

Provocateurs and criminals in the employ of the Brandenburg intelligence service

Lena Sokoll**17 November 2003**

German undercover agents known as “V-men” have been regularly recruited or infiltrated by the intelligence services on a state and national level into groups and organisations the secret services regard as politically dubious. The official function of such agents is to acquire firsthand information about the groups.

In practice, however, they have not limited their activities to merely passively gathering information. On occasion they have carried out major illegal and violent acts, and often play a leading role in the organisations under observation. They are, according to author Rolf Gössner’s apt description in his recently published book *Geheime Informanten (Secret Informants)*, “criminals in the service of the state” [1].

In the few brief years of its activity, since its foundation after the collapse of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the Brandenburg intelligence service has gained notoriety for its use of provocateurs and criminals.

Particular public attention was aroused by the cases of Carsten Szczepanski and Toni Stadler—two neo-Nazis who worked as undercover agents for the Brandenburg intelligence service in the milieu of extreme right-wing and neo-fascist organisations. Both men were active in building up the groups they were associated with and took part in illegal activities, which the intelligence services are ostensibly supposed to prevent.

Carsten Szczepanski had already gained a reputation as a neo-Nazi at the beginning of the 1990s. He was part of the right-wing extremist skinhead milieu and had contact with the leadership of the National Front. He was also instrumental in establishing an offshoot of the Ku Klux Klan in Germany.

In 1992, police raided an apartment rented by Szczepanski and found four pipe bombs, explosive material and detonators. The police then undertook a preliminary inquiry on the suspicion that he was involved in founding a terrorist organisation. However, Szczepanski was never charged or sentenced for these crimes—indicating that he was at this point already being employed and receiving cover from the intelligence service.

According to the Brandenburg intelligence service, it first began to work with Szczepanski in 1994, after he had begun a long prison sentence for attempting to murder a Nigerian, Steve Erenhi. Despite the gravity of his crime, Szczepanski was already a free man in 1997, and renewed his activities in the neo-fascist milieu as V-man “Piato.”

After his release from jail, Szczepanski/Piato opened a shop in a small east German town, Königs Wusterhausen, where he sold books and music with neo-fascist text and lyrics. He was the publisher of an extreme right magazine, *United Skins*, and played a leading role in building up the neo-fascist milieu that he was supposed to spy on for the intelligence service. He became chairman of the local branch of the NPD (German National Party), a member of the regional leadership of the NPD in Spreewald, and the organisational head and committee member of the NPD for the state of Brandenburg-Berlin.

V-man “Piato” took over a leading role in the party he was sent to spy on for the Brandenburg intelligence service—and his is not the only case. Over the past three years, the German government has been attempting to ban the NPD, but in the spring of this year the German constitutional court threw out the entire case after it became clear during investigations that the party has been heavily infiltrated by the intelligence service. Because every seventh member of the NPD was an operative of the intelligence service, the court was forced to confront the fact that agents working for the intelligence services inside the NPD had possibly been responsible for acts and behaviour that the state had sought to use as evidence to ban the party.

In the case of Toni Stadler, the responsibility of the Brandenburg intelligence service for crimes carried out by neo-Nazis, including the dissemination of extreme right-wing material, is much more directly evident.

Stadler ran a neo-fascist shop with specialist music and literature. He took part in the production and distribution of the CD “Notes of Hatred,” which featured lyrics by the “White Aryan Rebels” calling for the abuse of children and the rape and murder of foreigners, Jews and anti-Nazis.

Shortly after Stadler received the commission for the production of the liner notes and cover for the CD, the Brandenburg intelligence service recruited him as an undercover agent. Stadler's acquaintance, Mirko Hesse, who established contact with a foreign-based CD publishing company, was in the meantime working for the national intelligence agency. With the knowledge and backing of both intelligence authorities, the two neo-Nazis distributed the CDs, including lyrics calling for murder, with a circulation of 3,000 copies. Following the sell-out of the CD, the couple organised a further printing—entirely under the eyes of the intelligence services.

The undercover agents were finally exposed when the Berlin police, who knew nothing about the undercover activities of Stadler and Hesse, took action against their neo-Nazi music distribution. Previously, the intelligence services had done everything imaginable to protect Stadler from the police: his intelligence service handler warned him of imminent house searches, provided him with a “clean” computer, and advised him to establish a “bunker” for the illegal goods stored in Stadler's shop.

In the trial against Stadler, Berlin state attorney Jürgen Heinke concluded: “Without the help of the Brandenburg intelligence service, the production of the CD by the neo-Nazi band White Aryan Rebels would not have been possible.” The presiding judge, Hans-Jürgen Brüning, declared in his judgment that the crimes of the accused were carried out “under the eyes and with the knowledge of state authorities” and that the intelligence service had been in a position “to nip the crime in the bud.” He concluded his judgement with the unusual demand by a judge for a parliamentary inquiry.

Both cases from Brandenburg cast light on the methods and characters of those who collaborate with the intelligence service. In Brandenburg, there are no regulations governing the activities of undercover agents. State interior minister, former general Jörg Schönbohm (Christian Democratic Union—CDU), has openly defended these practices and argued that his agents have to be allowed room to manoeuvre to avoid exposure.

Following criticisms of Schönbohm, the prime minister for the state of Brandenburg, Matthias Platzeck (German Social Democratic Party—SPD), demonstratively backed his controversial interior minister in the case of Stadler. He declared that Brandenburg required an “effective” rather than a “transparent” intelligence service. In similar manner, the state parliament commission overseeing the activities of the intelligence service backed the authority's work in the cases of Szczepanski und Stadler. In fact, it emerged that the parliamentary commission had been regularly informed of the collaboration with agent “Piatto.” This amounted to a de

facto legitimisation of the intelligence service's relations with Stadler. The commission went on to criticise the Berlin police for taking action against distribution of the racist CD without informing the commission or the intelligence service.

There has been little exposure in past years of the work of the Brandenburg intelligence service in the so-called milieu of “left-wing extremism.” Bearing in mind that Interior Minister Schönbohm never misses an opportunity to emphasise the potential threat from left-wing extremism, it is entirely plausible that the intelligence service has employed provocateurs in such circles. Attempts by the intelligence service to recruit spies in left-wing circles have regularly come to light when those approached have turned down an offer and publicised what had transpired.

In March of this year, a local Brandenburg newspaper, the *Märkischen Allgemeinen Zeitung*, featured an advertisement by the “Working Group—Knowledge and Progress” offering part-time employment for “politically interested young people—18 years and older.” A student who followed up the advertisement and met with a contact person reported that, in exchange for cash, he had been asked to provide information about the “left-wing milieu... for example, the peace movement.” Additional research revealed that the “Working Group—Knowledge and Progress” was a fiction. Just a few months before this incident, the Berlin intelligence service had also sought to recruit students for espionage purposes in left-wing groups under the cover name “Team Base Research.”

The results of these attempts at recruitment are not known. It would be the height of naiveté, however, to discount the use of agents and provocations in the milieu of “left-wing extremism” in a manner similar to that employed by the intelligence services in neo-Nazi groups.

[1] Rolf Gössner, *Geheime Informanten*, ISBN 3-4267-7684-7, 315 Seiten, € 12,90.



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