

[Article by Claus-Binar Lagon]

[Text] Frankfurt, 29 September--There are adequate reasons to suspect that a quota, not quite discernible albeit considerable, of exposed escape attempts--predominantly on the transit routes to Scandinavia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and between West Berlin and the Federal Republic--is attributable to an "escape assistance" organized by the GDR State Security Service. This is the result of observations over 3 years. The investigation relies on, among other things, records and concrete clues--many of these clues being followed up by this newspaper and leading to foreign countries. The GDR State Security Service has set up a sophisticated system of counterintelligence and infiltration--and there are indications of this as well--with the cooperation of representatives of the Soviet Committee for State Security (KGB) in East Berlin. The methods of organization of this fake "escape assistance" are just as different as are the political intentions of the GDR in pursuing the plan.

The long investigation period was beneficial to the survey: Events that at the beginning did not seem important, later, in a different connection, presented themselves in a different light. The Federal Government should be informed of the occurrences, at least in rough outlines. Thus, it would be possible for competent authorities to review corresponding statements of former prison inmates who were condemned by the political criminal justice of the GDR and released to the Federal Republic after having served part of their sentences. Obviously, the working group of the chancellor's office, which looked into the organization and methods of escape assistance 3 years ago on the basis of interrogation minutes of the Giessen emergency reception camp, has failed to draw the necessary conclusions.

An increasing number of citizens of the two states in Germany are victimized by the Eastern intelligence services which have intensified their activities especially on Federal Republic territory. According to reliable sources, about 320 of the approximately 500 inmates of the Cottbus prison, for example, have been condemned for attempting to escape or abetting defection. In the Brandenburg prison, there are more than 500 inmates who had to stand trial for "illegal border crossing," "white slave traffic detrimental to the state" and "antistate contacts." Of the 800 women imprisoned in the Hoheneck prison, about 200 were charged with the same offense. On the whole, there are reportedly about 4,200 persons imprisoned in the 67 largest prisons and prison camps of the GDR who had been involved in escape projects. (To buy these persons off the Federal Government would have to spend about DM170 million in tax funds. During 1970-75 Bonn paid at least DM250 million for the release of about 5,000 political prisoners.)

In the GDR's efforts to gain control of the widespread network of escape assistances, several methods are discernible: attempts at infiltration and spying--along with phony plans for defection--exerting of influence through offers of cooperation, and finally, establishment of organizations of its own.

These organizations of the State Security Service are among the most dangerous traps in the entire system of GDR barrier measures. Former political prisoners have repeatedly called attention to the great number of foiled desertion attempts. It has been known for quite some time that the State Security Service recruits convicted escape helpers for its purposes. In this connection, mechanic Manfred Rehrer, 27, who was released from political imprisonment on 8 September this year, reports: "The inmates said that the State Security Service itself is setting up escape assistance organizations in West Berlin. During my pretrial confinement the State Security Service suggested that I continue working as an escape helper: that case the escapes would be generally successful."

Observers agree that the GDR considers "defection assistance" managed by itself at its own expense a way to avoid negotiations with the Federal Government on buying freedom for people. Bonn regards it as successful intra-German policy. Moreover, East Berlin with its "escape helpers" is bypassing the practical procedures applied for years, with all the ensuing administrative-technical complications: discovery through treachery, arrest and sentencing of the would-be refugee and those helping him; burdens on penal authorities; negotiations with Bonn concerning financial matters for buying the freedom of people; and release of those concerned to the Federal Republic. Their own organization, however, reduced those hitherto complicated procedures to the only important factor: to secure the receipt of foreign currency. In addition, it is up to the GDR when and how many arrests it will make; it selects the people desirous of fleeing and it decides on who will be arrested. Arrests of people willing to flee can be interpreted in the future as "violations of the transit agreements," and it can be used propagandistically against Bonn. This is not a decisive factor but is a significant factor in such planning.

Another organizational method is the agreement on lists of commercial flight helpers from the Federal Republic. The State Security Service has offered so-called free quotas for looking at the list of persons wanting to leave. Those quotas are higher than the number of those flight enterprises that would fail without the cooperation of the State Security Service. In 1972 one could hear about this kind of first cooperation offer. A particular flight assistance enterprise would appear to have made a special agreement with the State Security Service. The enterprise would handle flights outside the transit roads between West Berlin and the Federal Republic. Article 16 of the transit agreement, according to which searches of transit roads can be made only "in case of sufficient suspicion of misuse," would not be valid in these cases.

After numerous clues--which were not examined first--dealing with certain participation by the State Security Service, we found the following case in 1974: A mother together with her 6-year-old daughter and a nurse were waiting at night for the flight helper on a street not far from Leipzig. The assistant asked the three persons to get into the trunk of the car. The persons felt this kind of transportation was insufficient, saying that by merely opening the trunk they could be discovered. It was said that the flight assistant answered: "I guarantee that the trunk will not be opened." The State Security Service had approached the flight assistance organization with offers of cooperation first.

Among the remarkable proof of infiltration efforts by GDR organs is a letter that a person allegedly seeking flight assistance had channeled secretly in May 1972 from the GDR to a well-known flight assistance enterprise. FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINE ZEITUNG has a photostatic copy of it. The more carefully one read the letter at that time, the more doubts it created. It was not learned at that time whether the enterprise, which in the meantime had established contact with the man, shared the same doubts. The man wrote that he had been a colonel in the East Berlin Ministry for State Security, and that his "lucky escape from the GDR would be of extraordinary political significance." "No limits" existed on the price he would pay for his flight. "Your financial requests," the letter said, "will be paid by significant personalities of the Federal Republic and of the West Berlin economy." He said he had gotten into political difficulties and was sentenced "for state treason to...years of imprisonment." It was gathered from the letter that the author (allegedly) went underground after having been imprisoned.

But this finely spun infiltration attempt had its sore spots. The author of that letter tried to identify himself by the statement that he had been interviewed on a certain day in an Eastern Bloc town by a West German radio correspondent. The correspondent named in the letter--he now holds a high position in the Federal Government-- on being questioned, said on 17 January 1974 he had not been in the Eastern Bloc at the time stated. He said he had been in the specified town 3 years earlier, but that he had no talks with representatives or fellow-workers of GDR authorities. "I suspect this is a fabrication", he said.