local activity but as it became known through contacts that we had made, church newspapers, or members of the group returning to the parishes and telling about it, requests
for the lecture became more numerous and very wide spread until it got to the stage where Martin Turner was driving something like 800 miles a week giving the lecture. Perhaps it would be an afternoon lecture in Dresden and then an evening one in Karl Marx Stadt 80 miles away.69

By delivering this message of co-operation between Christians and Marxists, the main participants in the Coventry/Dresden project were unconsciously dancing to Ulbricht's tune.

The degree to which the Coventry/Dresden project assisted in the success or failure of Ulbricht's Church policy at that time is difficult to calculate, coinciding as it did with the beginning of the end of Ulbricht's rule. Other influences entered the equation around the middle of the 1960s, particularly the rise of the new Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, and the ensuing increase in the power of Honecker, which effectively brought Ulbricht's liberal policies, including his advocacy of Christian/Marxist dialogue, to a close. In historical terms, the Church moved on to a new phase which has been labelled *Kirche im Sozialismus*, a halfway house between the Church against socialism and the Church in support of socialism.70 Recently, John Conway has raised many questions as to why the Church in the GDR failed to oppose the regime by denouncing its 'flagrant misuse of political power and the horrendous disregard of human rights', or why it failed to stand up for freedom.71 This analysis of Church/state relations in the brief time span between 1963 and the beginning of 1965 demonstrates that the transition from Church as opposition in the 1950s to the Church as reluctant cohabiter by the 1970s was not as smooth or united a process as some commentators have suggested. It may not fully answer Conway's questions but it does raise another - that being the extent to which the move by the East German Church towards compromise with the regime was the result of its manipulation by the unlikely allies represented in the Coventry/Dresden project.

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1 Goeckel, 'Von der Mitzenheimerpolitik bis zur Anerkennung des Kirchenbundes', in *Staatliche Kirchenpolitik im 'real existierenden Sozialismus' in der DDR*.
3 Kurt Nowak, 'Zum historischen Ort der Kirchen in der DDR', in *Die Kirchenpolitik von SED und Staatssicherheit*, p.12.
4 Dresden was given the nickname *Tal der Ahnungslosen*. 
Goeckel, "Von der Mitzenheimpolitik bis zur Anerkennung des Kirchenbundes", in *Staatliche Kirchenpolitik im 'real existierenden Sozialismus' in der DDR*.

Hartweg, *SED und Kirche*, pp. 405 and 411. An SED report on the Church situation in 1962 noted that the diocesan leaders in Dresden were 'led by reactionary forces'. Measures to be taken against the Church included neutralising the attitude of Noth and others, who were to be 'systematically influenced in a positive manner'. SAPMO-BArch, ZPA IV 2/14/9, report reproduced by Hartweg.


Magdeburg, the seat of the Church leadership, was the city where Kreyssig, the head of *Aktion Sühnezeichen*, was an active member of the Church administration. He was Präs des of the synod and head of the Evangelische Akademie. The regime considered Kreyssig to be a reactionary enemy of the state.

It should be noted that the boundaries of the administrative areas of the Church, the diocese or Landeskirchen, did not conform to political administrative boundaries. In addition, the diocese of Saxony was a separate entity from the diocese of the Church Province of Saxony. For maps of the Church and political administrative boundaries of the GDR, see Besier, *Der SED-Staat und die Kirche*.


CCA, Williams' report of his meeting with Seigewasser, 24 January 1964. There is some doubt about this statement because it is not corroborated in Seigewasser's report of the same meeting. See SAPMO-BArch, DO4 2781, SfK report on Seigewasser's meeting with Williams, 24 January 1974.

BSIU, MfS AP 10343/92, *Stasi* information report on Noth, 24 November 1958. The *Gemeinsame Erklärung* stated that the Church in the GDR was not bound by the *Militärsseelsorgevertrag* and gave support to the peace policies of the GDR regime. In return, the state confirmed freedom of belief and conscience for Christians in the GDR and agreed to consider some of the complaints that were being made about changes to the education system. The declaration marked a shift in policy away from one of attempting to restrict the activities of the Church towards a concentration on splitting the EKD.

SAPMO-BArch, DO4 2621, letter from Seigewasser to Stoph, 21 November 1963. The information had come from Oberkirchenrat Lotz, Stasi informer and Mitzenheim's right-hand man.

Ibid.

IBID.

CCA, letter from Konsistorialrat F Schlingensiepen to Williams, 7 June 1963.

Ibid.


SHD, SED Bezirksleitung Dresden IV/2.A 14.586, copy of the petition against the Order for Silence attached to a letter from Noth to all priests, 10 September 1963.

SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/14/2, Barth's report on measures taken against the Order for Silence, 25 September 1963.


Ibid.
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33 SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/14/9, report on events in the diocese of Saxony by Barth, November 1963.
34 CCA, letter from Mrs Respondek to Williams, 30 June 1965.
35 SAPMO-BArch, DO 2616, SfK report on the Saxony synod, 30 November 1963.
36 Ibid.
37 SAPMO-BArch, DO 2618, SfK report on future work in the Bezirk, 1 August 1963.
38 PRO, FO 371/169324 CG1781/8, report by Major-General D Peel Yates, General Officer Commanding (British Sector) Berlin, on Church/state relations in the GDR, 10 August 1963.
39 Ibid. Translation of the Ten Articles attached to British Foreign Office report.
40 Besier, Der SED-Staat und die Kirche, p.546.
41 PRO, FO 371/169324 CG1781/8, report on Church/state relations in the GDR, 10 August 1963.
42 BStU, MfS AP 10667/92, Stasi report of a meeting between Krummacher, Flint and Weise, 13 June 1963.
43 Besier, Der SED-Staat und die Kirche, p.542.
44 PRO, FO 371/169324 CG1781/8, report on Church/state relations in the GDR, 10 August 1963.
45 SAPMO-BArch, DO 2616, SfK evaluation of the Ten Articles, 29 May 1963.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 PRO, FO 371/169324 CG1781/8, report on Church/state relations in the GDR, 10 August 1963.
49 Ibid.
50 BSIU, MfS AP 10667/92, Stasi Treff report by GM Karl, 15 March 1963.
51 Ibid., Stasi report on Krummacher's plans and opinions, 26 June 1962.
53 Besier and Wolf (eds.), Pfarrer, Christen und Katholiken, p.17.
54 Goeckel, The Lutheran Church and the East German State, p.60.
55 SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/14, draft of the annual report on Church affairs to be delivered to the 7th Party Congress, 30 November 1966. This document spends about a page extolling the Wartburg-Gespräch.
56 BSIU, MfS AP 2968/70, Teil II Band 2, Wilke's report of a meeting with Kreyssig, 17 July 1964.
57 BSIU, MfS AIM 3654/71 Teil II Band 9, Seidowsky's report of meeting with Kreyssig, 7 April 1964.
58 SAPMO-BArch, DO 2965, SfK report of a meeting between Seigewasser, Noth and others, 11 November 1964.
59 SAPMO-BArch, DO 2969, Wilke's report of a business trip to Dresden, 2 February 1965.
60 EZA, 102/329, Pabst's report of a meeting with Williams, 10 November 1965.
61 Martin Turner's private papers, Political Impressions, undated, circa 1966.
62 Martin Turner's private papers, Political Impressions, undated, circa 1966.
63 SAPMO-BArch, DO 2965, SfK report of a meeting between Seigewasser, Noth and others, 11 November 1964.
64 Ibid., his article on the project in the pamphlet, Outlook, November 1966.
65 Ibid., Dresden Report by Mike Carmody, undated, circa 1966.
67 Ibid. p.392.
CHAPTER 6

The Cold War World of Non-Governmental Diplomacy: Anglo/GDR Relations and the Crossman Connection

Introduction

The suggestion that Britain and the GDR might have been secretly co-operating during the early 1960s runs counter to official British foreign policy and to most subsequent, but limited, historical analyses of the period. Indeed, any hint of co-operation between the two countries would have been remarkable, if not shocking at the time given that at an official level the GDR was deemed by Britain not to exist. As Klaus Larres has recently remarked, until Ostpolitik became official West German policy in the early 1970s, 'Britain firmly supported West Germany's strongly defended claim to be the only legal and moral representative of the entire German nation'. Although Larres has identified cracks in the apparently smooth surface of Britain's GDR policy, most noticeably in the development of trading relations between the two countries, politically, according to the Larres interpretation, relations remained 'strained' until the recognition of the GDR in 1973, and were 'cool' thereafter. He acknowledges that by the early 1960s, it did seem 'only a matter of time' before Britain would enter into 'at least semi-official' relations with the GDR but British politicians held back, laying more store on the 'vital importance of western unity' and the avoidance of a 'serious rift' with the West Germans. Henning Hoff has also pointed out recently that in 1963, at the time of the Coventry/Dresden project, it appeared that Britain was more anxious than ever before to maintain good relations with West Germany in order to counterbalance the French veto on British entry to the European Economic Community.

At an official level, it was no doubt true that the British priority was to maintain good relations with West Germany. But it has also been suggested that at another level the British were working towards an accommodation with the GDR long before they were prepared to publicly acknowledge that this was so. A conference in 2001 concluded that Anglo/GDR
relations were 'not just determined by mutual antagonism. There always were connections, links and attempts to bring about a dialogue between the two countries'. Some of these links were chronicled as long ago as 1977 by Marianne Bell in her work on the groups and individuals who played a part in developing relations between Britain and the GDR, including the Coventry/Dresden inter-city relationship. Recent research by Hoff has also demonstrated that Anglo/GDR relations were more complex than they might have appeared on the surface.

That a considerable amount of contact did take place between British and East German individuals and organisations during the 1960s is beyond doubt. But there was a significant difference between these contacts and those established by the Coventry/Dresden project. On the whole, British connections with the GDR were structured and controlled, either because they were political or revolved around trade, or because they formed part of the Anglo/GDR city twinning programme. The Coventry/Dresden project falls into a category of its own. This was an Anglo/GDR arrangement which did not fit the pattern. It involved a group of British people actually living in the GDR for a period of several months. The object of the visit was to make a statement of reconciliation on behalf of the British people. The danger from the British point of view was that it could be interpreted as having official British blessing. The claim that the project was non-political could not be valid since, at an official level, the GDR was deemed by Britain not to exist. Therefore, anyone who visited the country was giving the lie to that assumption, a fact that the GDR was never slow to exploit.

The Coventry/Dresden project cannot be detached from British foreign policy, and yet it would appear that it was at odds with that policy. In addition, as has been demonstrated, it became entangled with the intelligence services of both Britain and the GDR operating on behalf of their respective governments. This chapter will seek to examine some of the questions raised by the apparent contradictions and anomalies raised by these circumstances.

Most governments at some time say one thing and do another. This duplicitous tendency was extremely prevalent during the Cold War, when the victor was likely to be the
side with the greater mental agility. In order, therefore, to answer the questions raised about
the Coventry/Dresden project, it is necessary to differentiate between the different layers of
government policy: official policy for public consumption and unofficial policy, the basis
for secret action. What was in accord with one was probably not in accord with the other.
Since official relations between Britain and the GDR revolved around a single issue, that of
recognition, superficially bilateral foreign policy remained virtually static for many years.
But lying beneath the outer crust of the official policy of both Britain and the GDR, as
publicly declaimed, was the substratum of unofficial policy; a policy which was drawn up
behind closed doors and was not intended for public consumption. Unofficial policy tended
to be of greater significance by virtue of the single-issue nature of official policy. Unofficial
policy reveals the true state of affairs behind the outer facade. Unofficial policy needed
unofficial envoys to put the policy into practice. The man who best demonstrated the nature
of unofficial relations between Britain and the GDR during the late 1950s and early 1960s
was the Labour MP and initiator of the Coventry/Dresden project, Richard Crossman, whose
activities are examined in this chapter.

**Official Foreign Policy - Recognition and the Hallstein Doctrine**

The GDR’s quest for diplomatic recognition and West Germany's equally strong
determination to prevent this taking place was the central foreign policy issue for Britain and
her Nato allies in their dealings with the GDR during this period. This fact is integral to an
analysis of any contact that took place between Britain and the GDR, however tenuous that
contact may have been in grand terms. The policy of non-recognition of the GDR, which
was followed by Britain along with other Nato countries and much of the rest of the world,
seriously undermined the authority of the GDR regime. It signified that in the eyes of the
world the GDR was not regarded as a legitimate sovereign state. The importance the GDR
attached to becoming a legitimate member of the international community can be judged
from the fact that from 1955, when the Soviet Union granted the GDR sovereignty, until
1973, when recognition was finally achieved, the regime focused its foreign policy efforts
largely, though not exclusively, on trying to change this situation.
The problems surrounding this thorny matter were encapsulated within the Hallstein Doctrine. The doctrine stated that West Germany would regard the taking up of diplomatic relations with the GDR as an unfriendly act and that it would respond by breaking off diplomatic relations with any country which took such action. The doctrine had been drawn up by the West Germans in 1955 following the establishment of diplomatic relations between West Germany and the Soviet Union and the GDR and the Soviet Union. This, according to Bell, created a precedent which the West Germans were anxious no other country should follow. They saw the Hallstein Doctrine as a means of putting pressure on other countries to prevent the GDR's existence becoming a diplomatic reality and it remained the basis for West German policy towards the GDR for the following 17 years. The rationale behind this policy was the West German claim that it alone had the legal right to represent the German people since it was the only democratically elected government. The GDR regime had no legal standing; it had been imposed upon the population of the eastern zone. In addition, Britain along with the other Western Allies was, in theory at least, committed to the eventual reunification of Germany. Recognition of the GDR as a separate state would therefore have been a logical inconsistency.

However, there was a more universal issue than the Hallstein Doctrine governing British foreign policy at the time. This was the desire for peace and stability in Central Europe. Britain and her allies demonstrated on more than one occasion that they were not prepared to risk the outbreak of hostilities for the sake of Germany. According to Martin McCauley, the main aim of British foreign policy throughout the life of the GDR was 'the wish for stability in central Europe'. It was this desire for stability, that in reality necessarily included a stable and independent GDR, which, it will be argued, governed Britain's unofficial foreign policy towards the GDR, as practised by envoys such as Crossman and Oestreicher. Crossman himself commented on the discrepancy between the West's public and private policy towards the GDR in an article in the *New Statesman* in 1962. Kennedy and Macmillan had long ago recognised the need for co-existence between the two Germanies, he said. They should say so publicly.
The breaching of the Hallstein Doctrine was the main foreign policy goal of the GDR. According to Peter Ludz, the 'overriding objective' of the GDR was to 'upgrade the international status of the GDR by whatever means and in whatever way possible, toward the end of achieving formal recognition of its legitimacy under international law.' In September 1963, during the early stages of the Coventry/Dresden project negotiations, the regime advised its officials that every means possible must be used to promote the growing debate about whether or not the GDR should be recognised. A foreign policy offensive was launched which saw its greatest breakthrough when Ulbricht made a state visit to Egypt in February 1965, the first such visit to a non-communist country. In addition to focusing on non-aligned countries, the GDR also sought to breach the Hallstein Doctrine by extending the ramifications of the doctrine to the Soviet Union and other Soviet bloc countries. It argued that the West German claim to speak for the whole territory of the Third Reich and its refusal to recognise the new German borders in the east, as agreed at the Potsdam Conference in 1945, were an attack on the integrity of Poland and the USSR. An MfAA paper sent to all Bezirk authorities in 1964 stated: 'Bonn's presumption to speak for the whole territory of the former German Reich finds its foreign policy reflection in the infamous Hallstein Doctrine...' The document went on to outline what it called the 'bankruptcy' of the Hallstein Doctrine. This bankruptcy was demonstrated partly by the fact that, despite the doctrine, the GDR had relations (although not necessarily full diplomatic relations) with 35 countries, representing about half of the world's population; partly by West Germany's recent moves towards closer trading ties with other Soviet bloc countries; and partly by the fact that both the GDR and West Germany had diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union.

The GDR's campaign was noted by the British Embassy in Bonn. It reported back to London that the West Germans were taking up a 'tough position' on the Hallstein Doctrine because they thought, rightly, that the East Germans were engaged on a 'co-ordinated diplomatic campaign supported by the Soviets directed at enhancing the international status of the GDR.' The report continued that the GDR was using the argument that the fact that the West Germans were establishing trade links with Eastern Europe meant that the Hallstein Doctrine had been weakened. However, despite its own inconsistencies, the West
German government was enormously sensitive to any act by a third country which had the whiff of recognition about it, including actions which could be seen to imply *de facto* rather than *de jure* recognition. The British Embassy advised that the West Germans would take a 'serious view' of any other East German encroachment.

The Coventry/Dresden project was an obvious candidate for West German disapproval. Both the British and the West Germans were conscious of the fact that the project could be interpreted as a move towards *de facto* recognition, that it would both confirm and foster an acceptance that was gradually taking a hold on British public consciousness of the GDR as a country in its own right. Indeed this was a view which the West Germans rightly feared permeated British policy-making echelons. As Larres has noted, despite her public adherence to the Hallstein Doctrine, Britain was considered to be the 'western soft spot'. She was regarded as the Western country most likely to deviate from Nato policy and was, therefore, one of the GDR's prime propaganda targets. The West Germans were suspicious that 'British foreign-policy makers were ...ready to accept the *status quo* in order to achieve something in terms of détente'.

It is evident that unofficial British attitudes did not necessarily correspond to official British deeds. In 1957, in response to a request from Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, to know the 'real view' on Germany (a comment which demonstrates official acceptance of two levels of policy), the Foreign Office had drafted a reply which included the comment that the writer did not see why 'the non-recognition of the East German régime need necessarily be regarded as sacrosanct...But in this matter we are for the time being largely the prisoners of Dr. Adenauer's policy'. In 1959, during the second Berlin Crisis, Macmillan told a Cabinet meeting that there were in fact two Germanies and policy should take account of that. The Labour Party, in opposition until 1964, took a more open pro-recognition line than the government. In 1959, 41 Labour MPs signed a motion demanding *de facto* recognition of the GDR, a motion which was overturned. But two years later the Labour Party Conference passed a resolution calling for *de facto* recognition.
Internationally, the 1960s saw a change in mood among world leaders. Following the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, both American and Soviet leaders showed themselves ready to work towards a form of East/West détente. According to Hoff, after Cuba, the two superpowers focused their attention on maintaining the status quo in Europe, and the British followed suit.\(^{21}\) Even in Bonn there were signs of a thaw. The West German Foreign Minister, Gerhard Schröder, had begun a cautious 'policy of motion' towards the GDR which was, according to Larres, greatly welcomed by the British Foreign Office.\(^{22}\) It is worth noting that Schröder was a close contact of Müller-Gangloff who at this time was also engaged in promoting his own form of détente with, according to the Stasi, the blessing of Western intelligence services, a fact which also suggests that more than one strand of policy was being pursued.

Nevertheless, by the middle of 1963, at the time of the early negotiations on the Coventry/Dresden project, there had been a hardening of the official non-recognition line in Britain. This was brought about by the French veto on Britain's entrance to the EEC in January 1963.\(^{23}\) Britain looked around for allies and settled on Adenauer. Both he and his successor Erhard continued to maintain the official hardline policy on the non-recognition of the GDR. Sir Frank Roberts, who became British Ambassador to West Germany the following month, has recalled that it was a 'cold winter', reflecting 'the state of British relations with de Gaulle and Adenauer after de Gaulle's recent veto...'.\(^{24}\) The British aim was to detach Adenauer from de Gaulle and win his support. From this point until 1966, according to Hoff, it was Britain's aim to establish good relations with West Germany by, among other things, 'discouraging contacts with the D.D.R'.\(^{25}\) When Harold Wilson became Prime Minister in 1964, he abandoned the Labour Party's commitment to recognition of the GDR. During the period of the Coventry/Dresden negotiations, therefore, despite previous ambivalence, Britain was officially firmly on the side of non-recognition and did what it could to prevent politicians and others from visiting the GDR.\(^{26}\)

A major part of GDR strategy, on the other hand, was to curry favour by persuading British people to visit East Germany. In the absence of inter-governmental contact at an official level, manipulation of British public opinion through influential individuals was
precisely the tactic that the GDR had devised in the hope of bringing pressure to bear on the
British government. The strategy was aimed at two categories of people, these being MPs
and others operating at national level, and people of influence at regional level. GDR foreign
policy in relation to Britain was geared towards creeping recognition by these backdoor
methods. As Oestreicher, one of the most important unofficial links to the GDR, has put it, it
was a 'cold war world of nongovernmental [sic] diplomacy'.\(^{27}\) As a part of this non-
governmental diplomacy a steady stream of British politicians, trade unionists and
journalists took up offers of GDR hospitality during the 1950s and 1960s. On the whole,
they went to see for themselves the merits of socialism in practice. But there were a few who
fulfilled the vital role of the official 'unofficial' contact. In a situation where there is no
diplomatic channel through which countries can work, these unofficial contacts fulfil a vital
role, providing a conduit for information and influence.

In these circumstances, did the GDR regime see the Coventry/Dresden project as an
ideal vehicle for its foreign policy aim of achieving recognition by small steps? Surprisingly,
the answer would appear to be that it did not. The regime's initial reaction was to reject it. In
May 1963, the historian David Irving, who had raised the idea of an act of atonement in
Dresden following the publication of his book *The Destruction of Dresden*, sent a letter to a
contact in Dresden outlining the then sketchy plan for a British act of reconciliation in the
city. He pointed out that the plan was supported by Crossman and the Provost of Coventry
Cathedral.\(^{28}\) By July, this letter had found its way to Politburo member Albert Norden,
together with a detailed proposal for the way in which the scheme should be handled.\(^{29}\)
Norden was informed that the MfAA's recommendation had been outright rejection of the
scheme. The more complex approach recommended to Norden by the SED's Abteilung
*Internationale Verbindungen* (Department for International Contacts) and the Deutsch-
Britische Gesellschaft remained that the plan should be turned down but they also advocated
that the GDR should make a concrete counter proposal.\(^{30}\) In this way, if the plan failed,
responsibility for refusal would not fall on the GDR. It was not anticipated that the counter-
proposal would prove acceptable to the British but, nevertheless, Norden was advised that it
was worth doing if only because the discussion might restimulate the city partnership
between Coventry and Dresden to the benefit of the GDR. In July 1963, therefore, the GDR
decision was to reject the project while at the same time looking at ways in which it might be hijacked for its own purposes. It is clear that despite the regime's emphasis on achieving recognition by small steps, the idea of using the project for this purpose was not sufficiently attractive for the GDR to be tempted by the carrot held out to it.

At this point, the GDR's reasons for the British proposal being unacceptable were twofold. Firstly it was noted that Crossman had described the bombing of Dresden as a 'crime against humanity' for which its authors would have been prosecuted at Nuremberg... This, in the eyes of the GDR, was an argument that played into the hands of West German 'revanchists' who would be able to claim that they were not the only war criminals and it was, therefore, time to draw a veil over the events of the Second World War. It was a view with which the communist GDR regime, claiming to be the true enemy of fascism, could not be associated. The second stumbling block was the potential provided for West German anti-GDR propaganda. It was noted that the expressed wish of those behind the project was that it should cause no offence to West Germany. From the GDR perspective, this was a condition which could not possibly be met. Crossman, the report said, was practically demanding the 'elimination of the GDR authorities' from the proceedings. Norden was advised that 'it is well known that the Bonn government is only not offended when there is open discrimination against the GDR'. In addition, there were other considerations such as the fact that the West German government had a close association with the new Coventry Cathedral.

It is worth noting here that, in GDR eyes, the scheme had become the 'Crossman project'. It was not referred to as the Irving plan or the Coventry Cathedral scheme. Despite the fact that the report to Norden appears to be based on a letter from Irving, all the references are to the 'Crossman-Gruppe'. The involvement of Coventry Cathedral scarcely warranted a mention other than in the context of its connections with West Germany. Two conclusions can be drawn from this categorisation. Firstly, the project was unacceptable to the GDR even without the involvement of the Church, this involvement being deemed by the British, at an official level, to be a sure-fire way of getting the GDR to kill the idea. Secondly, it begs the question as to whether Crossman had at this stage already been in
contact with Norden, his long-term acquaintance, about the scheme. The fact that within the GDR the project was credited to Crossman, but that in Britain his role was hidden is an interesting discrepancy.

The involvement of Crossman in the Coventry/Dresden project is a revealing factor. Although Crossman cultivated a reputation as a maverick, archival evidence suggests that for a number of years he operated as the unofficial envoy of British non-governmental diplomacy and was probably the British government's closest link to the GDR regime. As such, it is probable that despite initial disapproval of the Coventry/Dresden project at an official level, Crossman was not operating entirely alone and that this factor explains, at least partially, the later change in the official British attitude from opposition to co-operation.

Many of Crossman's political actions have been explained away by the argument that he was merely engaged in his passion for stirring up hornets' nests. His involvement with the Coventry/Dresden project is no exception. In order to question the validity of such claims, it is necessary to examine not only Crossman's complex life, but also to scrutinise his links with the GDR, links which demonstrate the complexity of bilateral foreign relations between two countries which, at an official level, had no contact with each other. However little may have been happening at an official level, it is evident that much else was going on behind the scenes and that Crossman, until his elevation to the Cabinet, appears to have been a main player in this Cold War world of non-governmental diplomacy.

Unofficial Foreign Policy - Richard Crossman

The part played by Crossman in the Coventry/Dresden project is necessarily of consequence since he, together with Irving, was the instigator of the idea. His involvement, however, takes on greater significance when it is considered in the light of his high level contacts within the GDR, his political views on Britain's relations with the GDR, and his role during the Second World War working for British intelligence feeding propaganda to the Germans. There appears to be no conclusive documentary evidence showing that Crossman was directly involved with the GDR's decision to allow the project to proceed but
Archival evidence points to the fact that he certainly had the influence to do so and common sense suggests that it would have been perverse, even for a man of his complexity, not to have used his influence to promote a scheme of his own devising. Records do show that within Britain and West Germany this was precisely what he did do, putting forward his plans and attempting to manipulate both the British Foreign Office and the West German Ambassador in Britain. A number of questions are raised by these circumstances, especially when taken together with the fact that the Coventry/Dresden project became a part of an intelligence operation. Who, for example, was Crossman serving? What was Crossman's own agenda? How sympathetic was he to communism as a political ideology? How much of a bridge was he between East and West? Where did his espousal of the Coventry/Dresden project fit into the jigsaw?

Crossman was a complex political character. His reputation as a maverick has been well documented.\(^\text{34}\) He was deeply involved in German affairs throughout his life, from the time when in 1931, shortly after graduating from Oxford, he went to live in Berlin, right up to his death in 1974. He was an active campaigner for recognition of the GDR and a regular participant at the influential Anglo-German Königswinter conferences. Curiously, there is little reference to Germany in his copious papers, diaries or biographies.\(^\text{35}\) In terms of his later links with the GDR regime, one of his most important German contacts in the pre-Second World War years, and definitely his most intriguing, was the woman whom he eventually if briefly married, the 'beautiful, promiscuous German Jew', Erika Gluck.\(^\text{36}\) Through Gluck, Crossman gained access to the circle of leading German communists in Berlin, a circle which included the GDR's future leader, Walter Ulbricht.

According to Crossman's biographer, Anthony Howard, Crossman met Gluck in Berlin where she worked as a courier for Willi Münzenberg and may also have been his mistress.\(^\text{37}\) Münzenberg was a leading Berlin communist who later fled from Nazi persecution to Paris where he became Western Propaganda Chief of the Comintern. The writer and one-time communist Arthur Koestler, who worked with Münzenberg in Paris and who was also a friend of Crossman,\(^\text{38}\) described Münzenberg as '...the grey eminence and invisible organiser of the anti-Fascist world crusade'.\(^\text{39}\) According to Stonor Saunders, he
was 'the brain behind the Kremlin's secret prewar campaign of persuasion'. Crossman gained more than a wife from his association with Münzenberg. He also learned the propaganda skills which he was to make use of in later life. Ulbricht was also a member of the communist leadership in Berlin at that time. He had become political director of the KPD Berlin-Brandenburg district in 1929. It is a moot question whether the paths of Crossman and Ulbricht crossed but it is extremely likely. At one time Crossman and Erika even lived in Münzenberg's Berlin flat. Was Ulbricht a visitor? Crossman's association with Münzenberg would not necessarily have endeared him in later decades to the likes of Ulbricht and Norden since Münzenberg fell foul of Stalin during the period of ideological purges in the 1930s and therefore must also have appeared ideologically unsound to Ulbricht, one of the few German communists who managed to survive the purges in Moscow. Norden, who worked with Münzenberg in Paris, later suspected that Münzenberg had denounced him to the Paris police. However, the fact remains that Crossman shared a common background with GDR leaders. Münzenberg was murdered in France in 1940, his death remaining an unsolved mystery.

With this youthful background, the question raises itself of how close Crossman came to converting to the communist faith? Did he too, when he sat at Münzenberg's feet as the Nazis bludgeoned their way to power, feel the pull of the 'choice between an extreme Right, determined to use power in order to crush human freedom, and a Left which seemed eager to use it in order to free humanity'. In 1950, he saw fit to answer this question himself. In the book he conceived with his close friend Koestler, The God that Failed: Six Studies in Communism, he wrote:

"I sometimes ask myself why, as a very young man, staying with Willy [sic] Muenzenbuerg, the Communist leader, in Berlin, I never felt the faintest temptation to accept his invitation to go with him to Russia. I was captivated by his remarkable personality...and Marxism seemed to offer the completion of the Platonic political philosophy which was my main study...Then why did I feel no inner response to the Communist appeal? The answer I am pretty sure, was sheer nonconformist cussedness, or, if you prefer it, pride. No Pope for me, whether spiritual or secular."

That Crossman, according to his own statement, was not tempted would have been unusual for an intellectual such as himself in the period between the two World Wars. As he pointed out in the same book, 'conversion was so common' between 1917 and 1939.
Crossman was recruited to British Military Intelligence in 1940. He became head of the German Section of the Political Warfare Executive based at Woburn where he was responsible for propaganda broadcasts aimed at Germany. From 1940 to 1942, he ran the Sender der Europäischen Revolution with the help of German 'revolutionary socialists' who had escaped to Britain. Many of these people returned to West Germany after the war, taking up leading roles in the West German SPD. From 1944 to 1945, Crossman was Assistant Chief of Psychological Warfare at Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) on General Eisenhower's Staff. On Crossman's resignation in 1945 from the Political Intelligence Department (which during the war operated as a cover for those working in PWE), Robert Bruce Lockhart, the PWE director, wrote that Crossman had been recommended for a US decoration (which, in the event, he did not receive) and that Brigadier-General Maclure, the head of SHAEF Psychological Warfare Division, had described Crossman's work as 'the most notable achievement in the whole field of political warfare'.

Would a man so skilled in the art of propaganda have wiped these abilities from his mind when the war ended? Or would he have continued to use them, even if only on a freelance basis, during the Cold War conflict which followed? Almost certainly, for a man such as Crossman, the latter would be the case. Indeed, evidence that Crossman continued to think in terms of psychological warfare can be seen in notes he compiled on the short-lived uprising in East Berlin on 17 June 1953 in which he referred to the role of psychological warfare in the aftermath of events. He expounded his views on propaganda in a contribution to a book on psychological warfare published in 1949. The most effective weapon in psychological warfare was truth, he said. However, propaganda must not only be factually true, it must also be credible. The person at whom it was aimed must feel that 'he is listening, not to propaganda, but to honest men honestly and simply telling him the truth'. Examining these views in the context of the Coventry/Dresden project and the Cold War, it is possible to see how neatly the Provost of Coventry Cathedral and his band of idealistic young volunteers fitted into Crossman's theories of psychological warfare. What could be more credible than the genuine commitment of British Christians to reconciliation and
friendship? How much more convincing it would sound to East German ears if a British clergyman, out of a deep sense of conviction, advocated the theory of living in harmony with communist brethren compared to the same argument coming from a GDR apparatchik. Evidence relating to Ulbricht's policy for Christian/Marxist dialogue and his support for the Coventry/Dresden project suggests that Ulbricht, the man who shared the same propaganda guru as Crossman, came to the same conclusions.

The American view of the role of psychological warfare at the time was that of creating 'peaceful engagement' with the communist bloc, rather than of outright liberation.\(^{53}\) The liberation concept had been abandoned after the failure of the Hungarian uprising in 1956, the same scenario which so troubled Müller-Gangloff. Peaceful engagement was defined as the 'encouragement of gradualist, in-system changes toward more autonomy from the Soviet hegemonic power...and more internal liberalization'.\(^{54}\) It was a policy which required psychological warfare to 'concentrate on elites rather than the masses, since elites...were more inclined toward collaboration than the anticommunist masses'. This philosophy was in complete accord with the Stasi's analysis of a Western-inspired anti-communist conspiracy directed by Müller-Gangloff. It also reflected Crossman's wartime view shared with Foreign Office official, later Ambassador to West Germany, Sir Frank Roberts. The late Richard Crossman, with whom I was in close touch over propaganda to Germany, once told me that this should in his view be concentrated on the Generals and the Bishops.\(^{55}\)

Whether Crossman kept up his British and American intelligence contacts after the war is a question which cannot be answered categorically without access to the files of the security services. However, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the security services would have been interested in Crossman's later activities given that he was a frequent visitor to countries behind the Iron Curtain. Crossman himself made a brief reference to continued contact with British intelligence in a cryptic note contained within correspondence he filed for his unwritten autobiography. The note is to Major General Kenneth Strong, the Director-General of Intelligence at the Ministry of Defence from 1948 to 1964, and refers to a conversation between Crossman and the Russian writer Ilya Ehrenburg in 1950. Crossman
wrote that he could only be regarded as 'a B intelligence source' because there was a problem with the translator. A copy of the note was also sent to Kenneth Younger, Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Home Office and a former member of the British Intelligence Corp during the Second World War.\textsuperscript{56}

Crossman's interest in Dresden and its destruction dated from the Second World War. In his role as a 'psychological warrior', he was involved, in a minor way, in the decisions which preceded the authorisation of the raid.\textsuperscript{57} In common with his psychological warfare colleagues, he advised against terror bombing on the grounds that it strengthened rather than weakened morale. The link with Dresden continued when he became a Coventry MP. There is little doubt that his condemnation of the Dresden bombing raid was genuine. He expressed his views forcefully in print on more than one occasion, accusing Churchill of being a war criminal. There was the \textit{New Statesman} article which found its way into the files of the GDR Politburo.\textsuperscript{58} And in an article which appeared in the USA but not in Britain, Crossman wrote that a memo from Churchill written on 28 March 1945

\begin{quote}
"...provided damning evidence that so long as terror bombing was popular, the politicians would take credit for it; but now that public opinion was revolting against its senseless brutality, they were only too obviously running for cover and leaving the air force to take the blame...What remains is to ask how decent, civilized politicians enthusiastically approved such mass murder and decent, civilized servicemen conscientiously carried it out."\textsuperscript{59}
\end{quote}

Crossman's own version of events relating to his involvement in the Coventry/Dresden project leads the reader, probably as he intended, into a guessing game. He left clues but no definitive answers as to why he should have devoted some of his energies towards instigating and promoting the project. There are two unpublished diary references. One records a conversation with Edward Heath MP, at that time Lord Privy Seal, and is written in typical Crossman fashion.

\begin{quote}
"Another Coventry thing I might note here is the continuation of my negotiations about a Coventry memorial, from the Cathedral, in a Dresden church to the Germans killed in the raid. This idea of mine which I've been cooking up with the Provost has already got to the German Ambassador [an interesting turn of phrase since it implies the idea has been transmitted by someone other than Crossman, whereas in fact Crossman wrote to the German Ambassador outlining the plan on 9 July 1963,\textsuperscript{60} about a week before dictating the diary note] and duly Ted Heath saw me last week, on Tuesday... I find it enormously interesting in East-West relations in Germany, to try and insert a new element like this into it. I'm not at all sure the communists will like it as much. And that is why we like to do it."\textsuperscript{61}
\end{quote}
About two months later, Crossman made another, yet more cryptic, diary entry.

"...I put this idea to the Provost some months ago, and I was now going over to see him and hear the report on what had happened. Of course he has got a long way. He had squared [sic] ...(going back a bit, I had put all this to the German Ambassador and to Heath, and of course in my own style this produced maximum resistance and suspicion from both, because I was trying this idea out as a kind of fissionable material in the cold war)..."^62

What did Crossman mean by 'fissionable'? In dictionary definitions of 'fissionable', the word is used to describe a nuclear reaction which causes division and releases large amounts of energy - a definition akin to explosive. Although Crossman's precise meaning must remain unclear, it seems that in his diary entry he was trying to create the impression that he was motivated by the desire to create trouble rather than harmony. But Crossman wrote his diaries with an eye on posterity. As his friend and colleague, Tam Dalyell MP, said: one of the problems when writing about Crossman is that 'one cannot be sure about the absolute accuracy of what he said - or wrote in books'.^63 If Crossman was involved in some sort of intelligence game, he was obviously not going to spell this out in his diaries. The likelihood is that he was doing something, of which there is no hint in his sparse references to the Coventry/Dresden project. On the basis that Crossman was an expert in misleading, it is probable that if he claimed not to be creating harmony, then he was actually doing the opposite.

Although Crossman never achieved the political power which he aimed for, he was, by the 1960s, a man of great influence. He had become not only one of Britain's leading Labour politicians (he was a member of the Labour Party National Executive Committee) but also a prolific journalist. In addition to his political clout he had a regular journalistic stage on which to expound his views, being at various times a regular columnist for either the Daily Mirror or the New Statesman. In accordance with this influence, he had arguably stronger links with the GDR than any other British politician, with access to those at the very top. There appears to have been a particularly close relationship between Crossman and Politburo member Norden, the old associate of Münzenberg.^64 Norden, like Crossman, had also been a professional journalist. Ulbricht was kept informed of the meetings Crossman had in the GDR and attempts were made to arrange meetings between the two men although
no record has been found of a meeting taking place. Crossman visited the GDR almost on an annual basis for at least six years, if not longer, and his discussions took place in an atmosphere akin to old friends enjoying a stimulating debate.\textsuperscript{65}

Documentary evidence shows that Crossman's post-war contact with GDR leaders began in 1956 when he had a cloak-and-dagger meeting with a representative of the GDR regime in an attempt to set up a meeting with GDR \textit{Ministerpräsident} Otto Grotewohl.\textsuperscript{66} Subsequently, records show that Crossman visited East Berlin and Dresden in 1957, 1960, 1961 and 1962. There are also references to invitations to the GDR in 1958, 1959, 1963 and 1964. In 1958, for example, Crossman planned another visit to the GDR but, according to a conversation with a Dresden city councillor on a visit to London, called it off because Ulbricht had gone to Poland.\textsuperscript{67} The visit was postponed until the following year.\textsuperscript{68}

Crossman was, of course, far from the only MP to visit the GDR. Arthur Lewis and Will Owen, for example, were two other regulars. But unlike most other British politicians, Crossman nearly always travelled alone and not as a member of a delegation. This, together with his influence, put Crossman's GDR visits in a different league from the more run-of-the-mill political contact that was taking place between Britain and the GDR between 1956 and 1964. In 1956, for example, according to MfAA statistics, in addition to Crossman the GDR was visited by 32 Labour MPs, three Tory MPs and 12 local councillors.\textsuperscript{69} In 1959, the MfAA compiled a list of 62 names of British MPs who had visited the GDR.\textsuperscript{70} The Labour Party became increasingly unhappy about these visits and actively discouraged them. In 1957, the Labour Chief Whip wrote to all Labour MPs warning them that trips to the GDR could be misinterpreted and asking them to inform the Party of forthcoming visits so that they could be met at West Berlin airport by West German SPD members and advised accordingly.\textsuperscript{71} Crossman himself seems to have been immune from these demands. He made one of his regular visits to East Berlin and Dresden in August 1957, only a few days after the Chief Whip's letter was sent out.\textsuperscript{72}

Interestingly, the Labour Chief Whip's concern about the group visits was shared on the other side of the Iron Curtain, although for vastly different reasons. Suspicions grew that
the GDR's invitations were being wasted on insignificant freeloaders, as evidenced by remarks from a British source in an MfAA report following the visit of a group of Welsh MPs.

"A finer bunch of nonentities without any influence than those on your list would be hard to find among Labour MPs....So little impact do these people make that they are almost completely unknown...It would be very easy to get a more representative bunch including right-wingers who would have more value. Why don't they take notice before inviting people on free trips - the MPs new racket?"\(^\text{73}\)

The speaker, or author, of the quote, which is given in English, was not named - but the air of exasperation has a Crossman-like ring to it. In 1962, Crossman recorded in his diary his disparaging views about MPs who accepted invitations from the GDR. Responding to the GDR's criticism of backbench MPs who had accepted hospitality from the GDR but then joined Harold Wilson on a visit to West Berlin, Crossman noted that he had told Dr Johannes Dieckmann, President of the Volkskammer:

"You got what you deserved. The kind of person who accepts a free holiday from you is too cheaply purchased to be a reliable friend. In the House of Commons they say that if you cannot get a free holiday in America from the Pentagon, or from one of the Commonwealth countries, and if even the Zionists let you down, there is always a free trip to the Baltic at the cost of the D.D.R. That kind of quip does not do your reputation any good, and I am not the least surprised that the 5 people who have been your guests were equally amenable when they were the guests of Willi [sic] Brandt."\(^\text{74}\)

The breadth and depth of Crossman's GDR contacts was demonstrated during a visit in January 1960, which was documented by both Crossman and his hosts. Crossman's schedule showed that he had meetings with, among others, Politburo secretariat and chairman of the Central Party Control Commission Hermann Matern, deputy Foreign Minister Johannes König, secretary of the Politburo foreign policy commission Peter Florin, and Defence Minister Generaloberst Heinz Hoffmann, as well as discussions with leading academic, journalistic and military representatives.\(^\text{75}\) From Crossman's account, the conversations appear to have been open and friendly.\(^\text{76}\) He was very satisfied, he said later.\(^\text{77}\) However, it has to be borne in mind that whatever Crossman chose to tell the East Germans on his visits, or said he told them, must be taken with a pinch of salt, given his reputation for mischief making and operating to his own agenda. This tendency was well known to friend and foe. Ernest Bevin, for example, used to refer to Crossman as 'double Crossman'.\(^\text{78}\)
The most intriguing of Crossman's recorded visits to the GDR was that made in August 1961, his departure from East Berlin apparently taking place on 13 August, the day that construction of the Berlin Wall began. Two days before that, he had had a long discussion with his friend Norden. Norden sent a 12-page report of the meeting to Ulbricht. Not only did Crossman raise the question of the GDR erecting a barrier against West Germany and give his approval to such an idea, but it also appears that Crossman had had a meeting scheduled with Ulbricht for Tuesday 15 August which was called off because, propitiously as it turned out, Crossman had brought forward his departure date. Norden's report noted Crossman's comment that, while he regretted not being able to see Ulbricht, he also understood that there was a lot of work for Ulbricht to do 'in these days'. Was this remark merely a platitude? If so, why did Norden include it in his report which otherwise is a densely packed factual document shorn of meaningless pleasantries? Was it merely a coincidence that, while august figures such as German expert Frank Roberts, who became British Ambassador in Bonn in 1963 and who at the time of the Berlin Wall was British Ambassador in Moscow, later disclaimed any suspicion that the Wall was about to be erected, Crossman was busy having discussions on precisely that topic with leading members of the regime just as preparations were being made for construction to start? Circumstantial evidence points to the fact that Crossman was aware that the GDR was about to take action over its border. Rightly or wrongly, Norden may well have taken Crossman's remarks as a green light.

*Crossman repeatedly put the question as to why the GDR had not already resorted to measures in connection with the border problem and Republikflucht, such as the creation of a border between the state borders of the GDR and West Germany, including West Berlin... In Crossman's opinion it would be better if the population of both German states did not have so much contact with each other. He did not think that the view of the SED and the government of the GDR with regard to reunification and the strengthening of contact and relations, as for example in economic areas, was realistic or appropriate and he put forward the theory that if GDR politicians really rated the danger of West German militarism and revanchism so highly, as they say in their propaganda, then they should also therefore not be surprised if these forces in West Germany initiate psychological warfare measures which disrupt the development of the GDR, large scale measures which cannot be so quickly got rid of... In his opinion more energetic steps are necessary [author's underlining] in connection with Republikflucht. He described the speech of Foreign Minister Dr Bolz in the Volkskammer session of 11 August 1961 as very realistic and would like to know what else we are going to do about it.*
Were these remarks simply an example of remarkable prescience or was Crossman being used as an unofficial messenger by Britain to assure the GDR and the Soviet Union that there would be no dramatic reaction to the building of the Wall? Did Norden give Crossman an answer when he asked what further steps would be taken? Possibly. Crossman recorded a brief reference to this conversation about 12 months after the event, in the context of another more recent discussion between the two men on the subject of whether or not the GDR was going to sign a peace treaty with the Soviet Union. Crossman noted Norden as saying: '... We have simply got to go ahead [with the peace treaty]. This is the difference from last year. Then I made it pretty clear to you that we were bound to act on the Wall. We did and we calculated rightly that if we acted you would do nothing.'

Since the 1961 meeting took place two days before construction of the Wall started, Crossman would have had ample time to get the message back to London. Rumours were rife in West Berlin that the Western Allies were not taken by surprise on 13 August. Willy Brandt, at that time governing mayor of West Berlin, was among those who suspected that the West knew what was about to happen and was prepared to countenance it for the sake of stability. '... in August 1961 a curtain was drawn aside to reveal an empty stage... Ulbricht had been allowed to take a swipe at the Western super-power, and the United States merely winced with annoyance.' An additional factor which points to the fact that the East Germans and the Soviet Union had been given to understand that the erection of the Wall would be tolerated, is contained in an anecdote related by Oestreicher, ten years after the Wall came down. Oestreicher has recounted how, in 1961, a British army officer told him that 'the wall, or something like it... had come as no surprise to the western allies, but as a great relief. In building it, the Soviet masters of East Germany knew they were not risking a violent western response.' The GDR economy was being threatened and with it the stability of the country. No-one could predict the Soviet response if this had happened, Oestreicher explained, adding: 'A threatened superpower is very dangerous'.

Crossman had made his views on the border question known even more strongly in his discussions with Oberbürgermeister Schill in Dresden six days before the construction of the Berlin Wall. He described the current situation in Germany as civil war and, according to Schill, said that:
"...West Germany was fighting an economic war against the GDR, and that a psychological war was being fought which was expressed in particular by enticing the workforce away. He [Crossman] said, to quote him: That what was said in the GDR about the enticement was 100 per cent correct and he could imagine that that does great damage to the development of the GDR. It is incomprehensible to him that the GDR does not close the border in order to put a stop to this recruitment."²⁶

These exchanges demonstrate that Crossman's visits to the GDR were not simply run-of-the-mill fact-finding missions. He was there with a purpose, clearly attempting to manipulate events. His role as an unofficial intermediary between East and West is explicitly stated in records of his visit to East Berlin the following year when he met Norden again, as well as Dr Johannes Dieckmann, President of the Volkskammer, Otto Winzer, deputy Foreign Minister, and an unnamed person at the Ministry of Defence.²⁷ The most significant meeting was considered to be that with Winzer, who became Foreign Minister in 1965.²⁸ The two men had a two-hour discussion during which Crossman took notes which he later taped in question and answer format. On this occasion, he explicitly stated that it was his role to act as a channel between East and West. He recorded the fact on tape, noting that after Winzer had said he liked a 'real discussion', he had told him: 'I valued it too and thought it most important for me to report faithfully to those at home, and I hoped I had precisely understood his meaning'.²⁹

Most important it certainly was. The meaning referred to was whether or not the GDR was prepared to risk war over the status of Berlin. The message that Crossman took back with him to Britain was that war was not inevitable. If the GDR signed a peace treaty with the Soviet Union under which the Soviet Union's rights in Berlin as an Allied power and access to the city were handed over to the GDR, the GDR would be prepared to discuss transitional access arrangements for the Western Allies to Berlin before resorting to force in order to stop such access.³⁰ From the GDR viewpoint, the significance of the peace treaty would be that it would force the West to negotiate with the GDR and thus move towards recognition, the GDR's ultimate goal. The conversation, according to Crossman, went as follows:³¹

A [Winzer]: ... we shall never do anything warlike. The only danger of war will be from your side.
Q: So your aim is to make us recognise you - the reason you care about these negotiations resulting from the peace treaty is that they will force us into a kind of recognition?
A: Yes. The peace treaty will give us the right but there will be no war because as the situation develops you will be forced to recognise the D.D.R. and to come to terms with us..."92

The serious nature of this conversation for the future of world peace is evidenced by a top secret document drawn up by the British Cabinet Joint Intelligence Committee four months later, in which the possibility that interference with Allied communications with West Berlin could provoke a nuclear war was given detailed consideration.93 In this context, where the stakes were so high, Crossman's meeting with Winzer and the information he brought back with him must have been of great significance to those entrusted with the defence of British interests.

It was only nine months after these weighty and seemingly frank discussions that Crossman first proposed the idea of carrying out a project of reconciliation in Dresden. In keeping with his views on 'psychological warriors' though, his plan was to keep his involvement hidden. 'A propagandist should conceal his skill from the public,' he had written in 1949.94 The public figure, the front man, would be the Provost of Coventry Cathedral. Crossman noted in his diary:

"I was thrilled when he [the Provost] said to me, would I go over [to Berlin] with him. I said no, not on your life, because if I go it will become news. 'But I would like in the end, when it is revealed, I should like it to be known that I have been discussing it, and intimate with it.'"95

Events - one of them being Crossman's elevation to the Cabinet - prevented his involvement from becoming known. The version of events that became the public record was that the Coventry/Dresden project had been purely the brainchild of the Provost. People who were involved in the project's organisation, such as its leader Turner and organisational committee member, Butterfield, were unaware of Crossman's involvement when interviewed more than 30 years later.96 Even the Provost claimed the idea for his own. Writing in his unpublished memoirs, he said that, following a visit to Germany where the importance of Dresden was brought home to him, he contacted Irving and subsequently 'I determined that our first declaration of our intent to give a programme for to [sic] the vision of reconciliation was to be some kind of project in Dresden...'.97 According to the Provost, Crossman's only involvement came after the Provost had had his first ground-breaking meeting with the GDR Secretary of State for Church Affairs in 1964.
"When I returned to Coventry... Crossman came to see me. I suspected he had been asked to check on me and get an independent opinion of my intentions. Crossman was not a Christian, and was quite indifferent to the Church, but he promised to promote our hopes and plans...Crossman's interest in Dresden was, of course, entirely political, and he was at the forefront of pressure in Britain to agree to the East German demand for recognition as a separate German State."

Inaccurate though they are, the Provost's memoirs do give some credit to Crossman for his behind the scenes operations.

"His [Crossman's] support for the work we undertook in East Germany and in particular in Dresden was honest and steady, and we had reasons to be grateful to both of these men [the other being another Coventry MP Maurice Edelman] when we operated on the fringes of international politics."

Crossman's involvement with the GDR appears to have ended in 1973 when he recorded that he had had a 'row' with the GDR authorities and was 'no longer persona grata'. The deterioration of Crossman's relations with the GDR followed closely on the death of Ulbricht in August 1973 and the final demise of the old guard whose connections with Crossman spanned more than 40 years.

**Conclusion**

An analysis of the significance of the Coventry/Dresden project in the context of the foreign policies of Britain and the GDR must consider two distinctly different types of policy. The first is official policy, that designed for public consumption. The second area is unofficial policy, non-governmental diplomacy, closely allied to intelligence, which was being carried on behind the scenes but which, as Glees has demonstrated, can provide the 'missing dimension' to an understanding of events.

It is in this area that an examination of the involvement of Crossman in the Coventry/Dresden project and of his activities in relation to the GDR is of value, contributing towards the creation of a less blurred picture of the unofficial foreign policies of both countries, policies which by their very nature were not intended to be clear at the time and remain unclear in the present. Since, by virtue of the policy of non-recognition, there was no official contact between the two countries, it is only from an analysis of the unofficial contact that some hint of the true picture of relations between the two countries
can be gleaned. It is inevitable that the less contact there is between two countries at an official level, the more important any unofficial contact becomes.

To deal with official policy first, there can be no doubt that the Coventry/Dresden project was not in accordance with official British government policy regarding the non-recognition of the GDR and the upholding of the Hallstein Doctrine. Given that the British Foreign Office was actively discouraging people from making contact with the GDR at the time when negotiations over the project began, it is apparent that the project was directly contrary to official British foreign policy aims. This is supported by British Foreign Office records. Later, when negotiations were under way, the British Foreign Office attitude became increasingly one of co-operation rather than opposition, at which point the line between official and unofficial policy became blurred and the question has to be asked as to why this change should have occurred.

The aims of official GDR foreign policy, on the other hand, were diametrically contrary to those of the British in that top priority was given to establishing contact with people in Britain in an effort to bring influence to bear on the British government. In addition, the GDR was quick to make propaganda use of any seeming breaches of the Hallstein Doctrine, in order to bolster its arguments that the doctrine was not only contrary to international law, it was also bankrupt. The Coventry/Dresden project therefore superficially appeared to be in accordance with these aims. Perversely, however, the evidence shows that the GDR did not rush to grasp the carrot. Its initial reaction was to reject the project on ideological grounds which were central to the communist faith and considered to be more important than knocking another small nail into the coffin of the Hallstein Doctrine. It is significant that the GDR was opposed to the project before it became truly aware of the dominant role the Churches would play, a factor which the British and West Germans believed would kill it stone dead in any case, but which, as has been argued, had the opposite effect.

Understanding the significance of the Coventry/Dresden project in relation to unofficial policy is a complex matter. The absence of access to the archives of Western
intelligence services means that to a great extent analysis must depend upon hypotheses and circumstantial evidence. Crossman was and remains an enigma. But he was a highly placed enigma with close contact to those in power in both Britain and the GDR - not necessarily only those with elected power. An examination of his activities in relation to the GDR demonstrates that Britain did indeed conduct a form of non-governmental diplomacy with the GDR and raises the possibility that Crossman represented British views that were only expressed behind closed doors. The accounts which have survived of Crossman's discussions on the building of the Berlin Wall and access to West Berlin point very strongly to the fact that Britain was prepared to collude with the GDR in the interests of preserving international peace and stability which, as McCauley and Hoff have noted, was an overriding priority. It is, therefore, equally possible that when the British saw a way in which the Coventry/Dresden project could be used to help preserve stability in Central Europe, they were more than prepared to co-operate. If this involved dealing with the enemy, then so be it.

Foreign policy was a secondary consideration for the GDR in relation to the Coventry/Dresden project. The advantages to be gained in terms of recognition were deemed to be not of paramount importance. For Ulbricht, the advantages lay in the area of Church/state relations. Nevertheless, the fact that the project took place would appear to have had a positive rather than a negative effect on the GDR's recognition policy. The manner in which this policy related to the grass roots and, in particular, Coventry and Dresden will be examined in the following chapter.

1 Klaus Larres, 'Britain and the GDR: Political and Economic Relations, 1949-1999', in Uneasy Allies, p.64.
2 Ibid., p.65.
3 Ibid., p.84.
6 Bell, Britain and East Germany, 1977.
7 Hoff, Zwischen diplomatischer Blockade und transnationalen Beziehungen.
8 Bell, Britain and East Germany, 1977, p.31.
9 Berger, German History, Vol. 19 No. 2 2001, p.278.
Schroeder, Der SED-Staat, p.190.
SHD, BT/RdB Dresden 1276, MiAA arguments in relation to the Hallstein Doctrine and recognition of the GDR, 20 July 1964.
PRO, FO 317/177942 RG1076/6, report to the Foreign Office on GDR attempts to gain recognition, 19 February 1964.
Hoff, The 'GDR Factor' in British Foreign Policy 1955-1973, paper given to the International History Workshop, Cambridge University, April 1998.
Hoff, "... Largely The Prisoners Of Dr. Adenauer's Policy", in Die DDR und der Westen, British Foreign Office memorandum cited by Hoff, p.199.
Oestreicher, My Cold War Life in No Man's Land, October 1999.
Ibid., letter to Norden, 18 July 1963.
The counter proposal was that the cities of Coventry and Dresden should arrange through the city twinning structure for groups of young people to create memorials in each other's cities, with the Dresden group being given permission to travel to Britain.
Ellic Howe, The Black Game: British subversive operations against the Germans during the Second World War, (London: Michael Joseph, 1982). Howe cites Thomas Barman, a senior officer at Woburn, as saying of Crossman: 'It has been said of him that he is a great stirrer-up of hornet's nests. I do not agree. Crossman, it seems to me, is a hornet's nest all to himself', p.55. Tam Dalyell, Dick Crossman: A Portrait, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson), 1989. 'Crossman was one of those people who adored fishing in troubled waters. He found a thrill in struggle and strife... He was one of Mother Nature's stirrer-uppers', p.67.
Marianne Bell also noted this omission. 'Interestingly too, there is no mention of the DDR (or Dresden) in Richard Crossman's Diaries of a Cabinet Minister...', p 332, footnote 6. The index to the Crossman biography by Anthony Howard lists six references to Germany, all except one before or during the Second World War. Howard complained that he had not been given access to some documents about Crossman's wartime activities, p.356. His book makes no mention of Dresden. In a telephone interview with the author, Howard said he 'knew very little about Crossman and the period in relation to Dresden and Coventry', 29.9.99.
Ibid., p. 142.
Michael Stenton, Radio London and Resistance in Occupied Europe: British Political Warfare 1939-1943, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). 'Münzenberg had been the director of communist `agitprop' in Berlin when Richard Crossman had turned up to sit at the Master's feet and learn the trade', p.4.
Howard, Crossman, p.34.

Crossman, 'Introduction', in *The God that Failed: Six Studies in Communism*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1950), with contributions by Koestler, Ignazio Silone, André Gide (presented by Enid Starkie), Richard Wright, Louis Fischer and Stephen Spender, p. 11. This book was, according to Stonor Saunders, '...as much a product of intelligence as it was a work of the intelligentsia', most of the contributions having been published in a monthly magazine, *Der Monat*, a publication supported and at times financed by the CIA. Three of the contributors, Koestler, Fischer and Silone, had worked for Münzenberg. The book was promoted by the US government and by the Information Research Department in Britain. See *Who Paid the Piper*, pp. 63-66.

Ibid., p. 12.

Howard, *Crossman*, p. 84.

For a description of the work of the Political Warfare Executive and German émigrés, see Anthony Gleans, *Exile Politics during the Second World War*.

Howe, *The Black Game*, p. 84.

SAPMO-BArch, NL 182/1317, report from SED Bezirksleitung Dresden to Ulbricht, 19 August 1957. The report notes that, in conversation with a Dresden councillor, Crossman had said that all important members of the West Germany SPD executive were personally known to him because most of them had been in England during the war and he had used them in propaganda broadcasts.


MRCWU, Richard Crossman Papers, MSS. 154/3/AU/1/344, notes on the German situation by Crossman for consideration by the Parliamentary Labour Party Foreign Affairs Group at its meeting on Monday, July 13th [1953].


Ibid.


MRCWU, Richard Crossman Papers, MSS. 154/3/AU/1/239-512, note to Major General K W D Strong, 1 August 1950. According to Howard in his Crossman biography, Crossman interviewed the Soviet writer for the *New Statesman* when he was invited to Britain by the British Peace Committee.

Ibid., MSS. 154/6/1/413, 'The Lesson of Dresden', by Richard Crossman. This article was published in the American magazine *Esquire* but was omitted from the English edition of Crossman's book *Planning for Freedom* mainly because, as Crossman wrote in a note to his American publishers, Atheneum, dated 1 December 1964, 'it proves Churchill a war criminal'.


Ibid., MSS. 154/8/27, diary entry dictated 17 July 1963.


Dalyell, *Dick Crossman*, p. 66.

SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20, *Abteilung Internationale Verbindungen* report on steps to be taken to improve relations between Britain and the GDR. Norden was delegated to be the person to send a letter of invitation to Crossman, who was the only MP to be singled out for such personal contact. Others named in the report, such as Michael Foot, Barbara Castle and George Wigg were simply to be sent a general invitation from the GDR's international parliamentary association, 14 August 1963.

MRCWU, Richard Crossman Papers, MSS. 154/8/29/12, transcribed diary entry of visit to the GDR, 6-9 August 1962. Otto Winzer, deputy Foreign Minister, told Crossman after a heated discussion: 'Well, a bit of a row does both of us good....'
Crossman told Eberlein that he would like to discuss German matters with either Grotewohl or Ulbricht, preferably the former. Eberlein returned to East Berlin to see if this could be arranged and met Crossman again, together with his wife, in East Berlin in the sleeping compartment of a train en route to Poland. Grotewohl was willing to meeting Crossman but a mutually convenient date could not be found and so Crossman said he would return to Germany soon. Eberlein recorded that the Crossman he met in the train was totally different from the man he had met in West Berlin; he was more relaxed and friendly. Eberlein defected to West Germany in 1960.

SAPMO-BArch, NL 182/1317, report by retired GDR army officer Hummeltenberg of a meeting between Crossman and members of the GDR former army officers society, sent to Ulbricht, 16.1.1960.

Willy Brandt, People and Politics, p.20. According to Brandt, the question in Berlin was would the Allies sit back and accept the new development. In effect, they did. 'Seventy-two hours elapsed before a protest - couched in terms that were little more than routine - was lodged in Moscow,' Brandt noted, p.16. His interpretation of events in 1961 is supported by John Lewis Gaddis in We Know Now. Rethinking Cold War History, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997). Gaddis has documented the readiness of the USA not to react strongly against the building of the Berlin Wall. p.148.

Oestreicher, 'The wall was not so bad', in The Guardian, 10 November 1999.

LDS, OB 4.2.3/6, Schill's report of a discussion with Crossman, 8 August 1961.

Roberts, Dealing with Dictators, p.215. According to Roberts, 'We in Moscow had no inkling that this [the building of the Wall] was in the wind, and indeed very little seems to have been known even in Berlin,' p.215.

MRCWU, Richard Crossman Papers, MSS.154/8/29/9, transcribed diary entry of visit to GDR, 6-9 August 1962.
The possibility that the Soviet Union would hand over its powers in Berlin and access to the city to the GDR was first proposed by Khrushchev in 1958. See Larres, 'Britain and the GDR', in Uneasy Allies.

Howard, Crossman, Page xi. Howard says that he treated the Crossman diaries with scepticism, especially after 1962 when Crossman started dictating directly to tape without the discipline of a secretary to question what he said.

MRCWU, Richard Crossman Papers, MSS.154/8/2/9, transcribed diary entry of visit to GDR, 6-9 August 1962.

Lerner, Psychological Warfare, p.333.


Interviews with Martin Turner, 18 to 21 February 1999, and with Michael Butterfield, 6 March 1999.

Williams, unpublished memoirs, circa 1989, p 59.

Ibid., p 61.

Ibid., p 16


Williams, unpublished memoirs, circa 1989. 'Richard Crossman was - as he was to all who knew him - an enigma......', p.16.
CHAPTER 7

The Cold War World of Non-Governmental Diplomacy: Grass Roots and the Schill Affair

Introduction

It sometimes appeared during the first half of the 1960s that in the view of the GDR no stone was too small to be left unturned in the bid to influence public opinion in Britain in favour of recognition. Alongside attempts to win support from MPs and others at national level, the GDR also implemented a step-by-step approach of establishing contact at regional level, a policy known as kommunale Auslandsverbindungen. Contact at local government level had existed since the 1950s, the cities of Coventry and Dresden being the prime example, but the grass-roots strategy was given a more formal structure in 1963, just as the first seeds of the Coventry/Dresden project were being sown in Britain.

Responsibility for implementing policy relating to recognition lay with the MfAA. The change in the emphasis of the GDR's recognition strategy from national to local level resulted in a flurry of activity between local councils in the GDR and Britain which was directed by the MfAA. The intention was twofold. The GDR hoped not only to influence public opinion in favour of recognition, but also to erode the travel restrictions imposed on GDR citizens by the Allied Travel Office (ATO) which processed all applications by GDR citizens who wished to travel to the West. It was anticipated that British local councillors would issue invitations to their GDR partners who would, in the normal course of events, be refused permission to enter Britain. There would then be a public outcry in Britain, orchestrated by the would-be hosts, which would draw attention to the way in which GDR citizens were discriminated against by Nato countries. ¹ This chapter will examine probably the most notable example of the manner in which this tactic was exploited; the affair of Dresden Oberbürgermeister Schill and the invitation issued by Coventry City Council in 1965. It will show how the affair became entangled with the Coventry/Dresden project while
at the same time demonstrating the lack of a direct connection between the GDR's recognition policy and the Coventry/Dresden project, the latter not being within the remit of the MfAA.

Archival evidence demonstrates that the MfAA was excluded almost entirely from the organisation of the Coventry/Dresden project. The few references to the project contained within the MfAA archive fall into two categories. They are either copies of reports from other ministries, such as the SfK, sent for information, or they refer to visa problems. There are no documents indicating that the MfAA was involved in the decision-making process relating to the Coventry/Dresden project. Indeed the few comments put on paper indicate that the MfAA was anxious not to have anything to do with it. For example, in August 1965, the MfAA department responsible for relations with Britain advised colleagues that it would be just as well 'not to put the rebuilding of the Dresden hospital on the agenda any more'. This advice was issued in connection with the problems encountered by the British group as a result of the Schill affair. Difficulties relating to the project were all referred back to the SfK. By way of contrast, MfAA documents reveal that it did monitor other Christian activity. A visit by Oestreicher to the GDR in 1965 at the head of a group of British Christian students merited a five-page report on the group's tour of the GDR. The strange omission of any report whatsoever in the MfAA archive, or for that matter the SfK archive and the Dresden local authority archives, of the activities of the group of young Britons staying in the country for several months leads inevitably to the conclusion that these authorities were given to understand that the matter was being handled elsewhere.

Inter-city relationships were, however, the preserve of the MfAA. In 1963, it advocated taking a realistic approach towards the sort of person who should be targeted at grass roots. The criteria for invitation should be 'the public influence held by the person in question', not their political persuasion. Invitations should be issued not only to people known to be left-wingers sympathetic to the GDR but also to members of the Conservative and Liberal Parties as well as those involved in the intellectual, cultural and sporting life of the area concerned. In the context of the Coventry/Dresden project though, it is noticeable that the MfAA did not go so far as to suggest that Christians should be included on the list of
possible guests. It would appear that there was a lack of communication at ministerial level between Ulbricht's domestic goal of Christian/ Marxist co-operation and his foreign policy goal of achieving recognition. There is no evidence of the MfAA pursuing a policy of encouraging Christian/ Marxist dialogue in relation to its city twinning programmes. The ministry does not appear to have been privy to Ulbricht's strategy of using the Coventry/ Dresden project for domestic purposes.

_kommunale Auslandsverbindungen_

The policy of _kommunale Auslandsverbindungen_ was seen in strictly foreign policy terms. In addition to fomenting relations between Britain and the GDR, it was also intended to combat West German attempts to forge friendship links with ordinary Britons. The MfAA noted the existence by the early 1960s of about 150 West German links with British towns or cities which, it claimed, were used to propagate anti-GDR propaganda. The GDR plan was to attempt to beat the West Germans at their own game. In September 1964, _The Scotsman_ newspaper noted anxiety in Bonn over increased town twinning arrangements between the GDR and France where similar tactics were being used. The article said:

"...Erfurt and Lille have had one of these arrangements for some years. Thirteen others have been made recently and another seven are on the way. The political significance in the case of East Germany of these otherwise harmless arrangements is that they tend to build up the independent status of East Germany and lay the foundations for her eventual recognition..."8

Such was the concern of the West Germans over the GDR's twinning arrangements that the GDR suspected West Germany of putting pressure on the British to deliberately create difficulties for British towns wishing to form a twinning arrangement with the GDR. In August 1964, the MfAA recommended that there should be no publicity about negotiations to arrange twinning agreements with Britain until everything was signed and sealed because premature announcements gave the 'enemy' time to mount an effective campaign of obstruction.10 In 1965, the MfAA learned that the Sussex town of Crawley had been warned by Foreign Office Minister George Thomson against forming an official link with Eisenhüttenstadt. He had, apparently, told Crawley Council that there was a danger of political exploitation by the communist powers.11 By this time, the GDR believed that the prevention of new twinning arrangements had become part of the official policy of the Labour government.12
The relatively liberal proposals put forward by the MfAA to encourage people of different or no political persuasions to visit the GDR do not appear to have found favour with Party leaders, steeped in the conventional communist wisdom of dealing only with those who had already been converted. Proposals on local authority contact from the foreign affairs advisory body of the Politburo Agitation Commission in 1964 carried the dead hand of SED ideology. The GDR should seek assistance with its twinning arrangements in Britain from local government politicians who were members of the British Communist Party, the report said. Invitations to the GDR should be issued to people who had already visited and who remained in touch. Old faithfuls, such as councillors William Callow, of Coventry, and Illtyd Harrington, of London, whose left-wing reputations endeared them to the GDR but limited their effectiveness as British opinion formers, should be used to spearhead the drive for more British contact. On the whole, this was the approach that was adopted. Predictable contacts were made with left-wing councillors running left-wing councils. Once again, Christians were not on the guest list.

Another factor which hindered the GDR's kommunale Auslandsverbindungen policy was its ignorance of basic facts about Britain. Policy makers had to rely on a handful of sympathetic fellow travellers in Britain to provide them with elementary information about British public life. In October 1964, a letter was sent to Hilda Forman, a member of the British Communist Party and active friend of the GDR, asking for assistance. Written in English, the letter is not signed but appears to be from a friend. The subject is kommunale Auslandsverbindungen, though the language is cryptic and the style is conspiratorial. The friend appears to be highly placed. He/she knows that Ulbricht and Stoph are giving their backing to the plans. The letter reads, in part:

"After John [possibly John Gollan, General Secretary of the British Communist Party] has returned, reported and delivered I first of all want to repeat what I tried to express on the phone. I think that by the message, the return-message and the event last Sunday we have - to be modest - at least begun to be effective on a mass basis. I know that W. Ulbricht and W. Stoph are in agreement with this. I think this is something you can be proud of as the main burden has been on you... I feel that I have to inform you by writing of a few discussions I had with Städte-u. Gemeindetag. It concerns mostly Fred [possibly Fred Tonge, London councillor] but I would like you to inform and discuss it with him. The reason for not writing to him directly is that it is not advisable to entrust this letter to the ordinary mail."

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The letter goes on to ask for advice on finding partner towns. The writer wants a handbook giving a 'short characterist (sic) of towns and their newly elected members of council and offices'. He/she would also like an 'Education Authorities Directory'. In addition the writer would like 'Stanley' to supply information about 'a number of newly appointed members of governments of which I know nothing about. Beside that I don't even have a complete list of them.'

The GDR was obviously struggling to implement its kommunale Auslandsverbindungen policy with one hand tied behind its back. Ignorance sometimes led to comical results. GDR officials were surprised to discover, for example, that the mayor of a British city or town changed from year to year. It was disconcerting for them to find that, having expended considerable effort in cultivating a particular mayor, that person should so quickly fade into the background. On occasion, the invitations issued were so parochial that the recipients of the official largesse must have been astounded to have received them. In September 1964, for example, Bezirk Schwerin was host to a four-man delegation from Dorset and Somerset, an area not known for its radical politics. The delegation was led by an independent councillor, Alderman Bertie Hunt, who had written to the GDR expressing an interest in seeing the country. He was an awkward customer, sniffing his way suspiciously around the factory and other visits which had been set up for him before returning, in Ealing Comedy fashion, to obscurity at Fern Cottage, Blandford Forum. This visit merited a six-page report to the MfAA and was deemed a success. Sometimes MfAA officials showed themselves to be better briefed. An SED member in Erfurt received a brusque reply when he wrote to the MfAA in great excitement to say he had made contact with a Harrow school. He believed this to be the school which educated the children of Britain's elite and planned to invite some pupils over in order to influence them to influence their parents. The school named was not the famous public school and the enthusiastic official was told in no uncertain terms to do nothing.

On the whole it proved to be much harder than expected for the GDR to establish firm links with local authority areas in Britain. By October 1965, an MfAA report revealed that only three firm twinning arrangements had been established, these being Dresden and
Coventry, Ölsnitz and Buckhaven in Scotland, and Eisenhüttenstadt and Crawley. In addition, close contact existed between Prenzlau and Stockport, Rostock and Plymouth, and Meissen and Stoke-on-Trent. The report noted that although this was progress of a kind it was not very satisfactory, considering that West Germany had by then increased its twinning arrangements to 170.

The outstanding success, the blue print for all others to follow, was undoubtedly the Coventry/Dresden connection. The birth of this connection, however, owed little to the machinations of the GDR. It was a fortuitous link brought about by a powerful and left-wing city council in Coventry with ambitions to influence international politics, plus the fact that both cities shared a history of wartime bombing raids - though of vastly different magnitude. At first glance, it might appear that the Coventry/Dresden project was in accord with the policy of grass-roots influence and a natural offshoot of the city relationship. But closer analysis reveals that far from being consistent with GDR policy, it was, in fact, an anomaly. However great the value placed on the Coventry/Dresden city connection, there was never, at an official level, any question of encouraging Church contact. Those in the driving seat in Coventry were probably as opposed to the cathedral's involvement in the relationship as those in the GDR. The relationship between Coventry City Council and Coventry Cathedral was one of mutual suspicion.

The two cities first established contact in 1956 when Coventry City Council sent a copy of its official emblem to Dresden. In 1958, a group of Dresden councillors visited Coventry and thereafter for a couple of years there was continual if low-key contact between the two cities. The relationship became more active in 1961 when two forceful personalities were elected as Lord Mayors of their respective cities - Callow in Coventry and Schill in Dresden. Callow, a former car industry worker, carved out a place for himself on the international stage. In August 1961, after the erection of the Berlin Wall, he issued an appeal for international peace which was given wide publicity. Following the appeal, he organised a peace conference in Coventry which was attended by the mayors of other cities linked to Coventry - Warsaw, Volgograd, Lidice, Graz and Caen. In 1962, Callow was instrumental in establishing the Coventry Committee for International Understanding which became the
liaison organisation for Coventry's links with other cities, including Dresden. Callow's political views were summed up in a letter he wrote to the editor of the West Berlin newspaper *Der Tag* in 1962 in response to the paper's attack on his views.

"...I do not accept that everything in the West is white and everything in the East is black... there is much, very much, that is good in the DDR. I am, like thousands of other Englishmen, not afraid to study Communist economic philosophy and ideology objectively. There are many things that as an Englishman I do not like... but, at the same time, I realise that the conditions under which it is instituted and operating will very largely determine the method of its application and West Berlin are doing everything in their power to say that it cannot operate at all... I have so little confidence in your idea of freedom where there is ample evidence of the complete suppression of any opposing point of view in West Berlin, from where I have had letters from individuals asking me not to mention their names because they would be sacked from their positions and victimised in other directions if it became known that they had suggested even the possibility that I might be right."\(^\text{23}\)

Between 1961 and 1965 there were a number of exchanges between Coventry and Dresden. In June 1961, an unofficial delegation from Dresden visited Coventry for the unveiling of a mural by a Dresden artist. There had been difficulties obtaining travel documents, a problem which was to dog the relationship.\(^\text{24}\) During the course of this visit, discussions also took place on the consecration of Coventry's new cathedral, due to take place in May 1962. One suggestion that was put forward was that a Coventry/Dresden Friendship week should be held in both cities at that time with the emphasis on sport, culture and political events in order to detract from the 'sacred character' of the event. In April 1962, Callow attended a peace conference in Dresden. Young people from Coventry were invited to attend a holiday camp in Dresden in August 1963. But in 1963 some overtures from Dresden were rebuffed. Coventry decided not to take up Dresden's suggestion that a representative should attend a Nazi show trial in East Berlin, and also refused to become involved in attempts to organise celebrations in London on the fourteenth anniversary of the founding of the GDR.\(^\text{25}\)

The most positive development took place on 14 February 1964 when representatives of both cities signed a Friendship Treaty cementing the relationship between the two cities. Both parties promised to increase exchanges in the areas of local politics, culture, sport, science and education.\(^\text{26}\) It was agreed that a Dresden/Coventry Friendship Committee would be set up in Dresden which would liaise with the Coventry Committee for
International Understanding. Among other initiatives to be taken, a group from Coventry would be invited to attend the 15th anniversary of the founding of the GDR in October 1964. Contact would be encouraged between trade unions and a delegation would be invited from Coventry to Dresden. A football match would also be arranged.

**Tourism**

There was one other area of GDR policy formulated during the first half of the 1960s which, it could be argued, helped to create the climate in which the Coventry/Dresden project could take place. Unlikely though it may seem, that area was tourism. GDR town and city authorities were instructed that every effort should be made to encourage tourism in the various regions, and particular efforts should be made to attract tourists from capitalist countries. Although the word 'tourist' was so broadly defined that it appeared to include almost any visitor, from businessmen to political delegations, this was another move which demonstrated a degree of flexibility taking place among policy makers. Dresden, as a city of art and culture, was regarded as a key attraction.

The decision to encourage tourists from capitalist countries was made by the Politburo Sekretariat at the end of 1963. Local authorities were ordered to take appropriate action to make their areas more tourist-friendly. In Dresden plans were drawn up for such practical measures as constructing public toilets in the city centre, increasing the number of hotel beds and making arrangements for shops to open on Sundays. But the wheels of bureaucracy grind exceeding slow. By April the following year it was noted that nothing had been done about building the new tourist accommodation which was supposed to open in May and a note was made that someone must be put in charge to make sure that plans were put into action.

Dresden's efforts to draw in the tourists appear to have been fairly effective judging by figures which were issued in 1966. The number of tourists from capitalist countries roughly doubled from 4,611 in 1963 to 8,068 in 1965. These figures were still small compared to the number of visitors from non-capitalist countries. In September 1964, for example, there were 27,817 foreign tourists in Dresden, of which only 454 came from
capitalist countries. Nevertheless, it was a goodly number in a city cut off from most of the rest of the world behind the Iron Curtain. The countries included in the 'capitalist' category are not named. It is, therefore, not known whether the figure of 454 included those from, for example, Africa or Asia. It did include visitors from West Germany, many of whom came to visit their relatives. These, like many of the others included in the figures, would not usually be regarded as tourists; members, for example, of study groups and delegations, such as groups of teachers from Strasbourg and England, and economic journalists from capitalist countries were included. The 'tourists' were closely observed with reports on their attitudes and behaviour being received by local SED leaders from the official travel bureau, the Volkspolizei and hotel staff, among others. Most French and British visitors, it was reported, did not know who had destroyed Dresden. Some 'tourists' were important enough to warrant individual mention. In November, for example, it was noted that David Irving had visited Dresden again. He was taken to see some recent reconstruction work and expressed himself very satisfied that buildings destroyed by his compatriots now stood once again in all their glory.

The connection between the cities of Dresden and Coventry was seen as a part of the GDR's tourist offensive. Under the section on work with city partners, the report on November 1964 tourism noted a visit from the vice-president of Coventry art college and the fact that he intended to return with a group of 35 students in 1965. Buried within this section, is one of very few references to the Coventry/Dresden project to be found in Dresden city or Bezirk archives. It was noted that the Provost of Coventry Cathedral had launched an appeal to raise money for the rebuilding of the Diakonissenkrankenhaus and that a group of young British volunteers would be coming to Dresden to do the work in the spring of 1965. The authors of the report made no overt comment on the significance or otherwise of this scheme. However, it is apparent that they were aware of the fact that the visit of this particular group of 'tourists' was in the hands of more senior colleagues. They had been informed by the Bezirk representative of the SfK that Williams had reached agreement with Seigewasser, and that in January 1965 an advisory meeting would be held with Bezirk SED leaders and representatives of the Bezirk council's Kirchenfragen department. The city officials seem to have been disgruntled about being left out in the cold.
'It would be appropriate,' said the report, 'if the responsible comrades of the SED city leadership and the city council were also consulted.' With this slightly miffed remark the report's authors moved smartly on to the subject of the Strasbourg Friendship Committee and links between workers' sporting organisations.

By 1966, local officials in Dresden had decided it was prudent hardly to mention the project at all. In a report on tourism in 1965, under a section headed 'Activities of the Dresden/Coventry Friendship Committee' the eight-month-long major building project was given a mere one-and-half lines. 'Young Christians from Coventry helped with the reconstruction of the Diakonissenkrankenhaus,' it reported. By contrast a two-week visit by a youth delegation from Coventry to help build a rose garden in Dresden merited five lines and an eight-day visit by six Coventry teachers was given another five lines. The presence of a group of young British people in Dresden for the best part of 1965 was almost ignored in the records of the Bezirk and city officials with a responsibility for foreign visitors.

The official invisibility of this group becomes even more apparent when it is compared to the meticulous fashion in which preparations and plans were made for other visitors. A random example, for instance, is that of a group of young West Germans who visited Dresden for a week during the period that the project was taking place. Their whole programme was carefully planned with visits to places of interest and receptions with city representatives. It is evident that the British volunteers taking part in the Coventry/Dresden project were not considered to be, and not treated as though they were a part of the tourist offensive. The group had no Betreuer, a politically sound person who was detailed to accompany most visitors or delegations. It had no itinerary or schedule, and there were no restrictions on where its members could go. On his return from the GDR, the group leader, Martin Turner, reported to the British Council of Churches that:

"We were given complete freedom to go anywhere in East Germany we wanted to. We weren't in any way restricted or followed and the group did, in fact, visit every major town, bar two, in East Germany during out stay there."
The Allied Travel Office

The GDR's efforts to encourage two-way exchanges between Britons and East Germans were hampered by the restrictions imposed by the British in line with Nato policy. The British attitude towards GDR citizens who wanted to visit Britain was a constant bone of contention between Britain and the GDR. One of the results of the policy of non-recognition was that the GDR passport was also not recognised by Britain or indeed by any of other Nato country. Until 1962, the British entered the nationality of GDR citizens on travel documents as 'Presumed German'. Any GDR citizen who wished to travel to the West was obliged to obtain a document known as a Temporary Travel Document (TTD) which was issued by the Nato-run ATO in West Berlin. The ATO had been established shortly after the end of the Second World War, described as a relief organisation, since, at that time, there was no central German government and therefore no valid German passport. Originally, the ATO enabled German citizens from both East and West to travel despite the lack of documents, but increasingly, as the years went by, and West Germany became a sovereign state with its own passport, it became a weapon in the West's battle against GDR recognition. The British government was loath to acknowledge this role - at least publicly. The aim was to create the impression that it was solely GDR-imposed restrictions which prevented its citizens from travelling to the West. In 1965, in response to correspondence relating to a woman living in Britain who wanted her East German parents to visit her, a Foreign Office official advised:

"Mr Thomson [George Thomson, Minister of State at the Foreign Office] has asked me firstly to make a general point that any letter to Members of Parliament should put the blame for the lack of travel facilities, especially for old folk, from East Germany squarely on the East German authorities and not give any hint that the Nato allies are at fault."36

The issue had become increasingly live during the course of 1965, with a number of parliamentary questions being asked about the role of the ATO. The rules governing who was eligible for a TTD and the manner in which those rules were interpreted varied from time to time depending on political tensions. Fundamentally, though, the principle was to refuse a TTD to anyone who could be said to hold a political position or who claimed to be a member of an official delegation. However, whether by design or not, quite innocuous individuals were often caught up in the bureaucratic web and found themselves unable to obtain the documents needed to be allowed in to Britain.
It became one of the major objectives of GDR foreign policy between 1963 and 1965 to circumvent Allied travel policy. The regime argued that the Nato-imposed travel restrictions were contrary to international law. The GDR's aim was not simply to increase the number of its citizens travelling in Nato countries, but to get rid of the ATO altogether and obtain the recognition of GDR passports. The argument put forward was that 'the continuation of the Cold War in the area of international travel is a dangerous anachronism'. The GDR, being a sovereign state with absolute passport sovereignty, had a clear and legal right to the recognition and respect of its passport. By refusing to recognise the GDR passport, Nato countries were violating the UN charter. The fact that Nato countries did not recognise the GDR diplomatically was irrelevant. It was still their duty to allow people to travel, respect their rights and promote contact in the interests of international peace. The ATO was a hangover from the Second World War. The frontline troops in this battle were those engaged in trade together with Bezirk officials and other local personalities who might be invited to Britain as part of the kommunale Auslandsverbindungen policy. They were kept up-to-date on their role and the arguments behind the attack on the ATO by briefing papers from the MfAA.

An increase in the amount of British Foreign Office attention given to this matter in 1964/65 indicates that in this area at least, the GDR achieved some success. A British Foreign Office report in January 1965 noted that there had been a 'frontal attack' on the Allied Travel Office. The 'line had been held' but concerns were expressed that some other Western countries were showing signs of weakness. Prominent East Germans had, apparently, visited Paris, Rome, Brussels and Athens without going through the ATO and in August 1964 an SED delegation had visited Rome for the funeral of the leader of the Italian Communist Party, Pietro Togliatti. GDR policy was to push continually against the boundaries imposed by the ATO in order to discover any weaknesses and also to expose what it held to be illegal discrimination against its citizens, contrary to international law. For example, in 1965 there was a plan to test whether or not Britain would accept the holder of a GDR diplomatic passport, and the Labour MP, Ian Mikardo, a GDR champion in this cause,
was to be sent the names of various GDR officials, potential visitors, for his advice and consideration.\textsuperscript{42}

However, the \emph{cause célèbre} of 1965 in this long running battle was the case of Dresden \emph{Oberbürgermeister} Schill and his invitation to Coventry. The events surrounding this \emph{contretemps} almost put an end to the Coventry/Dresden project. In itself, it is an interesting case study which provides an insight into the intricacies of Anglo/GDR relations at the time. But, more importantly, given the weight attached by the GDR at that time to circumventing British travel policy, the fact that the Schill affair did not kill the Coventry/Dresden project is yet another major indication of the significance of the project in other policy areas.

\textbf{The Schill Affair}

In May 1965, an exhibition was held in Coventry entitled \textit{Dresden - city of socialist industry, culture and science}. The exhibition was scheduled to last two weeks to coincide with a Dresden fortnight which was taking place in Coventry. Other events included the showing of films, and performances by the \textit{Dresdener Staatskapelle}. Schill had been invited by the then Lord Mayor of Coventry, Tom Whiteman, to perform the official opening of the exhibition on 15 May.

In the eyes of both the British and the East Germans, this was a major event. For the East Germans it would have been a platform on which to propagate their message that the GDR was a peace-loving state, anxious to have good relations with Britain. The British hosts, the Coventry Committee for International Understanding, chaired by Callow, were equally enthusiastic that this message should be put across. The British government, on the other hand, was determined to forestall these plans. The exhibition thus became a matter of international importance. For both countries it was a very public testing of the travel restrictions imposed on East German citizens.

It is possible to interpret the affair as merely a high-profile example of the GDR's scheme to highlight what it saw as the iniquities of the ATO by attempting to send a political
figure to Britain, in this case Schill, in the full knowledge that he would never be allowed into the country. The strategy would be to keep up a pretence of trying to obtain permission for him to travel in order to focus British public opinion on what was deemed to be illegal discrimination against GDR citizens. There are indications, however, that, for reasons related to the presence in the GDR of the young volunteers taking part in the Coventry/Dresden project, the regime genuinely believed that an exception might be made for Schill. In the event Schill was refused permission to enter Britain and in a tit-for-tat move an order was issued to expel the British group from Dresden.

An examination of the circumstances surrounding the abortive visit demonstrates the enormous weight that was attached to contact between the two countries at this time, and the manner in which the East Germans meticulously planned such visits so that they could be used to their full advantage with delegations acting as the mouthpiece of the GDR government. It also illustrates the way in which the British government used the ATO in West Berlin in order to regulate and control visits by East German citizens. While the British public was, on the whole, well aware of the travel restrictions placed on GDR citizens by their own government, they were much less well informed about the travel restrictions imposed on East Germans by the British government. In the event, the furore that arose over the abortive Schill visit appears to have played into the hands of the East Germans rather than the British.

In its planning for the trip, the MfAA spelled out four particular reasons why it considered this visit to be so important. Firstly, there was the fact that the Coventry/Dresden connection was much valued by the East Germans. Secondly it would be a counter-attack on British efforts to prevent new twinning arrangements. Thirdly, the East Germans were nervous about a visit by West German SPD leader, Willy Brandt, to Coventry, planned for April. It feared that he would speak out against the Dresden connection. The Schill visit would provide an opportunity to counteract any damage that had been done. Finally, Coventry had indicated that it might pull out of the World Federation of Twinned Cities, to which Dresden also belonged. The MfAA was anxious to prevent such a move, believing it would weaken Coventry's ties with Dresden. These were the overt reasons why the trip had
priority. But the sequence of events surrounding the Schill affair point to the fact that behind these fairly innocuous reasons for promoting the visit even more was at stake.

Initially it appears that the GDR was under the impression that it might be possible to obtain permission for Schill to visit Coventry without going through the ATO process. In March, an MfAA missive had proposed that an attempt be made to arrange the visit by asking Coventry officials to use their influence. These plans were discussed by the Politburo Sekretariat in May where it was agreed that the visit was 'a foreign policy necessity', an indication of the importance being attached to the visit. By this time, though, it had become evident that the attempts by Coventry City Council to obtain entry permits for the Schill party without the interference of the ATO had failed. Nevertheless, the minutes of the meeting contain no hint that the mission was doomed despite the fact that the members of the Sekretariat would have been well aware that Schill and his party would fall into the category of politically active people who would not normally be given entry permits. It would not have been the first time Schill had been refused permission to visit Britain. The previous Dresden Oberbürgermeister had also been refused entry in 1960. The plans for Schill's visit, however, went ahead as though the GDR was not merely playing a propaganda game of pushing the British into vetoing the visit. The Sekretariat went on to agree financial arrangements for the trip. No trickery is evident on paper.

Detailed instructions were drawn up on the precise manner in which the members of the Schill delegation should behave when they got to Coventry and what they should say, these instructions being approved by the Sekretariat and ranging from policy statements to the laying of wreaths. The final instruction stressed the duty of the delegation to expose the machinations of the ATO and the way in which it was used to illegally restrict East Germans' freedom to travel.

The delegation will explain about the discrimination against GDR citizens travelling to Nato countries and reveal the role of the so-called Allied Travel Office in West Berlin, (which is directed by West Germany), as a remnant of the Second World War that interferes with the sovereignty of another country contrary to international law.

In view of the fact that the delegation would almost certainly fall foul of the ATO itself, it is a strange instruction for which there appear to be two possible explanations. The
regime was either taking game playing to the limits, instructing people to expose
discrimination when by virtue of that discrimination they would not be able to do so. Or else
the Sekretariat really did believe that an exception would be made in this case and Schill
would be allowed in. But what grounds could they have for believing that to be the case?
Did the Sekretariat think that a quid pro quo might be offered for the presence of the
Coventry group in Dresden? There is no documentary evidence to support the theory; indeed
no mention is made in any of the background materials relating to the Schill trip to the
presence in the GDR of a large party of British people representing Coventry, another
example of an omission which is notable by its absence since the links between Coventry
and Dresden were, on the surface, the raison d'être for the visit.

Whatever the East Germans may have hoped for in terms of reciprocity, it was not to
be. However, the attitude of the British government suggests that the East Germans might
have had grounds for believing that Anglo/GDR co-operation over the Coventry/Dresden
project would be stretched to include the Schill visit. British documents indicate that Schill
and the Coventry/Dresden project were definitely linked in the minds of Foreign Office
officials. On one such document referring to the Schill matter which noted that it was
Foreign Office policy to refuse to allow entry to political figures there is a handwritten note
by Holmer, who had liaised with the Provost of Coventry Cathedral in West Berlin in
1963. The note reads: 'Provost Williams knows the score'. What 'the score' was, as far as
Williams is concerned, remains a mystery but it is evident that the Schill visit, Williams and
the Coventry/Dresden project were not unrelated. As the story of the Schill affair unfolded,
the two became increasingly meshed.

On 26 April, Schill applied to the ATO for travel documents to go to Coventry. Ten
days later, having heard nothing, Schill phoned the ATO asking for news. He was told the
application was being dealt with and he should wait for an answer. He also wrote to the
MfAA enclosing his passport and those of the other members of the delegation so that they
could be appropriately stamped. On 13 May, on the day he was due to travel and two days
before he was due to open the exhibition, Schill received a telegram from the ATO saying
that his application had been refused. The story was covered in newspapers in both Britain and West Germany.

Kreyssig, the head of Aktion Sühnezeichen, on a visit to West Germany, read about it in a newspaper in Nuremberg on 16 May. He immediately feared for the future of the Coventry/Dresden project and rang Aktion Sühnezeichen in West Berlin to ask it to take action. Aktion Sühnezeichen contacted Williams who wrote to the West German Ambassador in London asking him urgently to 'revise' the refusal to allow Schill in. Meanwhile, in Dresden, the city council had appealed to Turner, the project leader, for assistance. He reported that the Bishop of Coventry had also made representations. Kreyssig himself refrained from making any public statements because of Seigewasser's instructions that Aktion Sühnezeichen's involvement in Dresden must not become public. He feared that public argument might destroy the chance of a settlement. His fears were justified.

On 18 May, five days after Schill heard that he would not be given a TTD, the Arbeitsgruppe Kirchenfragen drew up an order to expel the British from Dresden 'immediately' thus bringing the project to a close. In addition, visas were to be refused to a further party of volunteers due to arrive in Dresden in June. The reasons for the expulsion order were given as follows:

"The Lord Mayor of Dresden, Gerhard Schill, intended to take part in the opening of an exhibition in Coventry of both partner cities, Coventry and Dresden. The Allied Travel Board in West Berlin prohibited him from obtaining a travel permit. This discrimination against the leader of the city interferes considerably with the good relations between both cities. Since 16 March 1965, young English citizens have been working in Dresden doing voluntary building work organised by Provost Williams of Coventry Cathedral at the Diakonissenkrankenhaus in Dresden. It was agreed with the state agencies to let them work within the framework of city contact. At the moment seven young English citizens are active there. While the GDR has taken all possible steps towards détente and understanding and created the opportunity for English citizens to stay in the GDR, from the English side GDR citizens have been discriminated against by denying them travel permits. Therefore, it is not possible for the English citizens to remain in GDR territory as long as the Lord Mayor of Dresden does not obtain a travel permit to England without discrimination."
This order was not carried out and no further documentary evidence relating to it has been found. The British group in Dresden was never told about the expulsion order. Turner said he was unaware of it. 'Nobody ever, the whole time we were there suggested to me that my visa was in any doubt at all. I had no hint of it.'

On the same day, 18 May, rather belatedly, Mikardo wrote to the Home Office requesting that the matter of the Schill visa be resolved quickly and in his favour. Schill wrote a two-page letter to the Lord Mayor of Coventry on 24 May, detailing the manner in which his application had been handled from which it appears that the British were trying to distance themselves from the ATO by saying it was a matter for that office only. It was evident that both Schill and the MfAA wished the affair to be made as public as possible. Schill enclosed with his letter the telegram he had received from the ATO refusing his application. He also quoted back to the Lord Mayor the words of Callow, which had appeared in the Daily Worker of 20 May 1965, accusing the British government of playing games.

"... the Foreign Office comment that a visa had not been applied for is only a red herring because visas are only provided on the recommendation of the ATO and this, as the facts prove, had already been refused. It is all a question of the Allied Travel Office, to which an English representative belongs. Therefore it follows that the refusal of the Travel Board must have the agreement of the representative of the English government."

On 21 May, the Foreign Office wrote to Mikardo telling him that:

"Herr Schill was refused a Temporary Travel Document because he ranks as a fairly prominent political figure in East Germany. Such people are not eligible for Temporary Travel Documents. As Schill was not eligible, the other members of his party were also turned down."

On 3 June, the Evangelische Kirche in West Berlin applied to the SfK for visas for the second contingent of British volunteers who were due to join the Coventry/Dresden project on 15 June and remain in Dresden until October. They were unaware that it had been decided to refuse these visas. Meanwhile, on 4 June, the MP Arthur Lewis asked a question about the Schill affair in the House of Commons. The government reiterated that Schill was a political person and pointed out that numerous non-political East Germans were given
travel documents every year, unlike the GDR's treatment of its own citizens who wanted to visit relatives in West Berlin.

The GDR's decision not to allow the second British contingent into the GDR was relayed to Oberkirchenrat Pabst in the Evangelische Kirche East Berlin office on 15 June. The reason given was the Schill affair. By this time the British group was in West Berlin waiting to cross through Checkpoint Charlie. Turner wrote to reassure his parents the following day, telling them the news and added that the group already in Dresden was fine and it would not affect their stay. He then travelled to East Berlin to put pressure on the GDR regime.

What happened next has been recalled by Turner, more than 30 years after the event, in a taped interview. He first heard that visas had been refused to the second British contingent as he was working on the building site in Dresden on 16 June. He immediately went to the Dresden city hall where he spoke to Kortus, the city council Kirchenfragen representative. He took one of the hospital sisters with him, having been advised that 'on things like this' you never go on your own.

"He [Kortus] was appalled when he heard the visas had been refused. Quite apart from his comforting us, we had to comfort him. So it was quite clear that the decision had not originated in Dresden - this was important - but in Berlin. So Schwester Margarete and I went up to Berlin and we visited everybody that we could think of - Kirchenfragen, the Foreign Office...There was a big counter. I said I needed to see someone about visas. And the man said the government of the German Democratic Republic has decided. This is irrevocable. There is no point in trying to see anybody...A lady in her mid-50s got behind him where she could be seen by us, looked around the room very quickly, shook her head at us and pointed upstairs. So Schwester Margarete and I left this room and went upstairs and we saw someone else.

And everywhere I went I said it is imperative that we get those people out of West Berlin. This project is widely known throughout the world. It has been on television in over 13 countries and if a journalist discovers these people there and runs the story it will be in all the papers and people will pour obloquy on the German Democratic Republic and its government. I need those people. I have come here to do a job and I cannot do it with just the four English people we have got at the moment [three had recently returned home, as scheduled]...Everywhere we went people said it was someone else who had taken the decision. It was Dresden. It was Kirchenfragen. It was the Foreign Office. It was the government. You name it and at one point I went and said...I am not going to accept it. If you say you cannot help me then I need to see someone higher up. If necessary I will go to Herr Ulbricht. And this chap said, very solemnly, that is your right as a citizen - which of course I wasn't...

At the end of the second full day, we were trailing around Berlin in the Stadmitte, we returned to Aktion Sühnezeichen headquarters and there was a big black car waiting to take us to Kirchenfragen. As we got into the car, I said to Schwester Margarete that we had won.
On the grounds that they were sending a car for us, they were going to say yes. When we got there, it was about 5pm, I saw Herr Flint [deputy Secretary of State for Church Affairs] and he said: 'We have decided to give you visas for three weeks.' I said I would accept that in the short term because it was imperative to get these people out of West Berlin...but I needed them for the full four months so I will go on working to get permission for them to stay...I typed up a minute, about one side of A4, about what had happened at that meeting. We were told to come back the next morning to pick up the passports. I had a copy for us and a copy for Kirchenfragen. I was going to give them a copy. We got there...and were courteously received and the visas were given to us. We were sitting down and I had the envelope with the minutes in it and I was going to slide it across when the passports were given to us. I opened them and there, to my joy and huge surprise, were visas until mid-October. I did not draw attention to the fact that we had been given what we asked for rather than what had been promised. I just picked up the envelope again and put it in my pocket. I may have shown them to Schwester Margarete but we did not give any sign. We were always treated courteously and when it was over I noticed that we had never once felt nervous in spite of the fact that we were going into the offices of quite high people in the German Democratic Republic and saying what they were doing was no good...That is all I know except that a few weeks later I was ill and did not get better until Christmas and Herr Flint was ill for a whole year.  

In Turner's view, the stress had been so great on those who were the puppets in the Cold War battle, from both East and West, that it took its toll in terms of health. Certainly fear appears to have been an element in the proceedings. No-one said anything. No-one asked questions. Subsequently visas were refused to four other Britons who had been hoping to join the project for a few weeks in the summer. In a handwritten note to Coventry Cathedral, Turner wrote: 'We hear no more reasons for it [the visas] being refused. My impression at the moment is that it came from K-F [Kirchenfragen]...that they are frightened of what they have permitted to happen'.

Conclusion

The assumption that the existence of the Coventry/Dresden project can be accounted for by the GDR's recognition policy is not borne out by the facts. The perception which was prevalent both at the time and in later years that the existence of the project can be explained by the recognition issue, cannot be substantiated. It is true that both the British Foreign Office and the West German government had feared that the recognition issue would be a major factor, and also that the Provost of Coventry Cathedral in his unpublished memoirs made frequent reference 25 years later to the difficulties of preventing the project from being drawn into the policy of recognition. But there is no evidence to suggest that in the GDR the project was regarded as a foreign policy issue. The front organisation for the
project negotiations was the SfK, not the MfAA. There is no archival evidence to suggest that the MfAA was involved in the decision-making process or that it wanted to be. Quite the reverse. On the whole, MfAA documents relating to the Coventry/Dresden project are for information only. The MfAA made no attempts to encourage Christians to visit the GDR as part of its *kommunale Auslandsverbindungen* policy. Again, the reverse is true. On the one occasion on which the MfAA did become involved with the project, the Schill affair, it nearly led to disaster.

In addition, relations between Coventry Cathedral and Coventry City Council, the GDR's ally on recognition, were poor. As will be examined in more detail in the following chapters, the two organisations regarded each other with suspicion. Neither body wanted to be associated with the other. Coventry Cathedral certainly did not want to be associated with the council's support for recognition and the council was happy for that to be the case. In Dresden, the authorities buried their heads in the sand as far as the Coventry/Dresden project was concerned. They restricted themselves to pursuing the conventional contacts with left-wing councillors and other sympathisers and maintained a discreet silence about the presence of so many British people in their midst.

The Schill affair draws attention to the extremely murky waters which lapped around the Coventry/Dresden project. Those who were touched by it displayed fear and deviousness, characteristics which were also typical of the manner in which the Coventry/Dresden project was negotiated. Decades later, an attempt to understand the real significance of the Schill affair can be little more than conjecture. Nevertheless, the deduction can be made that the Schill affair provides evidence of policy conflicts in both Britain and the GDR.

In the GDR, foreign policy aims and practice became entangled with Ulbricht's goal to win support from the Christian population with the assistance of the Coventry/Dresden project. In addition, there was a conflict between the means by which these policies were carried out. The one, foreign policy, was conducted through the normal channels of government. But the other, the policy relating to the Coventry/Dresden project, was directed
by the *Stasi* and bypassed the system. Direction came from unknown sources and threw
government officials into confusion. The fact that the *Arbeitsgruppe Kirchenfragen*, a
senior policy organisation, passed a resolution to expel the British volunteers and bring the
project to an end and that this order was countermanded by a higher authority, indicates that
even at this level there was no unified policy. It adds weight to the conclusion that the
project was very much in Ulbricht's hands alone. It also raises the possibility that this
disunity is evidence of the internal power struggle which was to become more prominent
later that year. The manner in which those officials lower down the scale, the civil servants
in the MfAA and the SfK, tried to avoid being dragged into the affair also provides evidence
of the fact that in this instance the only decision-maker was Ulbricht.

In Britain, there were similar indications that Foreign Office officials, the public face
of policy, were not operating in harmony with those responsible for unofficial decisions. The
decision not to allow Schill into Britain was in accordance with previous public policy. But
it seems possible that senior GDR officials genuinely believed that they had entered into
some sort of arrangement with the British whereby an exception would be made in this case.
At the official level, the British did not appear to take the presence of the British group in
Dresden into account in their handling of the affair, although they were fully aware of its
presence. However, one interpretation of Holmer's cryptic remark that 'Williams knows the
score' is that the British had warned the Provost that should any public controversy arise in
connection with the Coventry/Dresden project, then the official British attitude would be to
wash its hands. There can be no doubt that the Schill affair was a period of extreme political
and diplomatic tension in both Britain and the GDR. The manner in which the atmosphere
surrounding the Schill affair reflected that of the two years of negotiations which preceded
the Coventry/Dresden project will be demonstrated in the following two chapters.

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2 See, for example, MfAA A 13122, copy of the SfK report on the Williams/Seigewasser meeting of
25 January 1964, and copy of the SfK report on the Williams/Seigewasser meeting of 14 October
1964. The visa problem related to one of the volunteers. See MfAA, A 18734, correspondence in
July and August 1965.
3 MfAA, A 18734, internal memo from the European department to the parliamentary and local
government relations department, 2 August 1965.
See MfAA A 18734, for correspondence relating to this problem during which one of the GDR's leading scientists and a Dresden resident, Professor Manfred von Ardenne, tried to intervene on behalf of the British by using his influence with his contacts at the MfAA.


MfAA, A 18732, MfAA report on kommunale Auslandsverbindungen, 10 June 1963.


Ibid.

MfAA, A 18734, letter from Central Committee member Werner Krolikowski to the Interior Minister, 10 May 1965.

SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/481, MfAA report on local government relations with Britain, 27 August 1964.

Ibid. Nevertheless, Crawley planned to send a delegation to Eisenhüttenstadt in April.

Ibid.

MfAA, A 18732, resolutions of the foreign affairs advisory committee of the Politburo Agitation Commission, 21 May 1964, presented to the Politburo, 22 June 1964.


Ibid.

Ibid., correspondence relating to unsuccessful attempts to establish links between Bournemouth and Meissen, 1964.

Ibid., report on a visit by a delegation of local government politicians to Bezirk Schwerin, 15 September 1964.

Ibid., correspondence relating to a Harrow school, 1964.


Williams, unpublished memoirs, circa 1989. 'Callow was most active in relaying and promoting the 'pro-recognition' propaganda of East Germany. Inevitably I found myself in disagreement with him as to the kind of involvement Coventry ought to have with Dresden. I felt he was politically naive, and easily manipulated,' p.61.

CCC, Minute Book of the International Friendship Committee of Coventry City Council, 21 November 1956.

Kenneth Richardson, Twentieth-Century Coventry, (London: Macmillan, 1972). The link with Dresden owed much to Callow. There had been exchanges between the two cities for several years before but Callow's visit in April 1962 to attend an international peace conference was a significant development.

MfAA, A 18734, letter from Callow to the Editor, Der Tag, West Berlin, 14 March 1962.

LDS, OB 4.2.3/5, Dresden city council report of a trip to Coventry for the handing over of a mural as a gift from the city of Dresden to the city of Coventry, 14 July 1961.

CCC, Minute Book of the International Friendship Committee of Coventry City Council.

SHD, SED Bezirksleitung Dresden IV/A/2.18.650, agreement of the Coventry/Dresden Friendship Treaty, 14 February 1964.

SHD, SED Bezirksleitung Dresden IV/A/2.18.650, local plan to encourage tourists from capitalist countries, following an order from the Politburo Sekretariat on 16 October 1963, 13 December 1963.

Ibid., action memo on tourist plans, 16 April 1964.


Ibid., report of the international affairs working group of the SED Dresden city leadership group on the city's international work in September, 16 October 1964.

Ibid., report as above for November, 23 December 1964

Ibid.

SHD, BT/RdB Dresden 1275, itinerary for a visit by a group of young West Germans from 25 to 31 July 1965, 20 July 1965.


Bell, Britain and East Germany, p.133.

PRO, FO 371/183140 RG1621/78, correspondence relating to a visit by the East German parents of a woman living in Britain, November 1965.
SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/481, MfAA proposal for the further development of relations between Britain and the GDR, 23 October 1964.

Ibid.

PRO, FO 371/182997 RG1011/1, six-monthly report on the GDR, 6 January 1965.

SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/481, MfAA proposal for the further development of relations between Britain and the GDR, 23 October 1964. Mikardo’s connections with the GDR had a long history, chiefly based around his business interests. See Bell, Britain and East Germany, pp.135 and 144.

MfAA, A 18734, MfAA internal report to deputy Foreign Minister Herbert Krolikowski on the city partnership between Coventry and Dresden, 26 March 1965.

Ibid., submission to the Politburo Sekretariat, 27 April 1965, and minutes of the meeting of the Sekretariat, Item 22, 5 May 1965.

Ibid., letter from Schill to the Coventry Lord Mayor, referring to British refusal to allow Schill to visit Coventry in 1962, 24 May 1965.

MfAA, A 13044, MfAA memo suggesting that Crossman, or another MP, should be asked to raise the matter of Britain’s refusal to allow the Dresden Oberbürgermeister into the country in the House of Commons, 23 November 1960.

MfAA, A 18734, MfAA instructions relating to the visit by the delegation from the city of Dresden to Coventry, 27 April 1965.

PRO, FO 371/183140, RG1521/58, report on TTD application by East Germans to visit Dresden exhibition in Coventry, May 1965.

MfAA, A 18734, letter from Schill to the Lord Mayor of Coventry, 24 May 1965.

Ibid.

LDS, OB 4.2.3/41, letter from Schill to MfAA, 6 May 1965.

MfAA, A 18734, letter from Schill to the Lord Mayor of Coventry, 24 May 1965.

EZA, 102/329, Kreyssig's report to Aktion Sühnezeichen on the Schill affair, 15 June 1965.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

SAPMO-BArch, DO4 650, resolution of the Arbeitsgruppe Kirchenfragen, 18 May 1965.

Ibid.

Interview with Turner, 18-21 February 1999.

PRO, FO 371/183140, RG1521/74, letter from Mikardo to George Thomas, Joint Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Home Office, 18 May 1965.

MfAA A 18734, letter from Schill to the Lord Mayor of Coventry, 24 May 1965. On 13 May he had received a telegram from the ATO refusing to supply him with a TTD. Without this document, the British government would not consider the matter of a visa. The system was a way of weeding out unwanted visitors without the British government having to explicitly ban them, and also causing maximum irritation to the East Germans.

Ibid.


EZA, 102/329, draft of memo sent with visa application forms, 3 June 1965.


EZA, 102/329, Kreyssig memo, 15 June 1965.

Martin Turner's private papers, letter from Turner to his parents, 16 June 1965.

Interview with Turner, 18-21 February 1999.

Copies of this minute, in German and English, are held in the archives of both Aktion Sühnezeichen and Coventry Cathedral and accord with Turner's memory of events.

Interview with Turner, 18-21 February 1999.

MfAA, A 18734, correspondence between the GDR Ambassador to the Soviet Union and the MfAA, July/August 1965. One of the Britons applying for a visa was Elizabeth Britton, the daughter of a senior official with a UN organisation. Her father approached a contact in Moscow asking him to
exert some influence in order to obtain a visa for his daughter. The request was passed to the GDR Ambassador in the Soviet Union, Dr Quilitzsch, who wrote to the MfAA asking if something could be done. Mr Britton, he said, was a very influential man. The MfAA replied that the reconciliation project was to be brought to an end and the writer had been instructed to pursue the matter no further.

CCA, letter from Turner to Michael Butterfield, Coventry Cathedral, undated.
CHAPTER 8

The Coventry/Dresden Project: Healing the Wounds of History

Introduction

It took just under two years for the negotiation process leading up to the Coventry/Dresden project to be completed. The first moves were made in May 1963. The first British volunteers crossed through the Berlin Wall in March 1965. The driving forces behind the process were a curious mixture of political pragmatism and Christian idealism. The negotiations themselves, despite the sometimes lofty ideals of the participants, were characterised by suspicion and manipulation. The project itself became a pawn in a bigger political game. However, despite the apparently contrasting motives of those involved, the Christians leading the project and the idealistic young volunteers who took part in it shared a common goal with those who wielded political power behind the scenes. This mutual aim was the maintenance of international peace and stability. The Christian reconcilers believed that the future of the world could best by guaranteed by people such as themselves doing what they could to 'heal the wounds of history'. Those with political power believed that peace and stability could best be preserved by fostering the ideal of Christian/Marxist dialogue.

Through a detailed examination of documentary evidence, the following two chapters will attempt to tease out the reality of events behind the project, as opposed to the myths and perceptions which either unintentionally or deliberately were created around it. In doing so, they will support the argument that the political purpose of the Coventry/Dresden project was twofold. First, to bring GDR Church leaders such as Bishop Noth into line with the more compliant sections of the Church. Second, to reinforce the concept of Christian/Marxist co-operation among the ordinary Christians of the GDR by encouraging the project members, and its leader in particular, to preach this message throughout the country.
The operation aimed at containing the influence of oppositional Church leaders needed to be conducted covertly for two main reasons. Firstly, the official foreign policy of Britain and the official domestic Church policy of the GDR prevented the two countries from initiating or encouraging any overt action. Secondly, for the plan to succeed it was necessary that British and East German Christians should be unaware of the sub-plot in which they were involved. The message needed to be delivered with an air of genuine conviction. The operation, therefore, would be based on the CIA’s definition of the most effective form of propaganda - that in which ‘the subject moves in the direction you desire for reasons which he believes to be his own’. Or, as Crossman said: ‘The way to carry out good propaganda is never to appear to be carrying it out at all’. The Coventry/Dresden project would be a classic Crossman/CIA operation in terms of propaganda theory.

Due to the nature of the operation, official documentary evidence is necessarily scanty. On occasion there is evidence of reports relating to the Coventry/Dresden project, but the reports have not been retained within the files. The aim of the writers of letters and reports was not necessarily to record the truth but rather a version of events which would fit the agenda to which they were working. Obfuscation rather than clarity was the name of the game. Even those involved appear to have found events bewildering. Kreyssig, for example, seems to have been genuinely taken aback to have been excluded from the GDR’s official reception for the British volunteers, although it is plain from the documentation that both he and Aktion Sühnezeichen were merely being used as tools. There was confusion within the ranks of the GDR bureaucrats, who were puzzled about who in the hierarchy was giving the orders. The line of command was deliberately vague. In terms of oral evidence, little is available. Of the main players in the negotiations, only those associated with their respective governments survive. The two most prominent non-governmental figures linked to the project, the Provost of Coventry Cathedral and the head of Aktion Sühnezeichen, have both died, Williams in 1990 and Kreyssig in 1986. Turner, who led the British group, has a vivid recollection of anecdotal material relating to the GDR but claims to have no knowledge of the negotiations behind the project.
However, the limited material of governmental organisations is augmented by correspondence and reports which have been retained in the archives of both Coventry Cathedral and Aktion Sühnezeichen. Within the documentation as a whole it is possible to detect some of the plans and thought processes of the main participants in the negotiations. The British and West German governments, for example, are initially plainly seen to have been scheming to kill the project in its early stages. Later, the close relationship which developed between the British Foreign Office and Williams is documented as the negotiations proceeded and the British attitude towards the project changed. The peculiar manner in which both the British and the East Germans attempted to keep the project out of the public gaze is recorded. The possibility that the two countries may have been co-operating over the project is suggested in a British Foreign Office document which refers to a 'promise' by Seigewasser that the project would not be given publicity. Despite Kreyssig's confusion, the GDR government is seen to have deliberately used Aktion Sühnezeichen and Kreyssig as tools which could be discarded. In short, a scrutiny of the relevant documentation demonstrates the manner in which all parties, both governmental and non-governmental, attempted to manipulate the negotiations process for their own purposes, and indicates, either explicitly in the case of the GDR, or implicitly in the case of the British, that the overriding purpose behind the Coventry/Dresden project was to constrain dissident voices within the Church in the GDR in the interests of stability.

These chapters will examine the extent to which governmental action differed from official policy in connection with the Coventry/Dresden project; the inconsistencies or contradictions on the part of the chief participants in the negotiation process; the relationship between the key figures and governmental or quasi-governmental bodies; and examples of instances in which words were at odds with deeds. Probably the most glaring inconsistency to emerge is the fact that Aktion Sühnezeichen, deemed to be a subversive organisation, was brought in as an intermediary while Noth was excluded for the very reason that he was deemed to be subversive. The answer to why this should have been so is key to an understanding of the role that the Coventry/Dresden project played in furthering the Ulbricht policy of Christian/Marxist co-operation. Aktion Sühnezeichen's role was to neutralise the influence of recalcitrant Church leaders in Saxony. It was a suitable vehicle for this purpose.
because its leaders were well-known and highly regarded figures within the Church hierarchy. But because it was a fringe organisation with little direct influence on Christians in general, it could safely be used to put pressure on the Church in Saxony without the blessing that the GDR regime appeared to be bestowing on it having wider implications. In addition, the organisation was already under close surveillance. It was monitored and infiltrated and appeared to pose little danger. It had also undertaken a project of reconciliation in Coventry and was known to the British public. It was an organisation which crossed the East/West divide.

The Legacy of the Second World War

When Guardian reader, Paul Binks, of Ruislip, Middlesex, wrote a letter to his newspaper in May 1963, he would not have realised that he was about to set in motion a chain of events which would impact upon the future course of the Cold War. Mr Binks had been reading a review of The Destruction of Dresden by David Irving, an account of the Allied bombing raid which laid waste to the city in 1945. His letter read in part:

"I was reminded of the symbolic act of atonement made by the German people in their gift to the new Coventry Cathedral. Has any such offer of redemption been made by us to Dresden, and if not, is there any organisation willing and able to undertake an appeal for this long overdue act on behalf of the British nation?"

The letter was noted by Irving, whose book had aroused public controversy in Britain. For many British people it was the first they knew of the raid which, according to Irving, killed 135,000 people. Although Irving's reputation as a historian was sullied in 2000 when he lost a libel action to clear his name of accusations of racism, his book on Dresden was generally regarded as an authoritative if controversial contribution to the record of the Second World War. The seal of approval was given by Air Marshal Sir Robert Saundby in a foreword, in which he described the book as 'an impressive piece of work'. Crossman had also welcomed the book. He credited Irving with having produced 'an admirable piece of historical private enterprise... a superb deadpan narrative which adds a wealth of appalling detail to the dry official record'.

Irving wrote to Crossman to thank him for his review and, picking up on the letter from Binks, inquired if Crossman knew of any non-political organisation which might be
willing to promote a scheme of British atonement. The obvious organisation was sitting on Crossman's constituency doorstep. Coventry Cathedral had been built with the ideal of reconciliation embedded within its fabric. Crossman therefore wrote to Williams, the Provost of Coventry Cathedral, enclosing Irving's letter and asking for his views. Williams responded enthusiastically.

"The idea in your letter is an absolutely right one. We have long been searching after the right thing to do as a reciprocal symbolic act. Dresden has always been in our minds. We have only hesitated lest our purpose of making this a gesture to the whole German people should be frustrated."

Coventry Cathedral, led by Williams, was at the forefront of the concept of international reconciliation at that time. The city had been the first to suffer serious bombing damage during the Second World War when, on 14 November 1940, a German air raid had destroyed part of the city centre. The major loss was the cathedral which was burnt to a shell. After the war a new cathedral was commissioned, designed by the architect Sir Basil Spence and consecrated in 1962. Williams was chosen to be the first Provost of the new cathedral partly because he was personally committed to the ideal of reconciliation. He was a South African by birth, with an English father and a mother of Huguenot extraction. She had been interned in a British concentration camp during the First World War. Williams often quoted his mother as telling him: 'We must always try to heal the wounds of history'. These words influenced him throughout his life. In 1961, he told an audience in Germany: 'We are trying to make the cathedral a symbol of reconciliation, internationally, ecumenically, industrially and personally. It is the one hope and vision which has anything to offer the future.' Williams had a charismatic personality and little patience with bureaucracy. These traits did not endear him to everyone. Indeed, according to The Times:

"It sometimes seemed that William's work was more appreciated abroad than at home. He preferred to work on a large canvas, was impatient with what he considered to be the trivialities of church life and he had little fondness for ecclesiastical synods."

The links between Coventry Cathedral and West Germany were strong. In 1958, shortly after taking up his appointment, the Provost met the President of West Germany, Theodor Heuss, to receive a gift of £5,000 for the cathedral. During the ensuing years he built up strong and lasting links with a number of leading figures, including the former mayor of West Berlin and later Chancellor of West Germany, Willy Brandt. In 1967,
Williams' work was recognised by the Bonn government with the highest award of the German Order of Merit. In the context of the Dresden project, these links with West Germany should, on the face of it, have made the establishment of a relationship with the East Germans difficult, if not impossible. Indeed, until the time of the Coventry/Dresden project, this seems to have been the case. Williams acknowledged the hostility of the GDR towards Coventry Cathedral because of its association with West Germany. He described this hostility as being 'fierce' in 1961 and 1962. One year later, though, the hostility had apparently been 'overcome' when the negotiations for the Coventry/Dresden project were set in motion. Williams never gave a satisfactory explanation of why this should have been so, other than to take some credit for his own success as a negotiator. The change in attitude is one of many policy inconsistencies relating to the Coventry/Dresden project.

Williams had had some experience of the GDR before the Coventry/Dresden project negotiations began and was not impressed.

"I was, when I first visited East Berlin [probably about 1959], not prepared for the intensity of propaganda being unleashed by the communist regime. At the Brandenburg Gate, under the guise of a tourist welcome to East Berlin, one was subjected to a communist sermon of paralysing boredom, made worse by the virulent attacks against certain leaders in West Berlin and West Germany." Despite these criticisms, Williams liked to think that he and the cathedral were 'aloof from partisan politics or ideologies'. He was aware that many vested interests wished to use the cathedral's influence and reputation for their own purposes and claimed to have believed that he had transcended such dangers. 'We were determined that we would not be "used" by any of the special interests in church or politics who recognised that Coventry Cathedral was a significant "platform" for addressing the public', he wrote.

However, while claiming to be above politics, he acknowledged his close links to the British Foreign Office, links that would have made impartiality an impossibility. 'The Foreign Office in London could not have been more helpful...', he wrote in connection with politically delicate arrangements for the cathedral's consecration ceremony. And again: 'During those years of contact with Germany, East and West, I maintained contact with the British Foreign Office. In no way did they impede me'. Williams also aspired to playing a
greater political role between East and West. On returning from his first meeting with Seigewasser, he told Crossman that he intended to pursue Seigewasser's suggestion that Williams could be a 'useful liaison' between the GDR and the Church in West Germany, as well as with the Church in the GDR. In no way then, was the Provost a non-political person. He was both willing and anxious to play as large a role as possible in the theatre of Cold War politics.

It was in 1959, at a lecture in West Berlin, that Williams was first made aware of the destruction caused in Dresden during the Allied bombing raid of 1945, and of its significance for the people of Germany. At the end of his talk a questioner had asked: 'And what about Dresden?' The Provost became aware from the emotional discussion which followed that Dresden had the same emotional significance for the German people as Coventry had for the British.

**The Negotiations**

The path of the negotiations which eventually led to the Coventry Cathedral project of reconciliation taking place in Dresden in 1965 was far from straight. Indeed, there was so many twists and turns along the way, so many diversionary side paths which had to be avoided, that a chronological overview of the proceedings is in danger of confusing by its complexity. However, it is just such a chronological overview which demonstrates so vividly the potentially treacherous waters into which those attempting to deal across the Cold War divide strayed.

Officially, the main negotiator on the British side was Williams. He was the person who entered into discussions at GDR state level. He also liked to stress that he alone was the person in charge of the project. In the GDR, the role of chief public negotiator was delegated to Seigewasser. Until the beginning of 1964, the other main British participant was Crossman who operated at both an official and an unofficial level. Following his elevation to the Cabinet, the role of unofficial envoy to the GDR was taken up by Oestreicher who had already established a close working relationship with Seidowsky. These two men conducted negotiations at an unofficial level. Others involved in the negotiations included the British
Foreign Office, Lothar Kreyssig, East and West German Church leaders, the West German government, and a West German woman, Doris Krug, who ran the *Deutsch-Englische Gesellschaft* in West Berlin.

In May 1963, a week after receiving Williams' enthusiastic response to his suggestion of an act of atonement in Dresden, Crossman replied enclosing a copy of another letter from Irving and querying whether an approach should now be made to Oberbürgermeister Schill in Dresden. He was unaware that Irving had already taken the initiative and written to a 'high-ranking official' on Dresden City Council, outlining the plans so far and asking him to take the matter up with Schill in the next few days. Williams' response was that Crossman should go ahead and contact Schill himself, but that the West German Ambassador, Hasso von Etzdorf, should also be put in the picture. It is likely that Williams did not wait for Crossman's agreement to this suggestion, as he spoke to the West German Embassy by telephone that day.

With things moving on apace, Crossman then approached the British government in order to complete the political triangle. He wrote to the Conservative politician, Edward Heath, then a member of the Government and Lord Privy Seal, requesting an appointment to ascertain the official view of the Dresden proposals to date. In his letter he referred to the fact that he had already discussed the matter with the West German Ambassador who was seeking his government's view. Sir Bernard Ledwidge, head of the Foreign Office department dealing with GDR affairs, was quick to dismiss the scheme for two reasons. Firstly, he advised Heath that 'Communist propaganda would exploit the whole affair as a repudiation by the British people of their own wartime policy'. Secondly, he was concerned about West German opposition, suggesting somewhat sardonically that if Crossman really wanted to make atonement he should consider Cologne rather than Dresden as a more appropriate city.

Crossman met Heath to discuss the proposal on 9 July and reported the substance of the meeting to von Etzdorf. The British government view was that the scheme must be entirely private and should be subject to the approval of the West German government.
Although anxious not to be seen to be involved in any way, after some prevarication the Foreign Office agreed to discuss the matter with a West German Embassy official on 16 July. During the course of the meeting, it became clear that the West Germans had their own plans for scuppering the reconciliation project without making diplomatic waves. The Foreign Office official noted:

"The West Germans were looking for a way of forcing the East Germans to reject the scheme rather than rejecting it themselves. They thought that one way of doing this would be to take up the suggestion that the scheme should be worked out entirely through church channels and to this end they might ask for a written guarantee by Herr Seigewasser, the East German State Secretary for Church Affairs, that the matter would be handled in this way and would in no way be exploited for political purposes."

The plan obviously pleased Ledwidge. In a handwritten addendum to the note, he wrote:

"I think we can be sure: i) that the East Germans will not give the undertaking the West Germans want; ii) that Mr Crossman will not get the positive support of the West Germans for his scheme, even if they hesitate to oppose it openly."

At this point, therefore, it seemed certain that the manipulation of the West Germans, with British support, would cause the project to fail. Ironically, however, the East Germans appear to have been working towards the same outcome at exactly the same time. As we have seen, they saw the British desire to make amends for a wartime atrocity as playing into the hands of West German revanchists. Like the West Germans, they too were anxious to avoid taking the blame for rejecting an act of reconciliation but they did not need to be pushed towards rejection by the involvement of the Church.

Meanwhile, another complicating factor had emerged in Britain which is significant for two reasons. Following the publication of Irving's book, the desire to make atonement in Dresden had become so popular that the reconciliation stage was in danger of becoming severely overcrowded, with more than one group jostling for position. In this instance, Jack Parry, secretary of the Coventry Committee for International Understanding (CCIU), wrote to Crossman to make known the CCIU's desire to play the part of reconciler in Dresden. He informed Crossman of preliminary plans for his committee to send a group of young people to Dresden to clear up a bombsite. The significance of this event lies in the fact that, firstly, as later events showed, it demonstrated Ulbricht's commitment to the cathedral reconciliation project as opposed to any other similar project proposed by other bodies.
Secondly, it demonstrated Crossman's determination to ensure that the reconciliation project was of a Christian rather than of a secular nature.

As the initiator of the idea, it must be assumed that his reasons for backing the involvement of the Church were not, as in the case of the West Germans and the British Foreign Office, in order to ensure its failure. Crossman rebuked Parry for his plans for a city-to-city act of reconciliation, stressing the fact that both he and Williams were 'seeking to narrow the project down to a pure church relationship between Coventry Cathedral and the church people in Dresden, on the ground that this is the only way to avoid impossible political difficulties'. Williams was also irked by Parry's intrusion. For the Provost this sub-plot demonstrated the manner in which others were only too anxious to jump onto the Coventry Cathedral bandwagon. He was suspicious of Coventry City Council and those associated with it, believing them to be politically naive.

Six days later, though, Crossman changed his tune when he saw a way of manipulating the Parry plan to put pressure on the West Germans. Etzdorf had told Crossman that the cathedral proposal was being considered by the West German Foreign Office and the Ministry for All-German Affairs, but that it might 'take some time'. Crossman interpreted this as a way of shelving things. Realising that the West Germans would be extremely unhappy for the project proposal to become the subject of public debate in the GDR, he set out to encourage Parry with his rival plan. Far from trying to keep the project under wraps he now told Parry that 'nothing could be better than an informal contact with the people in Dresden to find out how they would respond to the whole idea' and informed Etzdorf that West German tardiness

"...will give an opportunity to others in Coventry to make informal contacts in Dresden...In deciding not to hurry with the matter, may I assume that the All-German Ministry is deliberately leaving room for these informal overtures, and inform the civic authorities immediately?"

No, you may not assume anything of the kind, was the swift response from Etzdorf. The definitive reply from the West Germans came in the middle of August. Etzdorf wrote:

"We feel...that it may be difficult to carry out this action in such a manner as to make it clear to the whole world, and in particular to the British and the German public, that the proposed gesture is intended as an entirely non-political [underlined in the original] act of..."
reconciliation. In particular the danger cannot be excluded that the authorities of the Soviet Occupied Zone of Germany in which Dresden is situated, will try to exploit the proposal and its implementation as a British effort towards the establishment of normal relations with the so-called German Democratic Republic...In order to ensure that the non-political character of the action will be respected, my Government suggest that the realisation of the project be transmitted to the Christian Churches of both our countries, and to them only...As soon as an agreement on principle with Praeses Scharf is reached the Provost should try to obtain from the competent authorities in the Soviet Occupied Zone of Germany a written answer that they will not interfere with the realisation of the project entrusted to the Protestant Church in Germany."

This missive was official confirmation of the scheme that had already been discussed by the West Germans and the British, aimed at forcing the East Germans to reject the proposal. The inclusion of the reference to Scharf would appear to have been designed to be the coup de grâce, given his unpopularity with the GDR regime. The letter was also the first time that the issue of recognition had been clearly stated by any of the parties concerned.

Williams responded positively to von Etzdorf’s advice. In October, he had 'exhaustive conversations' with Scharf in West Berlin and also met Noth in East Berlin. In view of Noth's notoriety in the GDR at that time following the Order for Silence, it is unlikely that the Stasi was unaware of this meeting. The person who acted as the intermediary between Williams and the various concerned parties was Doris Krug. As the secretary of the West Berlin branch of the Deutsch-Englische Gesellschaft, she had close links with the West German Ministry for All-German Affairs and British government representatives in West Berlin. Her work involved monthly meetings with members of the British Military Government in West Berlin to discuss 'cultural' matters. The value placed on her work by the British was demonstrated in 1970 when Krug was awarded an OBE for her services to Anglo-German relations. She was familiar with the intrigue which pervaded Berlin during the 1960s. The atmosphere, she said, was one in which nobody could be trusted: 'You never knew who was sitting opposite you'. It was in this atmosphere that she wrote to Williams about his meetings in Berlin. After referring to his talks, she went on:

"It may interest you that Frau Pieser [Pieser worked for the West German Ministry for All-German Affairs] whom I contacted today was well informed about the whole plan from the Foreign Office and I had the feeling that these people are interested. They know of course many names of persons who might also be able to help."
As a result of all these discussions, Williams determined that the next step was to arrange a meeting with Seigewasser. The letter requesting an appointment was sent in November 1963 and at the beginning of January Williams was granted an audience to take place on 21 January 1964. Eight months had elapsed since the reconciliation project had first been mooted by Irving and Crossman. Williams, who was anxious to proceed, found the delays frustrating. In fact, given the slow pace at which government bureaucracies move, together with the deliberate obstructiveness of Cold War politics, the response was surprisingly swift. At around the same time, there was a more typical GDR reaction to inter-Church contact when the East Germans refused to allow an East Berlin clergyman, Superintendent Friedrich Krahnert, to attend a conference at Coventry Cathedral. The incident was reported in British newspapers, with Williams expressing his annoyance that an exit visa was refused the day before the conference began. The incident illustrates the fact that the GDR's readiness to discuss co-operation with Coventry Cathedral over the reconciliation project was the exception rather than the rule.

**The Williams/Seigewasser Meeting, January 1964**

Williams met Seigewasser for the first time on 21 January in East Berlin. Williams took with him Herbert Walker, a Coventry headmaster and active member of the cathedral's congregation. Walker's role, ostensibly, was to act as translator. However, given his background Walker would also have been a valuable adviser. He had joined the British Foreign Office in 1944 and became Director of Education to the Control Commission in Germany, charged with re-establishing an education system in post-war defeated Germany. Seigewasser was accompanied by his deputy Fritz Flint, head of department Hans Weise, and a translator. The meeting is notable for the fact that it was documented by both sides and that these reports have been retained in the archives of Coventry Cathedral and the SfK, with copies also existing in the archives of other organisations such as the MfAA and *Aktion Sühnezeichen*. In this instance it is possible, therefore, to compare the two versions of events in the search for veracity. Thereafter the paper trail becomes patchy.

The subject of the meeting was Williams' proposal for the Coventry/Dresden project and the GDR's reaction to this proposal. A comparison of the two reports reveals a major
discrepancy in the accounts of the same meeting. This discrepancy relates to the involvement of Aktion Sühnezeichen in the project, which fact, as has already been noted, was central to any plan to use the project to neutralise Christian opposition to the GDR regime. The Williams' report of the meeting creates the impression that Aktion Sühnezeichen was imposed upon Williams by Seigewasser, and that he, Williams, argued strongly in favour of Noth. The Seigewasser report, on the other hand, gives the impression that Williams proposed Aktion Sühnezeichen as a partner and that Seigewasser agreed. If the Williams report is correct, the inference is that Seigewasser drew up his report to make it look as though the idea came from Williams. If the Seigewasser report is correct, the inference is that Williams wanted to make it look as though the idea came from Seigewasser. The balance of probability is that Seigewasser gave the more accurate account of the meeting. There are three main reasons for making this assumption. Briefly, these are that firstly, Williams' inference that he was unprepared for the introduction of Aktion Sühnezeichen into the project does not accord with later events; secondly, it is improbable that by this stage Williams was unaware of Noth's political standing; and thirdly, the Seigewasser report does not mention Noth at all.

In his report Williams wrote:

"...It became clear to us that the Bishop of Dresden is at the moment persona non grata and, although we had made it absolutely clear that we would on no account operate this scheme through any other than Church channels, he [Seigewasser] persisted in saying that he wished to discuss this with the civic authorities in Dresden...It remains therefore an open question as to whether he [Seigewasser] will accept our conditions and allow us, in spite of his prejudices, to work through the Bishop of Dresden...A second alternative was then briefly discussed which opens the way to operating the same scheme without any of the difficulties embodied in the first proposal, and this was to operate through Aktion Sühnezeichen."

The impression created here that Aktion Sühnezeichen was introduced unexpectedly is compromised by the fact that Williams had a meeting with von Hammerstein, the head of Aktion Sühnezeichen in West Berlin, just hours after his discussion with Seigewasser. At this later meeting, it was confirmed that Aktion Sühnezeichen should be the cathedral's partner. This meeting was prearranged. It had been organised with the assistance of Krug. Others present included the British Foreign Office representative in Berlin, Paul Holmer, Pieser, Gräfin Matuschka from the West German Foreign Office, and Scharf. The presence of
von Hammerstein at this meeting indicates that the decision to include Aktion Sühnezeichen in the project had been taken before Williams met Seigewasser. The evidence shows that the presence of von Hammerstein at the dinner party was specifically requested. Twelve days before the Seigewasser meeting, Williams had told Krug that he particularly wanted to meet von Hammerstein, after he had met Seigewasser, because: 'I have a lot of help to ask him to give us'.

It must be assumed that Williams was aware that Noth was regarded as one of the most influential opponents of the GDR regime long before his meeting with Seigewasser. There is a record of the fact that he was advised of Noth's unpopularity with the regime the previous summer. Williams had met Scharf, he had met Noth himself, and he may well have sought advice in Britain from Oestreicher, who was well-versed in GDR Church politics. Even if he had not contacted Oestreicher directly, Williams was being advised by the British Foreign Office, which was well informed about GDR affairs, some of this information coming from people like Oestreicher. Holmer, one of the dinner guests, had written a report on the Order for Silence the previous year. Williams' air of innocence on the subject of Noth is not convincing.

The Seigewasser report not only fails to mention Williams' insistence on working with Noth, it does not even mention Noth at all. A reader of the Seigewasser report would not know that the Bishop of Dresden's name was raised during the course of the discussion - which may well have been the case. Instead, the Seigewasser report noted that during the course of Williams' introductory remarks, Williams had said that 'before leading into the importance of Aktion Sühnezeichen', he would like to say a few words about the significance of Dresden and Coventry - which he then proceeded to do. In other words, it was Williams who brought up the subject of Aktion Sühnezeichen. It then appears that Seigewasser had been prepared for Aktion Sühnezeichen to be raised for his first major contribution to the discussion was to inform Williams of the official status of Aktion Sühnezeichen in the GDR.
It seems, therefore, that Williams deliberately slanted his report, a report which was widely distributed and obviously intended to be seen by posterity as the official record. Why should he imply that *Aktion Sühnezeichen* was imposed upon him? After all, *Aktion Sühnezeichen* might have seemed to be the obvious choice given that West German volunteers from the organisation had taken part in a voluntary construction project in Coventry. Taking into consideration later events which will be examined in the following chapter, the state of GDR Church/state relations, and the involvement of the intelligence services in the Coventry/Dresden project, the probable answer lies in the fact that Williams had been briefed that it was imperative there should be no hint of Anglo/GDR collaboration on the public record. For Williams to have acknowledged his readiness to bypass Noth would have been a denial of the Cold War.

There can be little doubt that Williams intended to work with *Aktion Sühnezeichen* all along, and also that he was taking instructions from the British Foreign Office. Williams had asked Krug to arrange the dinner in West Berlin after his meeting with Seigewasser, saying he would be guided by her as to whom he should invite. He had also confessed to Krug, uncharacteristically, that he was 'very frightened' by the prospect of the Seigewasser meeting. Krug had replied by saying that she understood his fear but that she was certain Williams was 'on the right way and must not hesitate for a second to carry on'. These are cryptic remarks which could convey a multitude of meanings. Williams had hoped that Crossman might accompany him to his meeting with Seigewasser but Crossman had declined, citing lack of time. He did, however, tell Williams that he had just received an invitation from the 'Politburo to go over and talk to them about unspecified subjects' and added that he had 'a feeling that your project will be successful'. In view of Crossman's close contact with Politburo members, it is probable that this remark was based on more than simple conjecture. Even if Williams only knew half the story when he walked into Seigewasser's office, it is certain that both the British and the East German governments had been well briefed and were keeping a watchful eye on proceedings.

Williams demonstrated a certain amount of ingenuousness in some of his other remarks. He noted, for example, that his proposals for the Coventry/Dresden project took
Seigewasser and his colleagues by surprise and 'we had to listen to 20 minutes of Communist speech-making while he had time to frame his reply'. In reality, the element of surprise is unlikely since the matter had by this time been aired so fully in both Britain and Germany. At one point Seigewasser told Williams that he would have to discuss the matter with the civic authorities in Dresden. Williams recorded:

"... We saw with some alarm the civic authorities of Dresden discussing this with the Lord Mayor of Coventry, who is about to visit Dresden and told Herr Seigewasser quite bluntly that if this proposal was not treated confidentially, it was completely dead. He understood this."

There is no evidence in the Seigewasser version that he understood any such thing. The report merely noted that Williams had stressed he had only spoken about the project to a small circle of people. Since Williams' small circle included the British Foreign Office, the West German government and numerous influential German clergymen, it is unlikely that the East Germans were impressed with his pleas for confidentiality. As far as the inter-city connection was concerned, Williams had been in touch with Parry as recently as November 1963 about Coventry city's reconciliation plans and had promised to let Parry know the outcome of the Seigewasser meeting.

Von Hammerstein made his own notes of what was said at the post-Seigewasser dinner. His version confirms Williams' claim that he would have preferred to work through the Church in Dresden and had discussed doing so with Noth. However, the source of his information was Williams. Von Hammerstein also noted the lack of trust between British reconcilers. Everything is secret, he wrote. Coventry city is not allowed to be involved at all. Williams' opinion was that Coventry city representatives were 'irresponsible, short-term politicians'. A copy of von Hammerstein's report was obtained by the *Stasi*, this being the first evidence of *Stasi* involvement.

The West German government was also briefed on the meeting. In early January, Williams had arranged to meet Dr Brigitte Lohmeyer, cultural counsellor at the West German Embassy in London, when he returned from East Berlin in order 'to report to you on my visit to Seigewasser on the 21st on the Dresden project'. The lunch meeting was held in Coventry on 28 January.
There is one other very different version of the meeting which took place between Williams and Seigewasser, this version being the one produced by Williams in his unpublished memoirs more than 20 years later. Much of it is inaccurate, including a claim by Williams that he met Seigewasser every six months from about 1960 onwards. Confusion over dates can be put down to failing memory. It is less easy, though, to discount an anecdote which Williams recounts in convincing detail. According to Williams, the pattern of the meetings was that Seigewasser would be about to agree to the project but would then draw back and demand more time. Williams decided to have one more go:

"...and if I failed, to look for a more accessible project, possibly in Hamburg. The strangest thing happened: just as I was preparing to leave, someone on his [Seigewasser's] staff mentioned the Spanish Civil War. I remarked casually, 'I was involved in that'. Seigewasser immediately showed interest, and he said 'I was there too!' We compared experiences. He was with the Communist International Brigade in the north, where they were forming a protective front to guard the evacuation of children from the coast. I was working on a Red Cross ship, ferrying the children from the beach to be brought to England. That fortuitous common experience did what three years of discussion had failed to do, and Seigewasser said, 'Alright, you can build your hospital!'\textsuperscript{70}

This is not true. Seigewasser never went anywhere near Spain during the civil war due to the simple fact that he was imprisoned by the Nazis because of his communist activities in 1934 and remained in Sachsenhausen concentration camp until 1945. Either Seigewasser was lying or Williams' memory was hopelessly confused. But the detail of the story is convincing, leading to the conclusion that a conversation along these lines did actually take place, an example of the pervading deviousness of the time.

As Williams was being debriefed by all and sundry in West Berlin and Coventry, Seigewasser was drawing up his account of the meeting which he sent to Winzer at the MfAA. He told Winzer that before Dresden officials were notified of the plans, the matter would naturally be discussed with the 'relevant authorities' in Berlin.\textsuperscript{71} Copies of the report were also sent to the Arbeitsgruppe Kirchenfragen. Williams sent copies of his report to Crossman, Krug and Kreyssig, among others.

From the moment that it became apparent that the project might go ahead and that Aktion Sühnezeichen would be invited to take a leading organisational role, it was no longer
possible to sweep the political implications under the carpet. Pretend as the British did that
constant reiteration of the non-political nature of the event would make it so, the East
Germans were more alert to political realities. GDR churchmen recognised this fact and
gave voice to it. Kreyssig for one, who for decades had trodden a fine political line, first
under the Nazis and later under the Communists, recognised the stench of a political rat
although, as it turned out, smelling a rat was no guarantee of immunity from treachery.

In March, after receiving William's full report of the Seigewasser meeting, Kreyssig
spelled out his interpretation of the political implications in the context of the activities of
yet another British group which appeared to be contaminating the waters of reconciliation.
In February 1964, an 11-man group from the Fellowship of Reconciliation had visited
Dresden and put forward the proposition that a group of young people, representing the
Fellowship, should undertake reconstruction work in Dresden in the summer of 1965. This
made a total of three reconciliation projects on the table for the summer of 1965. Kreyssig
was worried because the Fellowship visit and proposal had been reported in GDR
newspapers and appeared to have the political backing of the GDR. Kreyssig told Williams:

"When our newspapers report in this fashion, it means that this form of project serves
political interests better...We must reckon with the fact, therefore, that what you have spelled
out so clearly will be politically undermined."^4

In addition, he was afraid that the other competing scheme, that proposed by Parry on a city-
to-city basis, would also take precedence over the cathedral plan. Either of the other two
projects would be more attractive to Dresden city council, he said.

Williams was extremely annoyed by the existence of the two competing projects,
accusing the organisers of the Fellowship scheme of being 'naive' and 'brainless parsons'. He
wrote to Kreyssig:

"The Fellowship of Reconciliation has been very naive in making itself accessible to
political propaganda in what it has set out to do in Dresden. I have recently heard that the
Coventry City Council International Committee, which has been just as naive, decided to act
independently and undertook some building operation directly with the DDR in Dresden and
to launch a national appeal."^5

In a letter to his fellow negotiator Walker, he was even more forthright in his condemnation
of the other bodies.
"I was alarmed in the extreme when I heard that the local International Fellowship Committee had decided to launch an official appeal in the name of Coventry to build a Church or something in Dresden as an act of reconciliation, without any sort of regard for the East/West problem. Already I had been hearing from Kreyssig that the Fellowship of Reconciliation had jumped in with both feet into the propaganda stew of the D.D.R. aided by one or two brainless parsons, so if the Cathedral was to keep the initiative in this I had to act quickly."

Kreyssig and Williams had not been alone in hearing alarm bells. In West Berlin, Krug and the British Foreign Office had also noted the Fellowship visit reported in the GDR press. They wanted to know if the group had any connection to the cathedral. It was hard 'to guess the fact behind the scenery', Krug told Williams. One person who might have been able to enlighten Williams, Krug and the Foreign Office was Paul Oestreicher. He appears to have been in sympathetic contact with the Fellowship of Reconciliation, having been invited to speak at the 50th anniversary of its founding in December 1964. In addition, Max Parker, the General Secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, had attended meetings of the British Council of Churches East/West Relations Advisory Committee, of which Oestreicher became associate secretary in 1964. If he knew of the Fellowship's activities in the GDR, which, given his expertise and contacts was quite possible, he obviously chose not to pass this on to Williams.

Kreyssig was correct in his political interpretation, but only up to a point. What became evident was that despite the superficially more politically attractive nature of the two competing proposals, the scheme that was wanted by Ulbricht was the cathedral scheme. The cathedral proposal did not make the newspapers at that stage. It was given no public promotion. But the fact that the two other schemes virtually withered away and the cathedral scheme did not, indicates quite clearly which proposal was in favour behind the scenes. The Fellowship plan was a mere distraction - but it was a distraction which supports the argument that Ulbricht wanted the cathedral reconciliation plan, and no other, to go ahead. The distraction of competing schemes continued to rear its head throughout the protracted negotiations but in the event had little impact on the outcome. It is possible that the competing schemes were used to create a greater sense of uncertainty which in turn spurred the project negotiators on to settle matters speedily, but in essence the die had been cast in the cathedral's favour from the outset.
The Seigewasser/Williams meeting of 21 January marked the end of one stage of the negotiations and the beginning of another. The action moved from Coventry and London to East Berlin and Dresden. The British Foreign Office file labelled 'Crossman and Dresden Memorial' appears to have been closed in July 1963 with a letter to the British Embassy in Bonn informing them of developments. There is no further documentary evidence of Crossman's involvement after January 1964. In October 1964, he became a Cabinet Minister, a post which would have precluded him from taking an active role in East German matters. Kreyssig became Williams' partner in Germany.

1 Bill Williams, unpublished memoirs, circa 1989, p. 59.
3 Ibid., p. 1.
4 PRO, FO 371/183002 RG1016/34(A), report from Buxton in West Berlin to Bullard in Bonn, 27 September 1965. This brief report, marked confidential, related to the Provost's visit to Dresden to mark the end of the Coventry/Dresden project. It referred back to a report on the project dated 20 September 1965.
5 Interview with Turner, 18-21 February 1999.
6 PRO, FO 371/183002 RG1016/34(A), report from Buxton in West Berlin to Bullard in Bonn, 27 September 1965.
8 PRO, FO 371/169329 CG1851/4, copy of a letter from Irving to Crossman quoting the letter from Paul Binks, 10 May 1963.
9 This figure has since been disputed and the debate continues about the precise number of people killed. Allegations have been made that the figure was artificially inflated during the Cold War for propaganda purposes. In 1995, The Guardian put the figure at up to 35,000, noting that German historian Friedrich Reichert has put the death toll at 25,000 while the Nazis claimed that 250,000 people died, 9 February 1995.
10 Irving, Destruction of Dresden, Papermac edition (no date), Foreword.
12 PRO, FO 371/169329 CG1851/4, Irving to Crossman, 10 May 1963.
13 The 14th century Cathedral of St Michael in Coventry was destroyed during a German bombing raid on 14 November 1940. The new cathedral was consecrated in May 1962. During the building of the new cathedral, a team of young West Germans, sent by Aktion Sühnezeichen, helped to create the International Centre of Christian Reconciliation in the crypt of the ruins of the old cathedral.
15 Ibid., letter from Williams to Crossman, 21 May 1963.
16 Interview with Pam Williams, widow of the Provost of Coventry Cathedral, 3 March 1997.
17 The Times, quoted in the obituary of Williams, 9 April 1990.
18 Ibid.
20 Ibid., p. 113
21 It should be noted that Williams' unpublished memoirs are an unreliable source. Written hastily, shortly before his death, they are littered with inaccuracies. For example, he claimed to have had his first meeting with Seigewasser in March 1960 when both Coventry Cathedral archive and that of the SKF reveal the first meeting took place in January 1964. The memoirs are, therefore, no more than
an indication of what took place, written by someone who was looking back over a long and busy life without the benefit of a research team to help him.

22 Ibid., pp.52-53.
23 Ibid., p.63.
24 Ibid., p.153.
25 Ibid., p.113.
26 Ibid., p.63.
31 CCA, letter from Williams to Crossman, 31 May 1963.
32 Ibid., letter from Jürgen Trumpf at the West German Embassy in London to Williams, 31 May 1963.
35 PRO, FO 371/169329 CG1851/4, confidential Foreign Office note, 9 July 1963, and MRCWU, Richard Crossman Papers, MSS.154/3/DR/16, letter from Crossman to von Etzdorf, 9 July 1963. Also MSS.154/3/DR/17, letter from Heath to Crossman summarising meeting, 11 July 1963. A section of the Foreign Office draft of this letter was omitted. The draft referred to the fact that the East Germans had never made an act of atonement in Coventry and had no plans to do so. A handwritten note advised that this should be left out as 'one doesn't know whom Mr Crossman will show this letter to; and we don't want the East Germans to make an act', a comment which illustrates Foreign Office distrust of Crossman.
37 Ibid.
38 MRCWU, Richard Crossman Papers, MSS.154/3/DR/12, letter from Parry to Crossman, 27 June 1963. The CCIU had been set up in 1962 to broaden Coventry city's participation in acts of international friendship. It operated in addition to the Coventry City Council International Friendship Committee and was designed to enable people with varied or no political views to take an active role. Members included representatives of religious groups, trade unions and cultural organisations. Nevertheless, the CCIU remained closely associated to the left-wing city council, its chairman in 1963 being Callow, the former Coventry Lord Mayor.
41 Ibid., MSS.154/3/DR/25, letter from Crossman to Parry, 23 July 1963.
44 CCA, copy of a letter from Etzdorf to Crossman, 13 August 1963.
47 Ibid.
48 CCA, letter from Krug to Williams, 3 October 1963.
49 Ibid., letter from Williams to Seigewasser, 19 November 1963.
50 Ibid., letter from Williams to Crossman, 2 January 1964.
53 CCA, Williams' report of his meeting with Seigewasser, 24 January 1964.
54 EZA, 97/124, von Hammerstein's report of his meeting with Williams, 21 January 1964.
55 CCA, letter from Krug to Williams, 13 January 1964.
56 Ibid., letter from Williams to Krug, 9 January 1964.
57 CCA, letter from Konsistorialrat F. Schlingensiepen to Williams, 7 June 1963.
SAPMO-BArch, DO4 2781, SfK report of Seigewasser’s meeting with Williams, 24 January 1964.
Also MfAA A 13122, copy of report.
Seigewasser had recently confirmed the official status of Aktion Sühnezeichen in discussion with deputy Foreign Minister Otto Winzer. The GDR’s policy was that Aktion Sühnezeichen was not an officially recognised organisation. It was not allowed to carry out projects outside the GDR but it could work on Church-related projects within the GDR.

CCA, letter from Williams to Krug, 2 January 1964.
Ibid., letter from Krug to Williams, 7 January 1964.
Ibid., letter from Crossman to Williams, 20 January 1964.
Ibid., Williams’ report of his meeting with Seigewasser, 24 January 1964.
Ibid.
Ibid., correspondence between Williams and Parry, 25 and 26 November 1963.
EZA, 97/124, von Hammerstein’s report of his meeting with Williams, 21 January 1964.
MfAA, A 13122, letter from Seigewasser to Winzer together with copy of report on Seigewasser’s meeting with Williams, 24 January 1964.

The Fellowship of Reconciliation had been founded in Cambridge, England in 1914, its members believing that Christians were forbidden to wage war.

MfAA, A 13122, German translation of letter from Max Parker, General Secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, to Schill, 19 February 1964, and MfAA, A 13101, report of the Deutsche Friedensrat to the MfAA on the Fellowship of Reconciliation visit, 19 February 1964. According to Bell in Britain and East Germany, the Fellowship of Reconciliation had connections with the British Peace Committee, an organisation which was regarded as a communist front and which was proscribed by the Labour Party, pp. 184-186.

ASA, letter from Kreyssig to Williams, 4 March 1964. Also CCA.
Ibid., letter from Williams to Kreyssig, 4 March 1964.
CCA, letter from Williams to Walker, 4 March 1964.
Ibid., letter from Krug to Williams, 4 March 1964.
Ibid., letter from Krug to Williams, 4 March 1964.
Ibid., letter from Krug to Williams, 7 May 1964.

BCC, BCC/DIA/1/8/10, broadcast made by Oestreicher on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, 8 December 1964.
BCC, BCC/DIA/1/11/20, minutes of various meetings of the East/West Relations Advisory Committee, 1961-1964.

The Coventry/Dresden Project: Separating Fact from Fiction

Church/state Co-operation and the Role of the Stasi

The Stasi, in the shape of Hans-Joachim Seidowsky, entered the picture at the beginning of 1964. Despite the fact that by March Williams had had no word from Seigewasser, Kreyssig had in February entered into negotiations with Seidowsky, whom he believed was acting as Seigewasser's intermediary. Kreyssig did not know that Seidowsky was an influential Stasi agent. He believed that he had established contact with a sympathetic unofficial intermediary, the introduction having been made by Kreyssig's old friend and colleague, Müller-Gangloff.

At the beginning of March, Kreyssig asked Williams for permission to enter into talks with the 'Verbindungsman' (intermediary). In fact, Kreyssig had pre-empted Williams' approval and had met Seidowsky on 27 February. Their conversation was significant because it demonstrated the manner in which, from the very start of the negotiations in the GDR, Kreyssig played the role that was required of him in relation to Bishop Noth. At this February meeting, he volunteered the information to Seidowsky that both he and Aktion Sühnezeichen were opposed to the reunification of Germany and were prepared to make compromises. He, Kreyssig, would take a stand against those in the Church who clung to outdated ideas of reunification, he told Seidowsky.

Kreyssig went on to ask Seidowsky to clarify the regime's attitude towards Aktion Sühnezeichen, saying he had been receiving conflicting messages. He was obviously already finding it difficult to make sense of the situation in which he found himself. On the one hand Aktion Sühnezeichen was being attacked by the regime; on the other hand Seigewasser had apparently spoken well of Aktion Sühnezeichen to Williams. In his report of this meeting, Seidowsky did not expand on the reference to Williams, merely inserting the word
'Coventry' in brackets after his name, an indication that he was already fully versed on who he was and the subject of the meeting. The Kreyssig/Seidowsky meeting indicates that by February 1964 the Coventry/Dresden project was in the hands of the Stasi.

Seidowsky and Kreyssig met again at the beginning of April, Williams still having had no news from Seigewasser and concerns growing in both countries over the rival projects. Kreyssig expressed his fears that the cathedral project would founder because of the poor relations between Noth and the Dresden civic authorities. He was prepared, together with his colleagues, to use his influence to 'bring Noth into line', he told Seidowsky. This statement by Kreyssig, noted without comment in a brief handwritten Treff report, is one of the most significant statements to have been recorded. It demonstrates how Kreyssig, aware of the political realities of the GDR, knew that curtailing Noth was a necessary part of the Coventry/Dresden project equation. Kreyssig's enthusiasm for his new friend was demonstrated by the fact that he issued Seidowsky with a warm invitation to private discussions at his home.

Kreyssig relayed his version of this meeting to Williams by courier. According to a translation made at the time, he wrote:

"Three days ago I told the negotiator through whom I have an unofficial [sic] communication with the secretary of state that the Provost is still without news. The reply was: Between the church guidance in Dresden and the local council of the district the relations have arrived at a dead end. They would fear that an English group as the guest of the church would only hear things about there [sic] to the disatvantage [sic] of the state. An arrangement through 'Aktion Suehnezeichen' was thought possible by the negotiator. I have expressed my readiness to do so. I shall get to know soon whether the secretary of state wishes and allows this."

Meanwhile, Kreyssig went on, GDR radio had announced that the city of Coventry wanted to take part in the reconstruction of Dresden. The GDR government would allow this to happen, he advised, 'so that they can in this way cut out all church influence...This may be the real reason why there are [sic] no news. The political instances join in the satisfaction that the church is put aside in this way'. 
Kreyssig's interpretation of events, although wrong, was at this point in line with the expectations of the British and West German governments, as proclaimed the previous year in London, that the GDR regime would balk at the prospect of a reconciliation project run by the Church and would reject it. However, by this point the attitude of both the British and West Germans had changed. The project was no longer an unwelcome distraction from which they wished to distance themselves. Both countries had by this point become actively involved in debriefing and advising Williams. They now expected the project to become a reality, even if Kreyssig did not. Seidowsky and Kreyssig met again two weeks later. Kreyssig wanted to know if any decisions had been made about the English group. He repeated his view that he was in favour of the Church leadership in Dresden 'normalising' its relations with the Dresden authorities.*

The first traceable indication that the cathedral plan had been given GDR approval came from von Hammerstein who told Krug that the response from Seigewasser had been 'positive'. This snippet was passed on in a letter from Krug to Williams at the beginning of May. It is not clear from whom they obtained their information although later Kreyssig was to say that Seidowsky had given him permission to proceed with the organisation of the project and it is possible that the message was relayed via Seidowsky's close contact Müller-Gangloff, a friend and colleague of both Kreyssig and von Hammerstein. There is no record that the news came from Seigewasser. It was still unclear precisely what form the project would take although Krug wrote that Kreyssig was due to meet the head of the Dresden Diakonissenkrankenhaus in East Berlin 'within the next few days'. Just to add to the confusion, a Dresden priest and Stasi informer called Dieter Frielinghaus, had, under instructions from Seigewasser, written to Williams in April telling him that there was no Church property in Dresden suitable for the building project and suggesting an historic building as an alternative. The lack of any record of Williams having been informed directly by Seigewasser that he had permission for the project to proceed is immaterial in a practical sense in that the operation was being run by the Stasi. However, it is a peculiar omission and one which Williams might have been expected to query since he operated in a more traditional manner where letters and phone calls were responded to. There is, though,
no evidence of Williams finding it strange that he had to learn of the positive decision on the project in such a roundabout fashion.

*_Stasi* records shows that Kreyssig came under intense surveillance from about April 1964 until the end of the year, to the extent that a plan was obtained of the precise position of the furniture in every room of his home. His flat was under constant watch and his neighbours were questioned. Given the scenario of secrecy and intrigue which extended to those working on the same side, there was no coherent chain of events. Most of the main participants showed themselves to be confused and anxious, a condition brought about by a combination of no information, misleading information or conflicting information. This situation was not helped by Kreyssig's habit of communicating in riddles. To a certain extent his caution against spelling out what he meant in writing was wise, given that he was no doubt aware that he was under surveillance. However, his obfuscation was also a result of his literary style, as succinctly observed by one exasperated Stasi agent who wrote:

"...Kreyssig likes to compose his documents and papers in very legal/theological German hedged around with qualifying clauses so that most people are not clever enough to follow it."

This was the style in which Kreyssig wrote to Williams, who in any case did not speak German and had to rely on sometimes inaccurate translations, the work of a German-speaking employee at the cathedral. In the process some of the subtleties of Kreyssig's letters were missed in the English translation.

The clearest expression of Kreyssig's understanding of the situation in the spring of 1964 was contained in a letter sent by courier to his _Aktion Sühnezeichen_ colleagues and friends and in Dresden, _Präses_ Reimer Mager and _Pfarrer_ Dietrich Mendt. These two men, who were active in the administration of the Church in the Saxon diocese, were charged by Kreyssig with initiating the delicate negotiations in Dresden between Church and civic authorities. Kreyssig wrote:

"A conversation with Herr Seidowski [sic] last Friday has confirmed the result that I gave you over the telephone. We have free rein for an act of reconciliation by Provost Williams in Coventry...The breakthrough has surpassed expectations...At any rate, clearly through an intervention, Williams seems to have priority with his plan."
The agreement was that the project would go ahead, with Williams supplying labour and money and *Aktion Sühnezeichen* supplying the practical organisational skills required.

"Accordingly, last Friday Seidowski [sic] again expressly asked me to keep him informed before the agreement is finally drawn up which we want to negotiate in Dresden in June. Please don't be afraid that there is anything wrong with this relationship. I have had not the slightest doubt, since I have been in contact with S., that we will proceed on our way honestly, that we will keep our music clean, and that there is no possibility of having to sacrifice our conscience in order to pay for this. The partner knows me well enough. So far no conditions at all have been placed on me for what we have in mind."\(^{17}\)

Kreyssig continued that he was aware of the politically sensitive relationship between the Church and the state authorities in Dresden, and proposed setting himself up as 'the appointed honourable broker' between Williams, Seigewasser and the civic authorities. The letter contains innuendo and half-spoken thoughts such as 'bigger things are on their way but we cannot speak about them yet'.

The plan was, as Kreyssig told Williams in May, for Mager and Mendt to do the groundwork in Dresden and for Kreyssig to present a final report to the Church's administrative body on 9 June, following consultations with the civic authorities. In the event, contact between the two sides - Church and state - was much more direct. Instead of Kreyssig acting as intermediary, on 9 June there was a face-to-face meeting between Dresden city council and Church representatives, this meeting following discussions between Kreyssig, Noth and Mager the day before.\(^{18}\) According to rough notes probably made by Kreyssig,\(^{19}\) the meeting on 9 June was attended by Schill, the head of the city council Church department Kortus, Kreyssig, and *Oberkirchenrat* Ulrich von Brück, the man who became the official link between the diocese of Saxony and the Coventry project and who a few years later was officially recorded as a *Stasi* informer, codename 'Zwinger'.\(^{20}\) Thus, probably for the first time since the Order for Silence in 1963, under Kreyssig's guidance the Church in Saxony and the Dresden civic authorities met in a spirit of cooperation. On 11 June, Kreyssig reported the results of his Dresden meetings to Seigewasser, and the following day he sent a detailed report to Williams, telling him that everything had been a 'complete success'. The Church and the civic authorities in Dresden had agreed that Williams could go ahead with his plans for the *Diakonissenkrankenhaus*. All that was missing was Seigewasser's final agreement.\(^{21}\)
On the same day, Kreyssig also dutifully wrote to Seidowsky telling him that his mission in Dresden had been successful, in accordance with the plan they had discussed, and enclosed a copy of the report he had sent to Seigewasser. This was probably unnecessarily egging the Stasi cake since it already had the operation covered from almost every angle; its agents included Schill reporting back from Dresden city council, Horst Dohle reporting back from the Bezirk Kirchenfragen department, Wilke reporting back from the SfK, and von Brück being a possible link to the diocese.

Oestreicher provided the British link. Oestreicher met Seidowsky in Prague a few weeks after the 9 June meeting. Oestreicher was there as a member of the CPC. Seidowsky was purporting to be a journalist covering the event. According to Seidowsky’s Treff report, Oestreicher informed Seidowsky about his forthcoming move to the British Council of Churches as associate secretary with responsibility for East European affairs. His mission, approved by the 'British Foreign Minister', was to research the possibilities of the British taking a more active political role in socialist countries. The meeting would have provided an opportunity to discuss the Coventry/Dresden project. It would have been surprising if the two men had failed to mention it, since both had a professional interest. There is, however, no specific mention of the project in the two-page hand-written account of the meeting. The subject matter largely revolved around Oestreicher’s new brief for work in East European countries. He was reported to have told Seidowsky that he would be working under the orders of the 'British HA', which planned to use him as an unofficial connection to the GDR. The meaning of 'HA' is not clear. The German abbreviation stands for Hauptabteilung or head office. In the context of the report, the probability is that Seidowsky was referring to either a government department or British intelligence. Oestreicher was obviously operating at a high level as the reference to British HA follows on from his assertion that Sir Alec Douglas-Holme, the British Prime Minister, had sent a message to Prague on Oestreicher’s advice.

Meanwhile, on a more prosaic level, work was going ahead on the practical arrangements which needed to be made in order to undertake what would be a major
construction operation. In this area, it was obvious that the Church and the Dresden city authorities needed to be able to work together. Mendt and Breitmann, head of the Dresden Bezirk Kirchenfragen department, met to discuss the project.\textsuperscript{25} The Health Ministry, for example, needed to be informed. Planning permission had to be obtained. Breitmann thought that Williams should come to Dresden as soon as possible to discuss his plans. In Breitmann's opinion it would not be possible to start work before 1965, although he informed Mendt that Seigewasser's approval had now been obtained. Given the shortage of building materials in the GDR, the lack of priority given to any work connected with the Church, and the cumbersome bureaucracy of the system, the fact that it was anticipated that the project would be able to proceed in a matter of months is significant.\textsuperscript{26} The Diakonissenkrankenhaus was being put on the fast track. Williams was delighted by all this news and also with Breitmann's proposed timetable. He told Kreyssig that he planned to launch an appeal for funds in November 1964 and wanted to begin work in March or April 1965.\textsuperscript{27}

Kreyssig was less happy with these proposals. Once again, even at this advanced stage, he was worried about other organisations highjacking the project. Breitmann had raised the fact that an organisation known as the Christian Peace Movement had been voicing ideas about reconciliation work in Dresden.\textsuperscript{28} Only one group could work in Dresden, said Breitmann. The matter must be clarified before further progress could be made. Accordingly, Kreyssig wrote to Williams asking him to write to Seigewasser assuring him that the project would only be carried out under the auspices of Aktion Sühnezeichen.\textsuperscript{29} By the tone of Williams' reply, it is evident that he was irritated rather than worried about these distractions. He wrote:

"I wish to make it very clear, and I hope finally, for I have said this many times, that I have no intention of co-operating with any organisation other than Aktion Sühnezeichen. It has been to be sure of this that I have gone so slowly and carefully for so long. I have had various approaches from organisations in England which are politically naive, and I have rejected any offer of co-operation. Unless it is accepted absolutely that we work with Aktion Sühnezeichen I do not wish to proceed."\textsuperscript{30}
As later events will demonstrate, the absolute certainty of this statement of intent regarding *Aktion Sühnezeichen* began to look much shakier only three months later when Williams began to agree that the organisation could be sidelined.

This missive probably crossed with another letter from Kreyssig in which he told Williams that he understood and agreed with his proposed timetable but pointed out that it would be very difficult to stop the press getting hold of the story before then. Kreyssig would instruct his own circle to maintain silence but the situation was so 'delicate' that it would not be wise to leave the Dresden civic authorities without news of Williams' plans until the launch of the appeal in November because during that time 'unexpected influences could press their case'. He told Williams that he could not vouch for the discretion of the Dresden authorities but had written to Seigewasser to do what he could and was sending a copy of this letter to Williams. Copies of both letters also went to Seidowsky.

It was around this time that another unexpected complication crept into the proceedings, which shed more light on Seidowsky's background role within the GDR in general and in relation to the Coventry/Dresden project in particular. In July, it became evident that Seidowsky's activities had aroused suspicion among state officials working in the more orthodox areas of Church/state relations. A member of the SfK, Kusch, was instructed by Seigewasser and the *Arbeitsgruppe Kirchenfragen* to question Seidowsky about his activities in Church circles and find out how damaging they were. A report on this interrogation was submitted to the *Stasi* by its informer, Wilke, who concluded that the whole thing would prove to be a boomerang against those who had initiated it because Seidowsky had shown himself to be so well-informed on a variety of matters that it was suspected that he was actually working for the KGB. The report's recommendation was to drop the inquiry immediately. Seidowsky's explanation should be accepted and no further action should be taken.

The incident, which has been referred to previously in the context of Seidowsky's operational cover, is also significant in the context of the Coventry/Dresden project. During the course of the official inquiry, Kreyssig was brought in for questioning about his
relationship with Seidowsky. His answers provide a record of Kreyssig's understanding of the political usefulness of Williams' role as envisaged by the GDR regime. Kreyssig told his questioners that:

"...[he] considered him [Seidowsky] to be an official figure and made all his thoughts and papers about his work available to him. There are two particular examples which made him believe that he was in touch with someone who had influence in state matters: referring to Provost Williams' trip to Dresden, Seidowski [sic] said that the Secretary of State would welcome such a visit because he had an interest in Williams' role as a mediator between the Church leadership and the Dresden Bezirk council in order to establish better political relations. [author's underlining.] [The second example quoted by Kreyssig has been censored by the BStU archivists.]

This is a most telling remark which substantiates the theory that the Coventry/Dresden project was used in order to curtail opposition within the GDR. The Provost of Coventry Cathedral was not being allowed into the GDR in order to give succour and support to the beleaguered Church. He was being allowed in in order to put pressure on the Church to co-operate with the communist authorities. He would not be giving moral support to Church leaders opposed to Ulbricht. Instead, he would be a tool in the political process of giving support to the GDR state. Both Williams and Kreyssig were aware of the role they were being asked to play, although in all probability they did not know the extent to which they were being manipulated by the intelligence services. But they did know that they were serving a political purpose aimed at the suppression of dissident voices within the GDR.

Around this time Kreyssig was also told by the SfK that the arrangements for the project would be finally agreed with Williams in the autumn. He relayed this information to Mendt, advising him that no further action was necessary at this time. Williams set about arranging the visit, with Krug, once again, acting as organiser in West Berlin. Another dinner party was arranged so that, after his meeting with Seigewasser, Williams could meet those he had met after his first interview in January. Interest in the project had not waned.

The first indication for Kreyssig and Williams that Seidowsky was not an honest broker came in September. Kreyssig wrote a hasty letter to Williams to warn him. He had discovered disturbing information about Seidowsky's real identity, but precisely how much
he knew is not clear from the letter he wrote, nor did he say how he came about this information. To compound the lack of precision, Kreyssig's warning would not have been clear to Williams since the English translation he received was inaccurate. Kreyssig told Williams that, although everything had been agreed, Seigewasser wanted to discuss 'the whole thing' with Williams again on his next visit and continued:

"... In the first place, it is the understandable wish of the Secretary of State not to be sidelined. I did not know and never once suspected that Herr Seidowsky, who authorised me on behalf of the state to take the steps that I did in Dresden, had taken his instructions not from the Secretary of State for Church Affairs but from someone else, from the highest state leadership [author's underlining], or at the very least an office or person very close to that leadership. We have been unwittingly drawn in to the differences which are created by the fight for power and ideology."38

The translation which Williams received said merely that Seidowsky was acting on the authority of 'another high government authority'.39 It did not say it was the 'highest' authority. It would have been possible for Williams to have regarded Kreyssig's warning as relatively inconsequential, a mere inter-departmental squabble within the GDR. Perhaps surprisingly, Kreyssig went on to tell Williams that, nevertheless, they should continue as planned and not allow anything to confuse them. He expressed his continuing concerns about rumours and reports of competing projects and wanted to hurry Williams along in announcing his plans in order not to allow 'too long an interlude for intrigue'. Did Kreyssig think he could outwit the Stasi? Whether or not Williams ever knew the identity of Seidowsky remains an open question.

This letter was sent to Williams via the Aktion Sühnezeichen office in West Berlin having been brought through the Wall by courier. Von Hammerstein read it and included a note of his own. He did not refer to Seidowsky directly but did advise Williams of the possibility that the contact between von Hammerstein and Khrushchev 'might be of help' in the current situation.40 Kreyssig, however, was of a different opinion, fearing that the GDR would take a negative view of this top-level Soviet link and told Williams so.41 Khrushchev was ousted from power on 15 October, the day after Williams had his meeting with Seigewasser.
These high-level contacts among those connected with the Dresden project were reflected in Britain, where, at the beginning of September, Williams was in contact with the Foreign Secretary, R A (Rab) Butler, and the British Ambassador in Bonn, Sir Frank Roberts. This correspondence, which took place 16 months after the British Foreign Office had declared it wanted nothing to do with the project, demonstrates the extent of the change in British attitudes. Williams told Roberts that he was well aware of the political implications of the project and, with the knowledge of Seigewasser, had held discussions with Scharf, Noth, Krummacher and Kreyssig with the aim of reducing the dangers. The safest way of 'insuring the operation against any misunderstanding' is for it to be conducted in co-operation with Aktion Sühnezeichen, he told Sir Frank. Williams ended his letter by advising Sir Frank of his forthcoming meetings in Berlin and Dresden in October and asked him for his comments. A copy of this letter was sent to the British Foreign Secretary and to the West German Ambassador in London. The Foreign Secretary replied that he was interested to see how far the Dresden plans had progressed, the implication being that he had therefore been briefed about the project in its earlier stages.

Kreyssig's warning about Seidowsky did not provoke a reaction from Williams. Towards the end of September, Williams appears to have been more concerned about the practicalities of obtaining a visa to travel to Dresden than the internal political machinations of the GDR. He had applied for a visa on 27 August, but, having heard nothing by the end of September, wrote a sharp letter to the GDR Foreign Ministry advising that it would not be worth his while to travel to Germany unless he received his visa. He asked Kreyssig to use his influence to speed things up saying that 'the greatest point of frustration is to get any replies to any letters I write to the DDR officials'. This lack of response to visa applications was normal practice on both sides of the Iron Curtain. It increased the feeling of uncertainty and anxiety, and if the visitor did eventually gain access to the country he wished to visit, he felt as though that in itself was an achievement. Von Hammerstein, to whom Williams had also complained, told him to come anyway. 'They always give visas at the very last minute.'
During this same period, in the run up to Williams' second meeting with Seigewasser, a seven-man strong delegation from the British Council of Churches was also visiting the GDR. Included in the delegation were the Coventry Cathedral youth officer, Michael Butterfield, who up to this point had been involved in many of the practical arrangements for the project from the British end, and Oestreicher, in his role as associate secretary of the BCC international department. The group was in the GDR from 10 to 17 October, overlapping the visit by Williams. During their stay, members of the delegation visited a number of towns and cities, including Dresden. Butterfield used his time in Dresden to have talks connected with the project. He met Noth, Mendt and the Mother Superior at the Diakonissenkrankenhaus. Later he also met Williams when he arrived there on 15 October. In the evening, Seigewasser gave a reception for the whole group in East Berlin. The following day, Kreyssig was one of those invited to meet the delegation, including Butterfield, at a Church meeting in East Berlin. In his personal report of the visit, Oestreicher referred to the fact that, while the delegation was there, Williams had finalised the details of the Coventry/Dresden project. Thus, although there was no overt connection between the visit by the BCC delegation and the Coventry/Dresden project, it is evident that the visit was used in order to expedite the negotiations. All the main protagonists were in contact or had the possibility of contact during the period of the visit - Williams, Butterfield, Oestreicher, Seigewasser, Seidowsky and Kreyssig. Whether the timing of the visits was serendipity or not is a moot point.

In the event, Seigewasser was not present at the planned meeting with Williams on 14 October. Instead he was represented by Weise, accompanied by Wilke and Breitmann from Dresden. Williams' party included Walker and Kreyssig. Wilke's report of the meeting was sent to the MfAA and to the Stasi. The meeting signalled the start of the process of excluding *Aktion Sühnezeichen* from the project organisation and instating the Church in Dresden in its place. Seigewasser's representatives insisted that no public recognition of *Aktion Sühnezeichen* was possible while Williams argued that he must use the name *Aktion Sühnezeichen* in Britain for publicity purposes. This impasse appears to have been resolved with the compromise agreement that a committee should be set up to handle organisational matters. The committee would consist of Church and state representatives, including *Aktion*
Sühnezeichen. However, Williams agreed that he would henceforth conduct executive arrangements directly with Bishop Noth.  

It appeared that the wheel had come full circle. In January 1964, Aktion Sühnezeichen had been the intermediary favoured by both sides. By October 1964, with Williams' acquiescence, Aktion Sühnezeichen was being sidelined by the GDR. Bishop Noth, considered to be persona non grata only a few months previously, was being spoken of as a central figure in the organisation of the project. Kreyssig's correspondence during the next few months expressed bewilderment and concern over the way in which Aktion Sühnezeichen was being edged out by the regime. The exclusion process culminated in March when he and Aktion Sühnezeichen representatives were banned from the official reception provided by Seigewasser for the first British volunteers, although GDR Church leaders were made welcome. On 17 March, the day after the reception, Gotthardt, an Aktion Sühnezeichen employee, telephoned the SfK to clarify an administrative matter and was told curtly by the person at the other end of the line to cease making phone calls because 'you know, of course, that we don't want to have anything more to do with you'. Gotthardt was then cut off.

Williams launched his fund-raising appeal for £25,000 in London on 2 November 1964. The Times reported that the project was intended as a gesture to the 'whole German people, east and west'. It did not refer to Aktion Sühnezeichen by name, but mentioned that a 'reconciliation organisation' founded in East Berlin would be assisting with the project. The Coventry Evening Telegraph, in a lengthy report on the appeal, devoted three paragraphs to the work of Aktion Sühnezeichen, making clear the major role the organisation was playing. However, it is apparent from the report that Williams went out of his way to appease the East Germans by alluding to the role of the Bishop of Dresden. Williams also wrote formal letters to Kreyssig, von Brück, Kortus and Butterfield inviting them to become members of the organising committee. Von Brück was asked to act as chairman. Throughout the next three months, the committee members forged ahead with the practical arrangements.
On 25 January 1965, the committee held its first meeting in Dresden. It was attended by all four members, including Butterfield. Two practical problems were discussed which provide an illustration of the general state of uncertainty among the GDR authorities about who or which department was actually running the project. It was not known whether visas would be processed in Berlin or Dresden. And officials were not able to say whether the volunteers would be required to comply with the currency regulations which required all Western visitors to change a certain amount of Western currency into GDR currency for every day of their visit. The matter was only resolved in favour of the British group a few days before they arrived in East Berlin, with officials repeatedly trying to pass the decision to other departments.

The smooth inauguration of the project was threatened by a row about who should be invited to the breakfast reception which Seigewasser was planning to throw for the British volunteers when they arrived in East Berlin on 16 March. Kreyssig had been expecting to attend along with some of his colleagues. The SfK, however, issued instructions that invitations should be issued to a number of Church representatives and that no-one from Aktion Sühnezeichen would be invited. In addition, the guest list would include GDR officials, the British group and Oestreicher. When the exclusion of Aktion Sühnezeichen was queried by Pabst, Wilke launched into a lengthy denunciation of Aktion Sühnezeichen. He repeated that as far as the Dresden project was concerned the GDR would only deal with Williams and his volunteers, von Brück as a representative of the Saxon diocese, and Pabst himself as the ecumenical officer representing the bishops of the GDR. It would not negotiate with Aktion Sühnezeichen. He warned that the whole undertaking would be put in danger if the press continued to connect the project with Aktion Sühnezeichen. Pabst raised the matter again at the meeting of 10 March but met the same response.

"The Secretary of State made it clear right from the start that, as far as the building project of the young Britons in Dresden is concerned, Aktion Sühnezeichen cannot appear in any way to be associated with state authorities in the GDR."

The regime's refusal to invite Kreyssig or any other Aktion Sühnezeichen representative to the reception put the Church in the GDR in a quandary. Should those Church representatives who had been invited attend, or should they boycott the function in support of Aktion
Sühnezeichen? Kreyssig wrote to Williams to inform him of these developments. On 8 March, he wrote:

"The matter has now got to a critical stage here in that the Secretary of State has invited six leading Church people but expressly refused to invite Aktion Sühnezeichen representatives. After the course of our conversation in September you will not be surprised. The six representatives of the Church are now wondering if they should accept such a snub to Aktion Sühnezeichen or refrain from participation. I am not so sure that the outcome is turning out to be as clear and simple as was apparent from your discussion in September."^60

Kreyssig nevertheless advised Williams that the British group should accept the invitation. He also sent Pabst a lengthy analysis of the situation as he saw it, in which he drew attention to the inconsistent attitude of the SfK towards Aktion Sühnezeichen. ^61 How could the state now object to Aktion Sühnezeichen when for the past several months it had been including it in the Dresden project negotiations? During the preparations for the Dresden project there had been 'continuous official traffic' between the Sühnezeichen office and the SfK, he said. He, Kreyssig, had always been prepared to be 'snubbed' again but it had only been since September 1964 [at the time that Kreyssig discovered the identity of Seidowsky] that Seigewasser had appeared to object to him again.

In the event the reception went ahead, with the guest list more or less as the SfK had planned. Following discussions with Krummacher, Noth, Kreyssig and others, the Church leaders decided to accept the invitations. ^62 The British group's memories of the reception are vague. They were tired after their long journey by train and boat and simply anxious to reach Dresden. According to one volunteer, they were served bacon and eggs which unfortunately were cold by the time the long and formal speeches of welcome had been completed. ^63

**The Coventry/Dresden Project and Publicity**

There is one other aspect of the negotiation period which bears examination and that is the manner in which publicity about the Coventry/Dresden project appears to have been controlled by both the GDR and the British. Five months before the breakfast reception, and at precisely the same time that Seigewasser and Williams were agreeing that Aktion Sühnezeichen was to be excluded, a British television company was being given permission to enter the GDR to make a documentary about the organisation. The making of this film was remarkable. It was the first time since the building of the Berlin Wall that a British
television company had obtained access to the GDR and it was to be some years before the event was repeated. It demonstrated to what lengths the GDR was prepared to go in order to ensure the success of the Coventry/Dresden project. In effect the GDR chose to allow a British television company to make a film within its own borders about an organisation to which it would give no official recognition and which it regarded as a cover for the subversive operations of the CIA. Why?

In order to attempt to answer this question it is necessary to examine events, as much as they are known. The film was made by ABC Television and was screened in November 1964, a few days after the national launch of the Coventry Cathedral fund-raising appeal for the Dresden project. The idea for such a programme probably came from Williams. The reporter/presenter of the programme was a young woman called Lyn Macdonald who, at the time, was working on religious programmes. Looking back on events surrounding the making of the film, she remembers it as a 'cloak and dagger affair' which culminated in drama at Checkpoint Charlie when she and her producer, Edward Childs, were interrogated by GDR border guards.

Macdonald discussed the film with Williams, who also informed Krug, still very much at the centre of events, of the plans. The aim was to make two programmes. One would deal with the work of the Church in general, with particular reference to *Aktion Sühnezeichen*. This would require background material in East Berlin plus interviews with Kreyssig and others. The second programme would relate specifically to Dresden and the hospital building project and would involve filming interviews and other material in the city. But despite Williams' apparent confidence that the film would be made, Macdonald met the usual problems obtaining a visa. Macdonald remembers letters and telegrams being sent to the GDR but no replies being received. Eventually it was decided that she should go without a film crew, try to talk her way in and make arrangements to use an East German crew when she got there. This she did, arriving in West Berlin during the second week of October. For three days, she recalls, she went backwards and forwards through the Berlin Wall on a day pass. Each day she went to see the head of GDR television, Ulrich Popp, and each day he told her to come back the next day.
"He was clearly just playing with us, telling us every day to come back tomorrow. We told him he could look at all the film. He said: 'We do not censor film'...After three days he said probably I could go to Dresden but I must come back tomorrow. This time he told me to bring my luggage...We went to see Herr Popp again with our luggage and were told we could go to Dresden. We were given Herr Schulz as our minder. We were told he was involved in the film business but I don't think he knew anything about it.\(^67\)

In Dresden, Macdonald interviewed Williams and one of the sisters at the hospital, as well as taking more general shots of the city. The film shot in East Berlin and Dresden was processed by the East Germans and viewed by them in the presence of Macdonald in East Berlin on her final day in the GDR. Afterwards she went back to the East Berlin offices of Aktion Sühnezeichen where it had been arranged that she should meet some young people who, as Macdonald describes it, 'were opposed to the regime'. They all spoke English 'after a fashion' and made statements about why they disagreed with their government. Macdonald recorded these statements on sound only and hid the reel down the girdle she was wearing before hastily making her way to Checkpoint Charlie to return to the West. There was only an hour or two left before her visa expired. At the crossing point she and Childs were told that they did not have the correct stamps in their passports and were taken to a room where they were questioned by the guards.

"...I was really scared because I knew I had this reel of stuff down my girdle. But it was all a charade. I knew that whatever happened I would be got out. But I also knew that at the first sight of the thumb screws I would spill the beans.\(^68\)

Macdonald was not given a body search and eventually the pair was told they could go. But just as they heaved a sigh of relief, a guard looked at his watch, observed to them that it was now five minutes past midnight, and announced that since they had overstayed their visas by five minutes he would now call the police. Another period of tense waiting followed before Macdonald and Childs were again told they could go. The grand finale to this drama came when the East German guards switched on the border floodlights and unslung their guns as Macdonald and Childs were forced to walk backwards and forwards across the East/West divide carrying all their luggage and film equipment, a process which took several long minutes. From the other side, the Americans watched and wondered what was going on.\(^69\)
What was the meaning of this 'charade', as Macdonald describes it? Several conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, it is almost certain that everything that happened to Macdonald was orchestrated by the East German authorities. Everyone she met would have been under observation. She herself was accompanied by a minder, although she says she was able to give him the slip on occasion. Nevertheless, the *Stasi* was closely monitoring Kreyssig's every move at this time. It is reasonable to suppose they would also have had the *Aktion Sühnezeichen* offices under surveillance, especially as they knew that a Western television reporter was making a programme on the organisation. They would have known about the so-called dissidents that Macdonald met, the reel of tape she secreted about her person.

For what reason would *Aktion Sühnezeichen* have put forward these 'dissidents'? If it really wanted the voice of young East Germans to be heard, it could itself smuggle out tapes via one of the many American couriers who regularly carried letters backwards and forwards. Why should it arrange for Macdonald to do this job? Is it likely that young people would have put themselves in jeopardy by agreeing to be recorded making statements against the government? Turner recalls that people were so wary, they would shut the windows before speaking, in case someone was listening outside. So is it plausible that these young people would agree to be recorded in this fashion? In addition, it would have been extremely rare for young East Germans to speak English. Russian was the foreign language taught in schools. How likely was it that several English-speaking young Christians could be found who would be willing to speak publicly against the government to a woman who was present in the country with the permission of the regime? But if these young people were not genuine dissidents, who were they?

Macdonald was not naive. She realised that the regime was playing games. She also recognised that her visit was important although, she says, 'I was young and only really realised in retrospect how important it was'. However, she did leave East Germany with the impression that she had captured on tape the voice of a repressed group of people and her belief in the genuine nature of the 'story' she had obtained was reinforced by her experiences at Checkpoint Charlie. The question which needs to be asked is whether this
was the impression that the East German regime wished her to have? The answer is that it probably was. Firstly, it is almost certain that the whole process was stage-managed by the East Germans from start to finish. Secondly, Macdonald's film would give the British public the impression that through the Coventry Cathedral appeal they would be giving support to the repressed Christians of East Germany. One of Macdonald's films focused on the problems of Christianity in the GDR and featured an interview with one of the sisters at the Dresden Diakonissenkrankenhaus. It also included one of the 'secret' interviews with a young East German Christian in which she spoke of the difficulties of obtaining an education if one 'didn't think or say right [sic]'. A West Berlin priest interviewed, who worked for Aktion Sühnezeichen, said that for GDR Christians it was 'a risk and a challenge to confess their faith' and described the situation as 'psychological persecution'. Most viewers who saw both programmes would have gained the impression that Coventry Cathedral was working with an organisation which was opposed to a regime which, while not openly persecuting Christians, made life difficult for them. The programme would probably have helped to quell any critical voices which might have argued that the Dresden project would appear to be giving support to the communist regime. No-one would have suspected from the programme that the purpose of the project was exactly the opposite of appearances.

Apart from the publicity generated in Britain in connection with the fund-raising campaign, media coverage of the project was low key. Indeed, Williams issued instructions that publicity was to be avoided when the British group crossed into East Berlin. Aktion Sühnezeichen in West Berlin was informed that Williams wanted the group to be 'unobtrusive'. There were to be no press conferences. A brief report was put out by the news agency, epd, which was picked up by a number of West German newspapers. The reception was not reported in the mouthpiece of the GDR regime, Neues Deutschland. No mention of the project has been found in the press cuttings of the SfK. The Daily Mail published a short article with pictures in April. But media coverage in Britain was largely limited to the reports in the Coventry Evening Telegraph. In July 1965, a reporter from the paper wrote two lengthy articles about the project, following a brief visit to Dresden.
noted that 'despite the fact that the gesture [the project] transcends politics and international barriers, comparatively few people appear to have realised the significance of the appeal'.

Why this media low profile about the project which, from the British side, was intended to signal the healing of the wounds of history, and which from the East German side could have been used, at the very least, to indicate a thaw in the hostility of the West towards the GDR? There is evidence to suggest that the lack of media coverage was the result of the direct intervention of the British and GDR governments, that there was a concrete agreement between the two sides that, once it was launched, the project should be shielded from public attention. A brief report sent from West Berlin to the British Embassy in Bonn and from there to the Foreign Office towards the end of the life of the project in September 1965 reads:

"I reported in Paragraph 10 of my letter 1856 of 20 September [this report is not contained within the PRO records nor is it held in the Foreign Office's own archives] that the East German authorities had not by then engaged in any propaganda exploitation of the project for reconstructing the Diakonissen Krankenhaus in Dresden.

2. This statement continues to be true, so far as the printed word is concerned. Neither the national press nor the local Dresden press, neither the SED press nor the church press have, so far as we can trace, published anything at all on the project...

3. ...one can, therefore, I think fairly conclude that Seigewasser's promise on this point (paragraph 4 of my letter) has been kept...."

It is unfortunate that the Foreign Office letter alluding to Seigewasser's apparent 'promise' of media silence has not been retained in the PRO records. But this single reference does indicate the existence of an agreement between the two governments to the effect that the project should, in publicity terms, be buried. The lack of publicity points yet again to the covert nature of the Coventry/Dresden project, to the fact that it had little to do with British attempts at reconciliation or GDR diplomatic recognition. A certain amount of publicity had been needed in order to get the project off the ground. Those working for it needed to believe in what they were doing. But once the project was up and running, once the operation to harness the East German Church to the regime was under the way, publicity was no longer necessary. Quite the reverse.
Conclusion

Despite the subterfuge and intrigue which surrounded the Coventry/Dresden project, a detailed scrutiny of events leading up to it taking place provides sufficient documentary evidence to support the hypothesis that the project was manipulated by the governments of both Britain and the GDR and that its main purpose was to persuade dissident GDR Church leaders of the wisdom of cooperating with the regime. The evidence falls into two categories - concrete and circumstantial.

Points about which there is no ambiguity are as follows:

1. In April 1964, Kreyssig told Seidowsky that he would use his influence to persuade dissident Church leaders in Dresden to co-operate with the state. In July, Kreyssig reported Seidowsky as saying that he saw Williams as a mediator between Church and state in Dresden. The aim was to 'establish better political relations'.

2. It was Seidowsky, the Stasi agent, and not Seigewasser, the responsible government minister, who authorised Kreyssig to proceed with the negotiations.

3. From January 1964 onwards, both Britain and West Germany were actively involved in the negotiations. Representatives were present at debriefing meetings and Williams kept the British informed of events. The British attitude changed from that of distancing itself from the project to that of keeping a close watch on everything that occurred and advising Williams on his actions.

4. In July 1964, Oestreicher told Seidowsky of his role as the unofficial British contact to the GDR and that he would be working closely with either the British government or British intelligence. Oestreicher was present at the official reception for the British group in East Berlin, the only British person there who was not employed by Coventry Cathedral or a member of the group.

5. The attitudes of both Williams and Seigewasser towards Noth and the Dresden civic authorities changed completely between the summer of 1963 and the autumn of 1964. In 1963, Williams claimed that he stressed repeatedly that the project was and must remain a purely inter-Church matter. By late 1964, he was telling the SfK that he was prepared to work directly with the Dresden authorities. Likewise, in January 1964 the SfK apparently insisted that Noth could not be involved in the project in any way at all. Ten
months later, it demanded that Williams should work through Noth and no-one else. In both instances, a complete U-turn was accomplished and the rift between Church and state in Dresden was on the way to being healed.

6. *Aktion Sühnezeichen* was brought in to act as an intermediary purely because it was considered to be expedient by both sides. Once the organisation had served its purpose it was relegated to the sidelines.

Circumstantial factors which support the concrete evidence include the following:

1. In 1963, the GDR changed its attitude towards Coventry Cathedral. This change was a necessary condition for the viability of the project. Previously, the cathedral's close links with West Germany had aroused East German hostility. Mysteriously this hostility evaporated between 1963 and 1964, enabling Williams to conduct his negotiations with Seigewasser in a constructive and co-operative atmosphere.

2. The negotiations were conducted with surprising speed. Fourteen months elapsed between Williams' initial meeting with Seigewasser and the first British group arriving in Dresden. Taking into account the fact the parties to this project came from countries which had no diplomatic contact, the hostilities generated by the Cold War, and the sheer practical organisation involved in an international construction project, the indications are that the Coventry/Dresden project was given fast track treatment.

3. *Aktion Sühnezeichen* became an integral part of the project in January 1964. The organisation was accepted as a suitable German partner, through which both Coventry Cathedral and the GDR state could operate in order to agree the practical arrangements relating to the project. There is a certain amount of ambivalence in the documentary evidence, however, about which side actually proposed *Aktion Sühnezeichen* as a working partner. In the context of the operation to win the co-operation of dissident churchmen, the matter is significant, since it was this organisation which played the pivotal role in obtaining that co-operation and which brought the project to fruition. It is possible that the matter had been agreed at another level beforehand and the ambiguity contained in the different reports of the Williams/Seigewasser meeting is merely an indication that both sides had been briefed independently to reach this agreement. The fact that the SfK had discussed the status of *Aktion Sühnezeichen* with colleagues in the
MfAA shortly before the meeting, and that also shortly before the meeting Williams had indicated his need to talk to *Aktion Sühnezeichen* leaders suggests that both parties were consciously working towards 'agreeing' that *Aktion Sühnezeichen* would be the linchpin of the Coventry/Dresden project.

4. The above hypothesis is supported by the fact that von Hammerstein's report of the debriefing dinner held in West Berlin after the Williams/Seigewasser meeting was obtained by the *Stasi*. The intelligence services were, therefore, involved before the first official negotiating meeting had taken place.

5. During the course of the negotiations, at least two competing reconciliation projects were proposed, which appeared at first glance to be more attractive to the East German regime. These two schemes received media coverage, an indication that they did indeed receive the stamp of approval. But in the event neither scheme came to much. The East Germans could have put their weight behind either of these two schemes but chose not to do so. It is possible that the competing schemes were deliberately used in order to create a sense of urgency among the organisers of the Dresden project.

6. Media coverage of the Coventry/Dresden project demonstrated a schizophrenic attitude on the part of both the British and East German governments. In order to raise sufficient funds for the project to go ahead and engage the public in what was supposed to be an act of reconciliation for wartime atrocities, it was necessary that the project should be given publicity. On the other hand, neither the British nor the East Germans wanted the project to fall under the media spotlight. The most glaring media policy contradiction was the British filming of *Aktion Sühnezeichen* in October 1964 which took place at precisely the same time that the East Germans were stressing the fact that the role of *Aktion Sühnezeichen* must remain very much in the background. Once the project was up and running, any pretence of East German co-operation with *Aktion Sühnezeichen* was dropped. But in the autumn of 1964 the regime obviously deemed that it was necessary to highlight its role in order to win the sympathies of the British people.

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^ ASA, letter from Kreyssig to Williams, 4 March 1964. Also CCA.
^ BStU, MfS AIM 3654/71 Teil II Band 8, Seidowsky's report of a meeting with Kreyssig and Müller-Gangloff, 27 February 1964.
^ Ibid.
^ BStU, MfS AIM 3654/71 Teil II Band 9, Seidowsky's report of a meeting with Kreyssig, 7 April 1964.
CCA, translation of letter from Kreyssig to Williams, 8 April 1964.

CCA, letter from Krug to Williams, 7 May 1964.

SAPMO-BArch, DO4 2781, StK memo with reference to the meeting with Williams on 20 January 1964, 12 May 1964. Frielinghaus was an IM, codename 'Dieter'. See Besier, Der SED-Staat und die Kirche, Volume 3, (Munich: Bertlesmann, 1993). Also CCA, on 29 April 1964, Williams told Schlingensiepen that he had received a letter from an unnamed person in Dresden and asked Schlingensiepen to report on him. Williams thought it was an attempt by Seigewasser to do things his way. Schlingensiepen replied: 'My first thoughts would be to leave Rev. F. [sic] alone. Though he is not a "progressive pastor" he is a friend of that group which is a thorn in the flesh of Bishop Noth and all our friends. On "second thoughts" however I think that it might be a good thing to let Bishop Noth decide.'

BStU, MfS AP 20985/92, Stasi reports of Kreyssig surveillance operations during 1964. BStU, MfS 10455/60 Band I, reports on Wilke's work for the MfS as an IM, codenamed Horst. BStU, MfS A 2968/70 Band V and P 2968/70 Band II, Wilke's reports referring to his suspicions about the relationship between Kreyssig and Seidowsky, 1964.

BStU, MfS AP 20983/92, Stasi report on Kreyssig, 23 September 1959.

ASA, letter from Kreyssig to Mager and Mendt, 18 May 1964.

ASA, notes on a meeting in Dresden, 9 June 1964.

ASA, letter from von Hammerstein to Williams, 9 June 1964.

ASA, Mendt's report on a meeting with Breitmann, 19 June 1964.

ASA, letter from Kreyssig to Williams, 12 June 1964.

ASA, letter from Kreyssig to Seidowsky, 12 June 1964.

BStU, MfS P 3654/71 Teil II Band 3, letter from Kreyssig to Seidowsky, 12 June 1964. Kreyssig's report to Seigewasser is not attached to the letter in the archive.


BStU, MfS A 3654/71 Teil II Band 9, Seidowsky's report of his meeting with Oestreicher in Prague, 4 July 1964.

ASA, letter from William to Kreyssig, 26 June 1964. Also CCA.

ASA, Mendt's report on a meeting with Breitmann, 19 June 1964.

ASA, letter from Kreyssig to Williams, 27 June 1964. Also CCA.

ASA, letter from Williams to Kreyssig, 6 July 1964. Also CCA.

ASA, letter from Kreyssig to Williams, 4 July 1964. Also CCA.

BStU, MfS AIM 2968/70 Teil II Band 5, report by Wilke to the Stasi Church department, 13 July 1964.

Ibid., Wilke's report on Seidowsky's interrogation by Kusch, 24 July 1964.

ASA, letter from Kreyssig to Mendt, 24 July 1964.

ASA, letter from Kreyssig to Williams, undated, circa first week of September 1964.

CCA, translation of letter from Kreyssig to Williams, undated, circa first week of September 1964.
The Allied Travel Office left it until the last minute in 1965 before informing Dresden Oberbürgermeister Schill that he would not be given travel documents to visit Coventry (see Chapter 7). Film producer Lyn Macdonald's applications for a visa to the GDR were met with silence (see p.?).

The head of the GDR's foreign intelligence service, Markus Wolf, has written that it was his policy when foreign journalists visited the GDR to 'direct clever disinformation at them, giving them scoops and insights that somehow benefited us...'. See Man Without a Face. The Autobiography of Communism's Greatest Spymaster, with Anne McElvoy, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997), p.289.

ASA, letter from Kreyssig to Williams, 8 March 1965.

Ibid., letter from Kreyssig to Williams, 30 September 1964.

ASA, letter from Kreyssig to Williams, undated, circa first week of September 1964.

ASA, report of the first committee meeting in Dresden, 25 January 1965.

ASA, report of the breakfast reception, 16 March 1965.

ASA, letter from Kreyssig to Williams, 8 March 1965.

ASA, letter from Kreyssig to Williams, 17 September 1964.

ASA, letter from Kreyssig to Williams, 11 September 1964.

ASA, letter from Kreyssig to Williams, undated, circa first week of September 1964.

ASA, letter from Gerhard Brennecke, director of the Berlin Missionsgesellschaft und des Ökumenische Missionarischen Amt, to Kreyssig, 1 October 1964.

ASA, letter from the British Foreign Secretary, Rab Butler, to Williams, 17 September 1964.

ASA, letter from Kreyssig to Williams, 1 October 1964.

ASA, letter from Williams to Kreyssig, 30 September 1964.

ASA, letter from Kreyssig to the SfK, 31 March 1965.

ASA, letter from Kreyssig to Williams, 8 March 1965.

ASA, letter from Williams to Seigewasser, 19 October 1964. Also MfAA, A 13122, German translation of this letter.

ASA, letter from Kreyssig to the SfK, 31 March 1965.

ASA, letter from Kreyssig to Williams, 9 October 1964.

ASA, letter from Kreyssig to Williams, undated, circa first week of September 1964.

ASA, letter from Williams to Butler and Roberts, 8 September 1964.

ASA, letter from Williams to Kreyssig, 1 October 1964.

ASA, letter from Williams to Kreyssig, 30 September 1964.

ASA, letter from Williams to Seigewasser, 19 October 1964. Also MfAA, A 13122, German translation of this letter.

ASA, letter from Williams to Seigewasser, 19 October 1964. Also MfAA, A 13122, German translation of this letter.

ASA, letter from Gerhard Brennecke, director of the Berlin Missionsgesellschaft und des Ökumenische Missionarischen Amt, to Kreyssig, 1 October 1964.

ASA, letter from Williams to Kreyssig, 10 March 1965.

ASA, letter from Kreyssig to Williams, 10 March 1965.

ASA, letter from Kreyssig to Williams, 10 March 1965.

ASA, letter from Kreyssig to Williams, 10 March 1965.

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ASA, letter from Kreyssig to Williams, 10 March 1965.
CHAPTER 10

Conclusion

There are two main conclusions to be drawn from this study. One is that during the first half of the 1960s, Anglo/GDR relations concealed a hidden agenda. Contrary to Britain's official policy of non-recognition of the GDR together with its stated support for the eventual reunification of Germany, the British government secretly sought to prop up the Ulbricht regime in the belief that the stability of the GDR would contribute towards a reduction in global tensions. The second conclusion is that dissident GDR Church leaders were not backed by the West. On the contrary, they were encouraged to come to an accommodation with the communist regime. British co-operation with Ulbricht took the form of providing support for his policy of Christian/ Marxist dialogue, a policy which sought to persuade GDR Christians that Christians and Marxists shared mutual humanistic aims. It necessitated neutralising the influence of GDR Church leaders who had been openly opposing Ulbricht, one of the most vocal of whom was the Bishop of Saxony, Gottfried Noth. The British and East German governments worked together against those who opposed the regime. In addition, support for dissident GDR Church leaders was also lacking from their colleagues in West Germany, some of whom were at the forefront of Ostpolitik and who were seeking détente rather than confrontation.

This thesis did not take as its starting point a particular theory or hypothesis and seek to examine that theory during the course of a particular historical period, be it a century or even a decade. Rather it has taken a specific event which took place over a brief span of time and subjected both the event and the time span in which it took place to close scrutiny. In doing so, it has sought to determine the inter-relationship between the Coventry/Dresden project and the great affairs of state, the domestic and foreign policies of the countries with which it was concerned. It has asked the question, firstly, of to what extent the event was touched by affairs of state and then, having determined that it had indeed not been isolated...
from international political agendas, proceeded to investigate with which particular policy areas it became entangled and why.

As a result, it became evident, firstly, that there were two major policy areas which had impacted upon the project, these being Anglo/GDR bilateral relations and GDR Church/state relations, and, secondly, that there was, in fact, an interaction between these two areas which was evident beneath the surface of the Coventry/Dresden project. In consequence, this study chose to examine Anglo/GDR bilateral relations in the context of GDR Church/state relations, and *vice versa*, rather than limiting the analysis to either one in isolation from the other.

Relatively little research has taken place into either of these topics during the years in question. The whole subject of Anglo/GDR relations is still very much uncharted territory. Many studies have, however, been carried out into the role of the Church in the GDR and it is perhaps surprising that the interaction between Christians from different countries in the context of international relations and the GDR has been neglected so far throughout the life of that state. Christianity, after all, is an international movement with an international infrastructure. The *Stasi* certainly placed the issue of the Church in the GDR in a worldwide context, seeing Christianity as a global subversive network. But most studies of GDR Church/state relations have limited themselves to domestic concerns, or to the GDR Church in relation to that of West Germany. Similarly, the few studies of Anglo/GDR relations which exist pay little attention to the role of the Church. It is the view of this thesis that the two subject were interconnected; that GDR Church/state relations were influenced by an aspect of Anglo/GDR relations and that this fact can be demonstrated through an analysis of the Coventry/Dresden project.

But before proceeding to the subject of that interconnection, I would first like to examine the contribution which can be made to our understanding of events by a study such as this, which has confined itself to a close examination of the small as opposed to a sweeping examination of the large. Our perspective on the history of the GDR and its relations with Britain is altered by zooming in, as it were, on the detail of international and
domestic affairs, detail which has remained undetected in the more usual aerial view. What the detail has revealed calls into question some of the assumptions on which our previous interpretations of the history of the period have been based. It has made clear the need for a reinterpretation of the material which was visible in the long-distance shot.

For example, the evidence contained in this thesis suggests that it is no longer tenable to maintain that British policy towards the GDR was governed by the Hallstein Doctrine and the concept of non-recognition. It is clear that this was a myth which the British deliberately propagated. Behind the scenes, Britain was prepared to deal with the GDR and, far from seeking its demise, during the period in question was anxious to maintain the stability of the GDR state in a turbulent world. Evidence contained in this study substantiates suspicions that the building of the Berlin Wall did not come as an unwelcome surprise to the West, but that messages were sent which indicated that this barrier would be tolerated. In addition, this study has highlighted the role of Christians who were used as secret intermediaries by the West in order to enable dialogue to take place between political players who could not talk to each other. In short, it has been possible to detect the operation of hitherto unsuspected forces and motives at work in both Britain and the GDR.

The major contribution of this thesis has been to shed light on the darker corners of Anglo/GDR history, in particular the role played by the intelligence services of both countries, a role which demands a new look at some Cold War shibboleths. This study presents a more complex picture than that of the popular black and white image of the Cold War. As Glees has remarked in a different context, and as Peter Hennessy has recently demonstrated, an understanding of the role of intelligence operations is essential to a full understanding of events. In no area is this more true than in the history of the Cold War, a conflict which was almost exclusively, within Europe at any rate, a war of intelligence.

Put simply, things were not how they appeared to be. They were not intended to be. Oestreicher has remarked that 'it was on misinformation and misinterpretation that the cold war [sic] thrived'. In Seidowsky's words: 'Alles war ein bisschen anders. No-one thought that the GDR would not be there anymore. We were thinking that we were all living
together. It was an arrangement. But nobody wanted it to be known that it had been arranged so. The long-term relationship between Seidowsky and Oestreicher was an example of that form of 'arrangement'. The two men worked in co-operation with each other, as unofficial representatives of their governments. While the two sides denounced each other across the Berlin Wall, Seidowsky and Oestreicher quietly, and secretly, maintained a dialogue which enabled one side to 'talk' to the other, the sort of 'talking' which prevents wars. In 1965, the Coventry/Dresden project was also a specific example of that sort of 'arrangement'.

Much has been written about the manner in which the West feared that communism would infiltrate the capitalist and non-aligned world. Less has been written about the manner in which the West used the same tactics in order to influence the communist world, although some details of these covert operations are beginning to emerge. One of those who has written about Cold War intelligence activities and who was eminently qualified to do so, was Reinhard Gehlen, the founder and head of the West German foreign intelligence service who worked closely with the CIA and MI6 during the 1960s. Writing in his memoirs in the early 1970s, he has referred to people he called 'influencers' operating on the Soviet side. These influencers often did not 'realise that they are merely playing a game to rules drawn up by the KGB', according to Gehlen. They were often in a country for legal purposes. It was this fact, together with 'their completely unsuspecting natures', that made it impossible to know how many influencers may be at large. This description of an influencer fits the leaders of the Coventry/Dresden project like a glove. Gehlen has also referred to the fact that the tactic of using influencers was 'favoured' by the British. This is the other side of the coin. The use of influence as an intelligence tool by the West in communist bloc countries has been much undervalued although, by comparison, the dangers of communist influence in the West have provoked reactions verging on the paranoiac.

Of course, the usual mission of an influencer was to play a part in subverting the country in which he was operating, rather than helping to stabilise it, as in the case of the Coventry/Dresden project. It is this aspect of the Coventry/Dresden project which, at first sight, seems to be so extraordinary. But it would appear that the biggest Cold War myth of all was that Britain (and in all probability her Western allies) was intent upon destroying the
GDR. Far from it. The main goal during the 1960s was stability and the preservation of the GDR. Ulbricht seemed convinced of that. In 1965, he told an interviewer that '... neither France, Britain nor the US want a reunification.... Is a thaw in Europe possible? I believe it is! The ice of the cold war which has obstructed cooperation in Europe for so long can be made to melt.¹⁰

As other sections of this study have revealed, intelligence operations aimed at the subversion of the whole Soviet bloc did exist. This was the aim of the Müller-Gangloff conspiracy, and indeed until about 1962 it would appear that the deposing of Ulbricht was also on the agenda. But there was a marked change in the direction of the Müller-Gangloff conspiracy after this point which would appear to be a reflection of a change of policy in the West. Thereafter, the object was to bring about the defeat of communism in a slow and controlled manner. In the meantime, the maintenance of stability in Central Europe was considered vital. If this meant supporting Ulbricht, so be it, despite the fact that in the view of the British Foreign Office Ulbricht was the most 'odious' of leaders.¹¹ The need for caution in any attempts to defeat communism by subversion was brought home in 1968 with the Prague Spring.

It would be unreasonable to suppose that the intelligence tactics used by one side, the East, were not also deployed by the West. Hennessy, in his book which largely deals with the nuclear threat and military planning, talks of the Cold War being an 'insiders' affair, nowhere more so than in its intelligence and counter-intelligence aspects. He has quoted a former Secretary of Whitehall's Joint Intelligence Committee, Michael Herman, as saying that the Cold War 'was in a special sense an intelligence conflict'.¹² He has noted that, again quoting Herman, '... to an extraordinary and hugely disproportionate extent, the world sees this clash of the secret worlds through supposedly British eyes'.¹³ The word 'disproportionate' is surely used advisedly. The British, and the West in general, has seen the Cold War world as one in which Ian Fleming's James Bond and John le Carré's George Smiley fought the evil cunning of those who were threatening to destroy Western civilisation. Fiction has presented an unbalanced picture and there has been little fact available with which to even the scales. Intelligence services do not advertise their activities.
Documents relating to British Second World War operations are only now slowly and cautiously being released through the Public Record Office.

The intelligence activities which surrounded the Coventry/Dresden project are an example of some of the missing fact. Here is an example of the manner in which an intelligence operation was used by the West in order to influence, as opposed to acquire information. It took place at a time when the world was shakily recovering from the fear generated by the Cuban Missile Crisis. The British saw that the Coventry/Dresden project and its message of brotherhood between Christians and communists could be a stabilising force within the GDR. The last thing the British wanted at that particular time was the collapse of the Ulbricht regime and a power vacuum in the centre of Europe. Ulbricht was more than happy to accept this assistance with his own domestic problems.

It is in relation to Ulbricht's internal problems with the Church that international relations and domestic policy became entwined. This is the area in which this thesis has demonstrated that the two disciplines did not operate in isolation from each other. At an official level, of course, they did, with particular government departments holding briefs for particular policy areas. But in the intelligence arena these boundaries can become blurred, as is evidenced by the activities of Seidowsky whose operations crossed the divide of foreign affairs and Church affairs. In this respect, the issue raised is the extent to which GDR Church leaders were influenced by their Christian colleagues to find an accommodation with the communist regime in the interests of Western foreign policy aims.

The Church in the GDR has been the subject of much criticism since archive material, particularly the records of the Stasi, revealed the extent to which the Church had been infiltrated and manipulated during the life of the communist regime. In addition, critics have attacked the policy of the Church during the last 20 years of the GDR for the way in which it sought an accommodation with communism, the policy known as Kirche im Sozialismus. Questions have been asked as to why the Church and its leaders did not oppose the atheist regime more strongly. As Conway has commented, following the demise of the
GDR the Church has been accused of 'prolonging the existence of the infamous regime', of giving it legitimacy.⁴

A question which is only just beginning to be asked is to what extent the Church in the GDR was encouraged to form an accommodation with the socialist regime by fellow Christians in the West. Conway has noted that the Kirche im Sozialismus policy was 'greeted with enthusiasm' by such bodies as the World Council of Churches.⁵ This thesis provides evidence of the fact that the Western attitude was not simply one of reaction to events, of 'enthusiasm', but proactive involvement in order to bring about this accommodation. As we have seen, British Church leaders, through the BCC, were active in promoting contact with East German Church leaders. They wanted to be able to influence events behind the Iron Curtain. Chief among those who did so was Oestreicher. In September 1965, Oestreicher reported to the BCC that the Coventry/Dresden project had been successful beyond expectations, particularly in helping 'to improve the atmosphere between Christians and Communists in Dresden'.⁶ The two broadcasts on the Church in the GDR which Oestreicher delivered on West German radio in 1965 were, in his words, an attempt 'to take some of the poison out of the ecclesiastical and secular cold war being waged in both Germanies as viciously as ever'.⁷ The CPC in Prague provided a forum at which radical Western Christians pushed for more open dialogue with Soviet bloc regimes. There can be little doubt that GDR church leaders were beleaguered on all sides, under pressure both internally and externally to contrive a means of living in harmony with the regime. The fact that they did so, should be no surprise.

Looking back over his many years of contact with the GDR, Oestreicher has remarked that, with the benefit of hindsight, he was 'more conciliatory' than he should have been.⁸ He is also reported to have suggested that the World Council of Churches was 'duty-bound to examine its own past', that like himself it had sometimes 'stressed the importance of dialogue with eastern Europe at the expense of giving support to Christians who opposed the communist authorities'.⁹ This is a continuing debate. The General Secretary of the WCC, Konrad Raiser, has responded to criticisms and called for a 'full and critical re-assessment of the Cold War period'.¹⁰ The impact of this Western pressure on GDR Church
leaders is yet to be properly assessed. It must be assumed, however, that in their embattled and isolated position they were extremely vulnerable to friendly coercion from colleagues in the West. Questions remain to be answered about the extent of Western Christians' responsibility for the East German Church's accommodation with communism. This study has taken a step along that road with the evidence it has provided which demonstrates that British Christians, far from supporting dissident Church leaders, deliberately undermined them.

But it was not only British Christians who advocated co-operation with the communist regime. This analysis of events relating to the Coventry/Dresden project has also highlighted the manner in which West German Christian organisations and their leaders led the way, behind the scenes, towards eventual détente with the Soviet bloc. In doing so, they too were anxious to promote the concept of co-operation between Christians and Marxists behind the Iron Curtain. It would have been illogical to carry out secret negotiations aimed at coming to a modus operandi between East and West if, at the same time, the boat was being rocked by recalcitrant Christians in the Soviet bloc. The need to control Church opposition in the East was a necessary part of what was to become Ostpolitik. Whether Ostpolitik was intended, as was first thought, to be a policy through which the West came to terms with reality and accepted the existence of the GDR in the interests of peace, an 'easement to West Germany's relations with countries in the Soviet bloc'; or whether it was, as has been more recently suspected by people such as Kvitzinsky, a long-term conspiracy which ultimately aimed to defeat communism by forcing the system to fall apart internally, is a matter of continuing debate. But it is the view of this thesis that Ostpolitik, as advocated by Müller-Gangloff and his colleagues, was seen as a means of creating stresses within Soviet bloc countries which would ultimately lead to the emergence of a different form of government. Whichever interpretation is placed on Ostpolitik, the fact remains that overt internal opposition to the GDR regime was not part of the plan.

This study has scrutinised the activities of two German Church organisations and come to the conclusion that both were at the forefront of Ostpolitik and, in addition, were working secretly to build up networks within Soviet bloc countries with a view to obtaining
a liberalisation of the whole area. Gehlen has described the manner in which communist infiltrators were used to 'subvert and recruit the people who will make future leaders'; how they then went on to bring 'influence to bear on every sector of public life'; how these strategically placed moles would be used to put pressure on government with the aim of ultimately achieving its overthrow.\textsuperscript{22} Again, his description of communist activities mirrors the strategy which, according to the \textit{Stasi}, was behind the conspiracy led by Müller-Gangloff, the leader of the West Berlin \textit{Evangelische Akademie}, and \textit{Aktion Sühnezeichen}. Both these organisations played a much greater role on the international stage than has hitherto been accepted. Although the role of the \textit{Evangelischen Akademien} within Germany as a whole has been noted by historians such as Garton Ash, particularly in relation to the delivery of the groundbreaking speech on \textit{Ostpolitik} by Egon Bahr, Willy Brandt's close adviser, at the \textit{Akademie} in Tutzing in 1963, the role played by the West Berlin \textit{Evangelische Akademie} is less well known.\textsuperscript{23}

Attention has also been directed towards the manner in which Christians were recognised to be important unofficial links through which East/West dialogue could be attempted, with the meeting between Khrushchev, Müller-Gangloff and von Hammerstein perhaps being the most dramatic example of such contact. But they were not alone. Shortly after that meeting, and at a more official level, the Chief Superintendent of the Berlin Brandenburg diocese, Hans Helbich, also had a lengthy meeting with Khrushchev at which, it was reported, Khrushchev expressed his regret that the January meeting with Brandt had had to be cancelled.\textsuperscript{24} The Soviet diplomat Kvitinsky has recounted a story of how, in 1964, he and other Soviet Embassy staff had secret meetings with the industrial chaplain in West Berlin, Brickert, during which the possibility of the Church in West Germany using its influence to promote recognition of the GDR was discussed.\textsuperscript{25} A report of a similar meeting between Brickert and the Soviet Ambassador to the GDR, Piotr Abrassimov, was sent to Ulbricht by GDR First Minister Willi Stoph.\textsuperscript{26} These contacts were made being at a time when any public discussion of recognition of the GDR would have been political suicide in the West.
The evidence presented in this thesis provides support for the argument that it was Christians rather than politicians who led the way towards Ostpolitik and eventual détente. Müller-Gangloff repeatedly confided to Seidowsky that he feared an uprising in Soviet bloc countries such as had been seen in Budapest in 1956. By the early 1960s, influential West German Christians were opposed to the Church presenting itself as the focal point of political unrest behind the Iron Curtain. Following the demise of the GDR, the West chose to criticise and condemn East German Church leaders, asking why they had failed to oppose the communist regime more strongly. The truth would appear to be that in the first half of the 1960s the West was prepared to secretly ally itself with communist rulers against the dissidents.

In relation to Ulbricht's period of liberalisation, this thesis has provided evidence of what may be considered to be another facet of Ulbricht's transformation from a Stalinist into a liberal in 1963. However, the fact that Ulbricht would have been aware of the conspiracy directed by Müller-Gangloff prior to 1963 to depose him and replace him with a more liberal leader, raises the question of how far the GDR leader's transformation was merely a tactical move. As both Kaiser and Oestreicher have observed, Ulbricht was never really a reformer. Given that fact, together with Ulbricht's reputation as a supreme tactician, the logical conclusion to be drawn is that his move towards liberalisation was merely a means of outwitting the West, a move which was successful in that the West appears to have grudgingly accepted that the new yet familiar Ulbricht was preferable to the unknown.

In terms of historical research, this thesis illustrates the caution required when dealing with archival material. It would be possible to examine vast quantities of documents, the legacy of the GDR regime, without ever becoming aware of the existence of the Coventry/Dresden project, let alone of its significance. The references to it which have been retained are few and far between. However tempting it may be to believe that the mass of archival material left behind by the GDR regime provides an accurate picture of events, the reverse may be the case. As Kaiser has noted, the opening of the GDR archives does not allow all questions to be answered. She argues that the reality is that it was the nature of the dictatorship that it did not seek to be transparent or comprehended. Much was done
through informal contact and was not written down. Much that was written down was not
preserved in the archives. Those who were actively involved in the events which are the
subject of this thesis are aware of that fact. Both Dohle and Oestreicher advised, rightly, that
it would be difficult to find evidence relating to the Coventry/Dresden project in the GDR
archives.

In addition, this study is an illustration of the fact that the history of international
relations cannot be written purely from the diplomatic records, that there is another level at
which governments operate and which they are always anxious to keep secret, that being the
level of non-governmental diplomacy and of intelligence operations. As a former FBI
counter-intelligence officer remarked recently: 'Every major world event has been
manipulated, affected or changed by intelligence and I think most historians forget that...
The truth is that intelligence has always played a role'. This study is a search after truth in
an area where the truth has been deliberately concealed or distorted. It is a search for
transparency in the necessarily opaque world of Cold War history.

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1 Glees, The Secrets of the Service. Peter Hennessy, The Secret State: Whitehall and the Cold War,
(London: Allen Lane, 2002).
2 Oestreicher, My Cold War Life in No Man’s Land, October 1999.
3 Interview with Seidowsky, 4 July 2000.
4 See Stoner Saunders' book, Who Paid the Piper, for a rare example of the West's covert activities
during the Cold War.
6 Ibid., p.334.
7 Ibid., p.335.
8 Ibid., p.224.
9 The activities of the US Republican Senator Joseph McCarthy during the 1950s are an extreme
eexample of this fear of communist influence.
10 Walter Ulbricht, 'A Thaw in Europe is Possible', in Whither Germany? Speeches and Essays on
the National Question, (Dresden: Zeit im Bild, 1966), pp.348 and 351, taken from a television
interview with Gerhart Eisler, chairman of the State Broadcasting Committee, 24 January 1965.
11 PRO, FO 371/183002 RG1016/40, report of Sir Frank Roberts to the British Foreign Secretary on
the attitude of East Germans towards reunification, 20 October 1965.
12 Hennessy, The Secret State, p.3.
13 Ibid., p.3.
14 Conway, 'Interpreting the German Church Struggles 1933-1990', in German History, pp.390/391.
15 Ibid., p.390.
16 BCC, BCC/DIAC/1/1/20, Oestreicher's report on East Germany to the BCC East-West Relations
Advisory Committee, 21 September 1965.
17 BCC, BCC/DIAC/1/1/20, Oestreicher’s report to the 48th meeting of the British Council of Churches,
Spring 1999.
18 Oestreicher, My Cold War Life in No Man’s Land, October 1999.
19 Stephen Brown, 'WCC head defends Cold War record', in Ecumenical News International, 27
November 1997.
Anne Deighton, 'British-West German Relations, 1945-1972, in Uneasy Allies, p.29.


Garton Ash, In Europe's Name, pp.54-56.

PRO, FO 371/169324 CG1781/7(A), report from Bullard in West Berlin to the British Foreign Office on Helbich's meeting with Khrushchev, 15 July 1963.

Kvitzinsky, Vor dem Sturm, p.208. Brickert's offer was not without conditions. The West German Church was also looking for a commitment that the GDR would not force an administrative split on the two geographical halves of the EKD. According to Kvitzinsky, at a later meeting with a senior unnamed Church representative, an attempt was made to make the offer more appealing with the Church representative offering to provide secret information about military technology. When this was put to Ulbricht, he brushed it aside saying that Mielke, the head of the Stasi, provided him with all the information he needed.

SAPMO-BArch, NL 182/1098, Stoph's report to Ulbricht on a meeting between Brickert, Abrassimov and others, 15 January 1964.

Kaiser, Machtwechsel von Ulbricht zu Honecker, p.25.

David Major, interviewed in The Spying Game, BBC television, broadcast 26 October 1999.
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BSTU: Der Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (Stasi Archive)
MfS AIM 3654/71 Teil I Band 1-4 - Seidowsky
MfS AIM 3654/71 Teil II Band 1-13 - Seidowsky
MfS HA II AKG 14 Band 1 - Seidowsky
MfS HA II/6 524 - Seidowsky
MfS HA II/6 616 - Seidowsky
MfS AP 21502/92 Band 5 - Müller-Gangloff
MfS AP 21497/92 Band 1, 2 - Müller-Gangloff
MfS AP 20985/92 Band 1, 3 - Kreyssig
MfS AP 20983/92 Band 1 - Kreyssig
MfS AP 7632/79 Band 1 - Kreyssig
MfS AP 279/57 Band 1 - Kreyssig
MfS HA XX/4 2781 - Kreyssig
MfS HA XX/4 2811 - Kreyssig
MfS AP 10667/92 Band 1 - Krummacher
MfS AP 11422/92 Band 1 - Krummacher
MfS AP 11321/92 Band 1 - Krummacher
MfS AP 10669/92 Band 1 - Noth
MfS AP 10343/92 Band 1 - Noth
MfS AIM 4066/86 Teil I Band 1 - Von Brück
MfS AIM 4066/86 Teil II Band 1 - Von Brück
MfS AP 76497/92 Band 1 - Dohle
MfS AIM 2968/70 Teil I Band 2 - Wilke
MfS AIM 2968/70 Teil II Band 5 - Wilke
MfS AP 10455/60 Band 1, 3, 4 - Wilke
MfS AP 4912/92 Band 1 - Carmody
MfS ZKG 11504 - Von Ardenne
MfS SV 3/83 - Von Ardenne
MfS HA XX/4/357 - Seigewasser
MfS HA XX/4/358 - Seigewasser
MfS HA II/16971 - Oestreicher
MfS HA XX/Abt.5-VSH - Oestreicher
MfS HA XX/Abt.4 - West - Oestreicher
MfS HA VI/3706 - Oestreicher
MfS AP 6931/84 - Oestreicher
MfS HA XX/4 1477 - Aktion Sühnezeichen
MfS HA XX/4 2278 Band 1 - Aktion Sühnezeichen
MfS HA XX/4 2303 Band 1 - Aktion Sühnezeichen
MfS HA XX/AKG 5932 - Evangelische Kirche
MfS HA XX/4 119, 301, 520, 1191, 1676, 1914, 2333 - Stasi Church Department, various reports

EZA: Evangelische Zentralarchiv in Berlin
102/329 - Aktion Sühnezeichen
102/618 - Aktion Sühnezeichen
97/124 - Aktion Sühnezeichen
97/534 - Aktion Sühnezeichen
97/639 - Aktion Sühnezeichen
97/692 - Aktion Sühnezeichen
97/31 - Kreyssig
97/33 - Kreyssig
102/373 - Secretary of State for Church Affairs
102/268 - GDR Church relations with Britain
102/269 - GDR Church relations with Britain
102/90 - the diocese of Saxony

LABB: Archive of the Evangelische Kirche in Berlin-Brandenburg
S10 Band I and II - Aktion Sühnezeichen

LDS: Landeshauptstadt Dresden Stadtarchiv
OB 4.2.3/5 - GDR government departments
OB 4.2.3/6 - GDR government departments
OB 4.2.3/11 - GDR government departments
OB 4.2.3/41 - GDR government departments
OB 4.2.3/42 - GDR government departments
OB 4.2.3/43 - GDR government departments
OB 4.2.3/88 - SED Bezirk leaders
OB 4.2.3/89 - SED Bezirk leaders
OB 4.2.3/322 - anniversaries
OB 4.2.3/324 - anniversaries
OB 4.2.3/325 - capitalist countries
OB 4.2.3/688 - international contacts
OB 4.2.3/689 - city partnerships
OB 4.2.3/778 - SED Central Committee

MfAA: Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten
A 13122 - Coventry/Dresden
A 13123 - Church affairs
A 13043 - Parliamentary delegations
A 13044 - Coventry/Dresden city partnership
A 13050 - Parliamentary delegations
A 13060 - British delegations
A 13063 - British delegations
A 13066 - Parliamentary contacts
A 13068 - British political parties
A 13071 - British politics
A 13072 - Invitations to British clergy
A 13083 - British politics
A 13093 - Deutsch-Britische Gesellschaft
A 13101 - Church relations
A 13102 - Parliamentary exchanges
A 13117 - British politics
A 13122 - Parliamentary relations
A 13113 - British politics
A 13144 - Deutsch-Britische Gesellschaft
A 15131 - Parliamentary exchanges
A 15214 - Visits by Lord Hinchingbrooke
A 18115 - British politics
A 18732 - City partnerships
A 18734 - City partnerships

SHD: Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden
BT/RdB Dresden 1002 - Abteilung Kirchenfragen
BT/RdB Dresden 6283 - Abteilung Kirchenfragen
BT/RdB Dresden 1275 - Abteilung Internationale Verbindungen
BT/RdB Dresden 1276 - Abteilung Internationale Verbindungen
SED Bezirksleitung Dresden IV/2A 14.586 - Church affairs
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SED Bezirksleitung Dresden IV/A/2.12.560 - Security matters
SED Bezirksleitung Dresden IV/A/2.12.555 - Security matters
SAPMO-BArch: Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv

DO4 - Staatssekretariat für Kirchenfragen: 213, 220, 226, 235, 238, 255, 278, 279, 281, 309, 310, 314, 369, 479, 480, 525, 597, 598, 650, 795, 814, 1098, 1180, 1182, 1502, 2477, 2526, 2558, 2614, 2616, 2619, 2621, 2626, 2658, 2662, 2666, 2686, 2760, 2762, 2763, 2766, 2780, 2781, 2782, 2796, 2885, 2955, 2965, 2969, 5189, 5555, 5939

NY 182 - Walter Ulbricht Nachlass: 1317, 1385, 1387, 1388, 1389, 1390

NY 217 - Albert Norden Nachlass: 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 13, 14, 15, 16, 43, 55, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100

DY30/IV A2/2.028 - Buro Albert Norden: 34, 67, 68, 71, 81, 91, 94, 114, 117, 118, 147, 149

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DY30/IV A2/20 - Abteilung Internationale Verbindungen - 484, 485

BCC: British Council of Churches archive

BCC/DIA/1/1/20 - East/West Relations Advisory Committee

BCC/DIA/1/2/48 - East/West Relations Advisory Committee

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BCC/DIA/5/9/1 - Krummacher visit

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BCC/DIA/1/8/9 - Oestreicher correspondence

BCC/DIA/1/8/10 - Oestreicher correspondence

BCC/DIA/5/9/2 - GDR politics

CCA: Coventry Cathedral Archive

CCC: Coventry City Council Archive

MRCWU: Modern Records Centre University of Warwick (Richard Crossman Papers)

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