

Canada as the Target of GDR Espionage

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Article abstract

German Democratic Republic (GDR) diplomatic missions included a legal residentur: an intelligence service base whose presence was more or less openly acknowledged. It was staffed by the Hauptverwaltung A (HVA - Main Directorate Foreign Intelligence), one of the principal divisions within the Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (Ministry for State Security). The HVA's main task was espionage. While most of the HVA files have been destroyed, the HVA had created a special database that holds all of the information it produced between 1969 and 1989. This database allows scholars to identify which source delivered what information and when, who received the information, and what value each piece of information had. The GDR's Canadian embassy did not open until 1987, and due to the short term of its existence, the HVA residentur in Canada could hardly have played a significant intelligence role. And we can be almost certain that it did not build up and manage an unofficial spy network from Canada. In fact, the HVA appears to have acquired its knowledge about Canada primarily from other sources, mainly agents within the West German foreign ministry and from other partner intelligence agencies. The GDR undoubtedly had deep insights into the domestic and foreign affairs of Canada. They were well informed about the role Canada played within NATO and the Helsinki Accord. Within Canada, regulations governing everyday life were of primary concern, indicating that the country was being used as an operational spearhead. Knowledge about the Canadian intelligence services was fragmentary and selective but also very accurate. Although there has been no evidence concerning East German spies in Canada, we cannot definitely conclude that there were none. Only the Canadian Security Intelligence Service can shed light on that.

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by
Helmut Müller-Enbergs

ABSTRACT

German Democratic Republic (GDR) diplomatic missions included a legal residentur: an intelligence service base whose presence was more or less openly acknowledged. It was staffed by the Hauptverwaltung A (HVA - Main Directorate Foreign Intelligence), one of the principal divisions within the Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (Ministry for State Security). The HVA's main task was espionage. While most of the HVA files have been destroyed, the HVA had created a special database that holds all of the information it produced between 1969 and 1989. This database allows scholars to identify which source delivered what information and when, who received the information, and what value each piece of information had. The GDR's Canadian embassy did not open until 1987, and due to the short term of its existence, the HVA residentur in Canada could hardly have played a significant intelligence role. And we can be almost certain that it did not build up and manage an unofficial spy network from Canada. In fact, the HVA appears to have acquired its knowledge about Canada primarily from other sources, mainly agents within the West German foreign ministry and from other partner intelligence agencies. The GDR undoubtedly had deep insights into the domestic and foreign affairs of Canada. They were well informed about the role Canada played within NATO and the Helsinki Accord. Within Canada, regulations governing everyday life were of primary concern, indicating that the country was being used as an operational spearhead. Knowledge about the Canadian intelligence services was fragmentary and selective but also very accurate. Although there has been no evidence concerning East German spies in Canada, we cannot definitely conclude that there were none. Only the Canadian Security Intelligence Service can shed light on that.

INTRODUCTION

The East German Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (Ministry for State Security) was operating throughout most of the world once the German Democratic Republic (GDR) received official recognition. In the 1970s, East Germany set up diplomatic missions — and the Hauptverwaltung A or HVA (Main Directorate Foreign Intelligence) was always present. The HVA, whose main task was espionage, was one of the principal divisions within the Ministry for State Security.

In Canada, the Hauptverwaltung A set up a legal residentur — a base for the intelligence service of a foreign country that has its presence more or less openly acknowledged — within the embassy of the GDR. The East German residentur in Canada carried the number 103. The ones in the US had the numbers 101 and 102. This gives an indication of the significance that Canada had for the operational work of the spy agency.

Unfortunately, most of the files kept by the Hauptverwaltung A were destroyed. In fact, nothing remains of the files on the espionage work in Canada. The most important source of information relating to the operations of the East German intelligence service in Canada is not available at the Office of the Federal Commissioner Preserving the Records of the Ministry for State Security of the former GDR — an agency often referred to by the shorter name Stasi-Archive. Missing are the index cards of the Hauptverwaltung A that carried information on Canadian citizens. These are in the possession of the CIA, and we must assume that they are known to the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), at least in part. We, too, would certainly like to know what is on these index cards.

If we don't have these missing files and index cards, what, then, are our sources? The main source is a special database set up by the HVA. This database holds all of the information produced by the East German secret service between 1969 and 1989. It allows us to identify which sources delivered what information when, who received it, and what value each piece of information had (each piece received a mark or grade). This database is called SIRA, and it is the focus of the rest of the article.

This research asks two questions: what did the Hauptverwaltung A know about Canada, and what made Canada interesting for the East German intelligence agency? I have narrowed my research scope firstly to the role of Residentur 103 in Ottawa. Secondly, I shall look at the political and military information delivered. Thirdly, I examine the information delivered concerning science and technology. Fourthly, I look at Canada as a centre of operations. And fifthly, I examine the information gathered concerning the Canadian intelligence services. I conclude my observations with a hypothesis about the role Canada played in the intelligence work of the Hauptverwaltung A.

The Residentur in Canada

What we know about the residentur of the HVA in Canada dates from 1987. The GDR Embassy in Ottawa was opened on 16 December 1987. However, the diplomatic advance staff had already arrived on 18 October 1987, and the advance party from the HVA had arrived even earlier in May 1987.¹

At this point in time, East German diplomats did not have their own embassy building.² Due to this circumstance, the residentur of the Hauptverwaltung A was still in the process of being set up, but they were there from the start.

In this connection, two persons stand out. The first is Dieter T., known in the HVA as “Vogt.”³ This diplomat was appointed Consilior, or Advisor, to the GDR Embassy in Canada from May 1987 to 1989. There is evidence of only 11 pieces of information being delivered by “Vogt,” all of which focused on Canadian foreign affairs and had little intelligence value. “Vogt” appears to have been extraordinarily cautious, as evidenced by the small number of reports.

The second person is Norbert S., who had taken on the position of Third Secretary at the GDR Embassy.⁴ He was given the code name “Elch” by the HVA.⁵ His intelligence focused on government matters. We have some of the information that he delivered, which concerns the health care system, welfare system, housing, the census, and identification cards in Canada. Intelligence concerning science and technology, or even that targeting the Canadian intelligence services, did not appear to be conducted through Canadian channels.

Due to the short term of its existence, the *HVA* residentur in Canada could hardly have played a significant intelligence role, considering the paucity of information received. And we can almost be sure that this residentur did not build up and manage an unofficial network in Canada. Yet, there must have been some modest success, as we see that most information delivered was in the form of copies of documents. This discovery also tells us that there could not have been a large Hauptverwaltung A network in Canada. The East German intelligence agency appears to have acquired its knowledge about Canada primarily from other sources, mainly from Germany and from other partner intelligence agencies.

Political and Military Espionage

About one quarter of the intelligence input to the Hauptverwaltung A during the years 1969 to 1989 can be traced back to the partner intelligence agencies. During this period, there is evidence of a total of 1,339 pieces of intelligence being delivered; however, 296 pieces (22 percent) came from the partner agencies. Of these, Soviet intelligence made up the lion’s share with almost half or 145. The second most important source of intelligence was — surprisingly — Bulgarian intelligence with 39 items, followed by Hungary with 34, Poland with 32, and 27 from the former Czechoslovakia.

What sort of information did Soviet intelligence deliver? Apparently it represented a very broad spectrum: in March 1970, the Soviets told the HVA about left-wing extremist organizations in Canada, and in February 1977 they reported about the split between Maoist organizations. Again and again, Soviet intelligence described domestic affairs in Canada (February 1978) or reported on the by-elections in the Canadian Parliament (November 1978) or depicted the political convention of the New Democratic Party (NDP) (November 1979).

Bilateral relations were also a hot topic, as the intelligence report on the visit in October 1973 of the West German Foreign Minister Walter Scheel to Canada showed. The intelligence reports also focused on discussions in June 1975 regarding Canada’s intent to export nuclear reactors, the trip Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau made to South America in January 1976, or the relations between Chile and Canada.

The intelligence reports also dealt with the problems Canada had with raw materials in August 1976 and Canada’s grain exports, a topic that inspired interest for over a year. Soviet intelligence astutely noted important advances made in Canadian foreign policy. One such event was the discussion in Canada in January 1978 to curb relations with the

Republic of South Africa. Another central topic was Canada's role in NATO. Ultimately, a very compact portrait of domestic affairs and foreign policy activities emerged from these intelligence reports.

The Hauptverwaltung A was not, however, totally reliant upon partner services; it could also draw upon well-informed West German sources, who, due to their positions in the West German government had access to documents from Canada. Three sources deserve mention here. Thirteen percent of the entire intelligence input at the HVA concerning Canada is derived from these three intelligence agents alone. Of particular significance is the agent with the code name "Katja" (later called "Gerald").⁶ She was likely employed at the Foreign Office of the West German government. Thirty-seven pieces of information concerning Canada can be traced back to her. She was able to report on NATO summit meetings from 1975 to 1987, including the May 1975 summit in Brussels, NATO Council meetings in October 1985, and the Canadian position taken in that meeting. She also reported on the role Canada played in the Helsinki Accord. She knew what the Chinese foreign minister spoke about during his visit to Canada and the position he took toward Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev.

The highly placed civil servant "Berger,"⁷ who was employed at the West German Ministry for Research and Technology, had access to documents regarding Canada from 1977 onwards. She reported on German-Canadian consultations in May 1977 in Bonn that focused on energy policy. She also provided information about the council meetings of the European Space Agency in Paris in February 1977; delivered details concerning a study conducted by the West German Embassy in Ottawa about Canadian industrial and energy projects; and reported on the changes made to Canadian Patent Law, the European-Canadian Agreement on Economic Co-operation (February 1977), and the cessation of Canadian nuclear exports to Pakistan in that same month. She always provided information about the consultations between West Germany and Canada.

Last, was another highly placed civil servant with the code name "Adler,"⁸ who reported from within his position in the Foreign Office. The 34 items he delivered between 1973 and 1989 gave the Hauptverwaltung A a very detailed overview of the knowledge the West German Foreign Office had about Canada.

Science and Technological Espionage in Canada

The Hauptverwaltung A regarded Canadian companies as especially interesting, particularly in respect to science and technology espionage. Twelve cases are documented where the GDR heads of state and the party heads of the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany) were directly informed about the intelligence gathered in this respect. The heads of state wanted to learn about the current developments in remote-controlled small reactors, remote-controlled missiles, and wheat yields in Canada.

The greatest effort, however, was spent on acquiring specific specimens and in documenting processes. Thirty such procurement orders are documented, spanning the period from 1977 to 1985. The shopping list was long. In 1977, the HVA placed an order for imitation leather. In 1979, they wanted to obtain some heavy-duty sacks. In order to fill these requests, an East German company would place an order with the HVA, who then set about getting the item. The VEB Armaturenwerk Karl-Marx in Magdeburg, an East German valves and fittings manufacturer, ordered welding rods produced by the Wall Company Ltd. in Canada. The order, which is actually the remit given to an intelligence agent, was submitted on 1 March 1980 and was filled by 11 April. In some cases, the order could only be partially filled. One such case was the order for a one-megabit RAM circuit board from Bell Laboratories in September 1982. Thus, Canadian companies were regarded by the HVA as suppliers of specimens, processes, and patents. The US, on the other hand, was in a completely different category. In the same period, 1,151 procurements were placed for US goods.

Beyond all this are the 129 intelligence items that look at other aspects of Canada. Of greatest interest are the 19 pieces of intelligence that can be traced back to the agent with the code name "Erich."⁹ His reports were exclusively dedicated to the Department of National Defence and the Defence Research Establishment. He provided detailed intelligence on Canadian military technology. Almost without exception, his reports were also sent to the Soviet intelligence service, but the source of this intelligence was not Canadian — it was a female clerk working at the West German Federal Ministry of Defence in Bonn.

Canada as a Centre of Intelligence Operations

There is some evidence that Canada was a relevant centre for intelligence operations for the Hauptverwaltung A. An important indicator is the so-called Regimematerialien, loosely translated as "government materials," which includes

everything pertaining to registration, residence, disability insurance, tax levels, work permits, identification cards, passports, and health insurance in Canada. A total of 214 reports were collected at the HVA on such matters between 1975 and 1989. They can be traced back to citizens of East Germany who had sojourned in Canada. For instance, "Siegfried,"¹⁰ an agent who cannot be identified, began his dealings with the HVA in November 1981 and these lasted until 1989. He delivered 69 pieces of intelligence in this period. Of these, 64 related to life in Canada and are dated between 1985 and 1986. "Siegfried" probably lived in Canada during this time. These reports included information on proof of entitlement, passports, citizenship, residence permits, entry into the country, driver's licenses, car registration, renting a house, work permits, unemployment insurance, labor conditions, income tax, occupational tax, and tax requirements. "Siegfried" was exclusively dedicated to delivering Regimematerialien, information that was needed in order to smuggle someone into or through Canada. Thus, Canada became a center of intelligence for the Hauptverwaltung A.

The Canadian Intelligence Services

The *Hauptverwaltung A* showed a great deal of interest in the Canadian intelligence services, especially CSIS. The database contains 66 items concerning Canadian intelligence services, but only nine regarding CSIS. The reports provide the real names of individual employees of the secret service as well as information about the reorganization of CSIS in 1982, co-operation with the American intelligence services between 1983 and 1986, and the internal workings of CSIS in 1987.

According to the "Rosenholz" file, there is no indication that the HVA succeeded in gaining direct or indirect access to Canadian intelligence services. The most important intelligence source for information sat at a desk in Pullach, a small town near Munich, at the BND or Bundesnachrichtendienst, the German Intelligence Service. Gabriele Gast, who was given the code name "Gisela,"¹¹ worked in the Soviet Union Unit of the BND. Nine intelligence items can be traced back to her; however, Canada is only marginally mentioned.

It appears that the Soviet and Polish intelligence services had better access to information concerning the Canadian services. From 1980 to 1986, the Soviet Secret Service shared seven intelligence items about Canada with the HVA. Evidently the Soviet services had knowledge in 1982 about the intelligence methods used by the Canadian services. In September 1985, the Soviets gave a list of presumed agents, including Canadians, to the HVA.

Between 1986 and 1987, eight pieces of intelligence on the Canadian services can be traced back to the Polish intelligence service, so it seems that the Polish service had even deeper insights. They knew about particular individuals within CSIS and gave reports about the internal workings of the organization on repeated occasions between the years 1986 and 1987.

On the whole, we notice that the interest the Hauptverwaltung A had for the CIA overshadowed its interest in the Canadian services. The HVA had garnered a massive 32,552 intelligence reports on the CIA from 1980 to 1989 compared with a total of 66 for the Canadian services.

CONCLUSION

The Hauptverwaltung A of the Ministry for State Security of the GDR undoubtedly had deep insights into the domestic and foreign affairs of Canada. They were well informed about the role Canada played in NATO and the Helsinki Accord. Within Canada, federal regulations governing everyday life were of primary concern, indicating that the country was being used as an operational spearhead.

The Hauptverwaltung A had a residentur at their disposal within the East German Embassy in Ottawa, but this was in the start-up stage and could hardly have built up a Canadian network of agents. Canadian companies were only interesting for their potential to provide specimens or process documentation. Knowledge about the Canadian intelligence services was fragmentary and selective, but also very accurate. The HVA relied on partner agencies and their agents within West Germany, especially those planted in the Department of Foreign Affairs, for information regarding Canada. Yet, Canada had a subordinate position on the global intelligence map of the HVA: the US could claim a much higher rank. Although there has been no evidence concerning East German spies in Canada, we cannot definitely conclude that there were none. Only the Canadian Security Intelligence Service can shed light on that.

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Endnotes

¹ See “DDR-Botschaft in Kanada eröffnet,” *Neues Deutschland* vol. 18, no. 12 (1987), p. 2.

² See Wilhelm Bleek, *DDR - Kanada. Gegenseitige Anerkennung, unterentwickelte Beziehungen*, in *Deutschlandarchiv* vol. 21 (1988), p. 205.

³ *Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (BStU) (Federal Commissioner for the Files of the State Security Service of the former German Democratic Republic) XV 2429/79. (agent classification number).

⁴ For confirmation, see “Canada Department of External Affairs, Diplomatic corps and consular and other representatives in Canada,” (Ottawa 1988), p. 21.

⁵ BStU. XV 1870/87.

⁶ BStU. XV 378/68.

⁷ BStU. XV 1579/68.

⁸ BStU. XV 15905/60.

⁹ BStU. XV 47/68.

¹⁰ BStU. XV 6489/81.

¹¹ BStU. XV 22/65.