



Jérôme aan De Wiel. *East German Intelligence and Ireland, 1949-90: Espionage, Terrorism and Diplomacy.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017. xiv + 313 pp. \$32.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-5261-0741-1.

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The East German Ministry for State Security, more commonly known as the Stasi, is a popular albeit difficult topic for the historian to research. Massive in terms of its work for the four decades it existed and omnipresent in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and its overseas missions, the Stasi is in many ways the popular image of the East Germany. Movies such as *The Lives of Others* (2007) and a slew of popular books of varying quality on the Stasi ensure that the Stasi is a popular topic for research. The Stasi's archives are found in Berlin and thirteen regional offices, yet many documents were destroyed or partly destroyed in the dying days of East Germany. Historians are thus faced with the challenge of conveying what is a fascinating subject with far too many sources and also without the sources they would like. Furthermore, as the Stasi touched nearly every aspect of East German life there is an almost irresistible temptation to link it to broader aspects of East German history. These limitations are all too present in Jerome Aan De Wiel's *East German Intelligence and Ireland, 1949-90*.

Ostensibly neutral yet fervently anticommunist and having given the Catholic Church a special status, the Irish Republic's relations or lack thereof with the staunchly communist East Ger-

many, which had complex relations with a variety of terrorist organizations, is a fascinating topic at first glance. The reader assumes that the seemingly "all-knowing" and "all-powerful" must have played a vital role in East German-Irish relations. Furthermore, it is an understudied area: Ireland's relationship to and with East Germany is far less studied than Ireland's relations with the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) during the Cold War. De Weil's groundbreaking study will therefore serve as a valuable jumping-off point for future historians researching Ireland during the Cold War and its relations with East Germany and the wider communist bloc. However, unless new archives are located it is unlikely that future research into the Stasi and Ireland will be undertaken.

A reader expecting a detailed account of East German espionage activities and spy thriller stories will be disappointed in *East German Intelligence and Ireland 1949-90*. The book is much more a narrative of East German-Irish relations than an analysis of Stasi operations in and related to Ireland. De Weil explores two main themes: first, the political, economic, and cultural links between the two republics and second, intelligence activities undertaken by the Stasi relating to Ire-

land, focusing on the information that was recorded about the Irish Republic.

The first theme is the most interesting and valuable to the historian as it shows how Irish relations with the German Democratic Republic slowly developed. Ireland, despite its neutrality, was very slow to recognize the communist regime in East Germany and did not begin trading with East Germany until 1964. Formal recognition was even slower to eventuate, despite the fascinating and comical details relating to the repatriation of an Irish volunteer from the Spanish Civil War. East Germany was keen for Irish recognition, as it was keen for recognition from many nations.

The second theme is far less interesting because, as De Wiel concedes, "Ireland, not even Northern Ireland, was not a priority for East German intelligence" (p. 278). This conclusion is undeniable and one cannot help but wonder if it would not have been better made in an article rather than in the second half of a monograph on Irish-East German relations. The second section of the monograph is further hindered by a table of over thirty pages of Stasi summaries. Although this chart does provide an insight into what topics the Stasi researched relating to Ireland, it would have been better as an appendix.

An Irish specialist will find much of value in *East German Intelligence and Ireland, 1949-90* and many interesting stepping-off points for further research. The historian of intelligence will be disappointed in the lengthy but largely unsurprising account of Stasi operations in and about Ireland. It is perhaps unfortunate, but, if Ireland was not a priority for the Stasi then for intelligence historians the Stasi's relations with Ireland will also not be a priority. Future historians will no doubt explore why the Stasi was not interested in Northern Ireland despite Soviet interests and seek to compare the Stasi's relative lack of interest in Ireland with its interest with similar small neutral nations.

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