



Gestapo scene from the movie "Jojo Rabbit."

Facts about the Gestapo



The Gestapo (GeheimeStaatspolizei) was Nazi Germany's feared secret police force. The Gestapo acted outside of the normal judicial process and it had its own courts and effectively acted as judge, jury and frequently executioner.

The Gestapo's main purpose was to hunt out those considered a threat to Nazi Germany. By the time World War Two started these included Jews, Communists, Jehovah Witnesses, homosexuals – basically anyone who was thought to challenge the dominance of the Nazi Party within Germany.

The Gestapo's greatest weapon was the fear that it created. Logic said that the Gestapo simply could not be everywhere. However, the perception of the German population was that it was everywhere and that you could trust no-one. There was an acceptance

that if you crossed the state, the Gestapo would get you. Their methods of dealing with anyone in 'protective custody' were well publicized – deliberately so, as this further enforced the message that an individual should be totally loyal to the state. Its mission was simple: to hunt down anyone who was suspected of treachery to Hitler. This included anyone who told jokes about Hitler or even celebrated the birthday of Wilhelm II as this was seen as evidence of someone sympathetic to monarchism and not National Socialism.

The Gestapo had the power of arrest, interrogation and incarceration. Stories were allowed to circulate as to what happened in Gestapo interrogation rooms and there was a great deal of truth in these stories and they served to keep the public fearfully obedient to the state.

The Gestapo became obsessed with accumulating information. When the Nazi Party rose to power in Germany, an intelligence operation aimed at any potential enemies became a vital part of the party apparatus. Files on anyone suspected of opposition were started in the early 1930s. The files grew from a simple operation in one office to an extensive network of files comprising information gathered from informers, wiretaps, intercepted mail, and confessions extracted from those taken into custody.

The fanatical accumulation of information became the Gestapo's obsession. Any deviation from Nazi policy was quickly suppressed, usually with brutal methods. The Gestapo operated by intimidation. Fear of being taken in for questioning was often enough to stifle any dissent. By the early years of World War II, the Gestapo was operating essentially without any meaningful



"Gestapo" Nazi political police symbol.

restraint. Gestapo officers could arrest anyone they suspected, question them, torture them, and send them off to imprisonment or concentration camps.

As all German police forces were eventually brought under the authority of the Gestapo, the prying eyes of the Gestapo seemed to be everywhere. All levels of German society were essentially under permanent investigation.

Many veterans of the Gestapo escaped punishment by blending in with the civilian population and eventually establishing themselves with new lives. Shockingly, in many cases Gestapo officers escaped any accountability for their war crimes because officials of the Allied powers found them useful.

When the Cold War began, the Western powers were very interested in any information about European communists. The Gestapo had kept extensive files on communist movements and individual members of communist parties, and that material was considered valuable. In return for providing information to American intelligence agencies, some Gestapo officers were assisted in traveling to South America and beginning life with new identities.



Name: _____

Oh no, it's the Gestapo! – Reading Assignment

Secret Police Reading and Reaction

Part One: While you read...

Complete the chart below as you read, "Facts About the Gestapo."

Record facts related to the focus question in the *facts* column.

Record your opinions, questions, connections and other interesting details in the *Thinking* column.

Focus Question: What tools and methods did the Gestapo use to keep citizens in line?	
Facts	Thinking

You should have at least 6 facts recorded on the “Notes” side and 5 more ideas recorded on the “Thinking” side.

Facts about the East German Secret Police (Stasi)

The Stasi's sole function was to keep the Communist Party in power. They didn't care how.

1 They Were Gaslighting before It Was a Thing

The Stasi were prolific gaslighters. In the 1950s, repression was brutal, physical torture. Early in the 1970s, eager to be accepted on the international stage, the East German Secret Police had to get more subtle. The aim of *Zersetzung* (a repurposed military term meaning disintegration or corrosion) was to “switch off” any activist individuals and groups who might threaten the Party. Police collected medical, school, and police records, interviews with neighbors and relatives, and any other evidence they could get and would then customize a direct hit on an individual's mental health.

If someone looked like they might challenge the Communist Party's legitimacy or control, the Stasi systematically destroyed their life. They used blackmail, social shame, threats, and torture. Careers, reputations, relationships, and lives were exploded to destabilize and delegitimize a critic. Some forms of harassment were almost comical: agents spread rumors about their targets, flooded their mailboxes with pornography, moved things around in their apartments, or deflated their bicycle tires day after day. Others were life-altering: Individuals labeled as subversives were banned from higher education, forced into unemployment, and forcibly committed to asylums. Many suffered long-term psychological trauma, loss of earnings, and intense social shame as a result of Stasi lies.

2 They Were (Almost) Everywhere

The Stasi had 91,000 employees at its peak—roughly one in every 30 residents was a Stasi agent. More than one in three East Germans (5.6 million) was under suspicion or surveillance, with an open Stasi file. Another half million were feeding the Stasi information. This level of surveillance and infiltration caused East Germans to live

in terror—you really never knew if you could trust anyone—though most had no idea of the scope of these activities until after the Berlin Wall fell.

3 They Kept a Crazy Amount of (Meticulous) Records

Stasi files laid out together would cover about 69 sq. miles. Recording detailed personal information on a third of the populace required a tremendous amount of paper. More pages of printed text were generated by the Stasi than by all German authors from the Middle Ages to WWII. Thousands of citizens were targeted as anti-government “trouble makers,” their homes were searched, phones and cars—if they were lucky enough to have either—were bugged, their letters opened and copied, and their movements secretly filmed or photographed. Every document went into a personal Stasi file. So far, hundreds of millions of files, 39 million index cards, 1.75 million photographs, 2,800 reels of film and 28,400 audio recordings have been recovered from Stasi archives. Millions more were shredded before they could be made public.



Stasi Museum Button Cam, via Atlas Obscura

4 Their Super-Secret Archives Are Now Public—Sort of

In 1992, the secret files the Stasi had kept on millions of East Germans were made available for review. Citizens can request to see their personal files, which are housed by the Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Archives on 63 miles of dedicated shelving. Sixteen thousand sacks of shredded documents still await reassembly. The agency tasked with maintaining them employed at least 79 former Stasi members as late as 2007, according to Wikileaks. Three million individuals have applied to see their records, with decidedly mixed results. Many former subjects of Stasi investigation or surveillance found out only from these files—20 years later—that their parents, children, spouses, or lifelong friends had been informing against them.



5 They Paid Reparations to Their Victims—Kind Of

Of the 10,000 people who can definitively prove they were targeted by *Zersetzung*, some 5,000 had lasting psychological damage inflicted by their own government. Thousands more lost careers and marriages. Some were jailed or had their children kidnapped by the state. These victims, now officially recognized, were supposed to receive modest compensation. The promised reparations—still only half of what loyal Communists still receive in pensions—have been difficult to obtain.

6 The Stasi Operated Its Own Prison

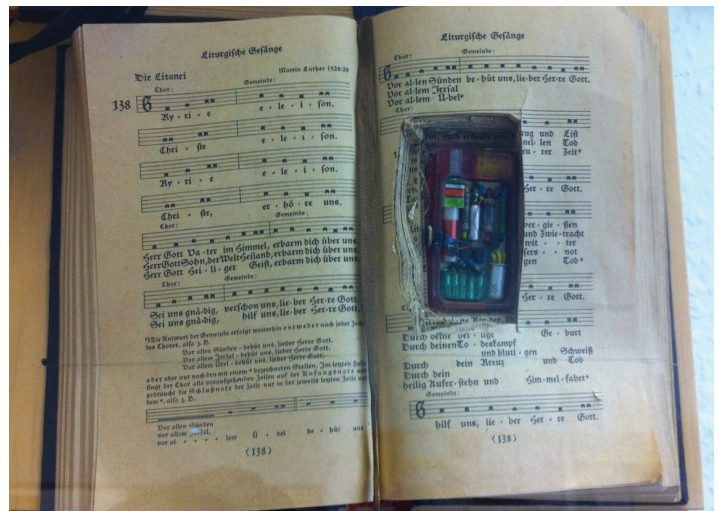
Hohenschönhausen. Over 900 former inmates have given testimony about the horror that happened there, but while the Stasi were active, the facility was top secret. The area didn't officially exist and was marked with a blank space on city maps. In reality, most of the country operated as an open-air prison, as few people were allowed to leave the country on exit visas. The Stasi told the people,

doctors, engineers, and skilled workers were induced by refined methods unworthy of the dignity of man to give up their secure existence in the GDR [German Democratic Republic, aka East Germany] and work in West Germany or West Berlin.

For their own “security,” East German citizens were not allowed to leave the East German state. Those who tried were often jailed or killed.

7 Their Propaganda Was Weaponized—Sometimes Literally

Public schools in East Germany were training grounds for police state compliance. Young children cut and colored paper dolls with gas masks and AK-47s. Hitler Youth-style groups were established for school children. In the absence of Twitter and text messages, Stasi officers launched “metal coconuts” or “information rockets” full of flyers into the countryside. The people were told the Berlin Wall was a protective barrier against “a West German separatist state” bent on sabotaging their socialist



Stasi bugged hymnal, via Atlas Obscura

state. Psychological operations were used to glorify the East German socialist state and smear the immoral, pleasure-seeking, capitalist West.

8 The Nazis Wrote the Stasi Playbook

Psychological policing of Germany's population—to root out dissenting voices and prevent people from challenging the government—had been the norm under the Gestapo, Nazi Germany's intelligence-gathering police. Nazis paved the way by using citizens as informers or denouncers.

In that kind of tattle culture, reporting your neighbors for minor wrongdoing might keep your own family safe. The secret police had so much personal information about each citizen and so much influence over institutions (whether you could get into college, get a job, buy a car) their power was almost absolute—and absolutely unaccountable. They didn't have to arrest you—they could socially paralyze you.

(Large-scale data collection by today's National Security Administration and Homeland Security follows the same pattern, according to well-known whistleblowers Edward Snowden and Daniel Ellsberg. The “See something? Say something” culture of citizen informers, the collection of personal info without warrants, and the assumption of guilt all feel eerily familiar.)



Name: _____

Don't Stress About the MfS – Reading Assignment

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Report from the Justice Press Office of Düsseldorf

August 8, 1937

Before the takeover of power, there were wild hiking groups in western Germany that called themselves "Kittelbach Pirates." After Hitler came to power, the good elements joined the NSDAP [Nazi Party], while the organization that remained became more and more of a collecting tank of discontented people against the NSDAP.... Despite the dissolution and ban on this group, new Kittelbach Pirate groups have developed in different cities in western Germany.... Not only will the activities of the Kittelbach Pirates be strongly punished, but so

Too will any continuation of the banned bündische youth groups.

Page 49 Gaddy



Report to the Gestapo, Düsseldorf

December 10, 1937

Even if these [bündische groups] can rarely be considered organizationally cohesive, there still exists the potential that they will bond more closely together and this constitutes an instrument

That would become, in the hands of the enemies of the state, a danger to the youth and thus to the nation.

Report from the Justice Press Office of Düsseldorf

To the Secret State Police [Gestapo] Office, Düsseldorf

October 7, 1941

According to the news received by us, the Bündische Youth groups have had increased activity lately. According to the report from the local district of Niederberg, the so-called Kittelbach Pirates have drawn attention to themselves. In one case, a Hitler Youth's uniform was shredded by one of these trash. The "Kittelbach Pirates" look like a Communist horde and are often in the

Company of degenerate women, found in undisciplined hordes dressed in colorful outfits and scarves. Recently, they have frequently been observed in the Neander Valley, for example.

It seems appropriate for the police to have a stronger approach and use reinforced deployment

Of patrols, especially since the Hitler Youth Patrol Duty members are no longer able to combat

This increased activity due to increased conscriptions.

Heil Hitler!

NSDAP Provincial Leadership Düsseldorf

Guidelines for the Hitler Youth Patrol Duty (HYPD)

June 1, 1938

B. Intervention against bündische groups

1. The youth are, according to the laws of the Reich, fundamentally outlawed. Bündische activity is antigovernment activity. The monitoring of the youth who engage in bündische activity falls to the Hitler Youth and is thus one of the main tasks of the HYPD.

2. One of the requirements for combating the bündische youth is that one recognizes them. Following are some distinguishing characteristics:

- A.) appearance is casual, unorderedly, and unclean;
 - B.) hair and clothing unkempt;
 - C.) The head coverings are frequently cut-up caps and strange hats of all types, decorated with a number of pins, buttons, feathers, etc;
 - D.) They wear leather sandals or tall leather boots with very short shorts, they often have tassels;
 - E.) other clothing that should be emphasized include checkered shirts and colorful handkerchiefs.
- The overall look of the bündische groups is always uneven. Pocketknives of all kinds are carried. They stick [tobacco] pipes and combs in the Tops of their boots, and zippers are found on all sorts of places.

3. These signs might not be found on all bündische groups. On the other hand, individual signs are also not proof of bündische activity. However, caution should be used when intervening.

4. Bündische activity should mostly be noted during travel stops. If during such a stop, there is a strong suspicion of bündische activity based on their type of ID or for any other reason, the police should be informed based on the laws and guidelines of the state.

From: Gaddy, K.R. Flowers in the Gutter. New York: Dutton Books, 2020

Documents- The Düsseldorf Reports: August 1937- October 1941

What happened to the good elements of the Kittelbach Pirates after Hitler came to power?

What do German authorities plan to do about the development of new Kittlebach Pirate groups in several cities?

Why is the Gestapo concerned about a youth hiking group?

Why can't the Hitler Youth Patrol Duty instead of the police take care of the Pirate groups?

Overall, why does the powerful Gestapo think that the bündische/wild hiking groups pose a danger to the current German government?

Document- Guidelines for the Hitler youth Patrol Duty (HYPD) 1938

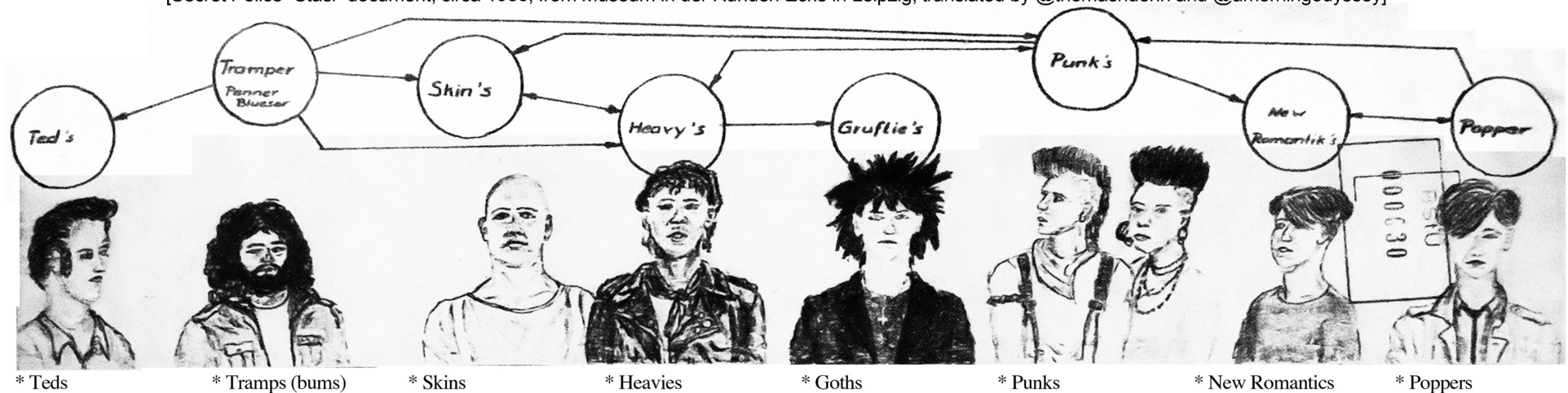
For what reasons should the monitoring of bündische youth fall to the Hitler Youth?

Which distinguishing characteristics of bündische listed stood out as particularly antigovernment?

According to the "Guidelines", what is it that bündische youth specifically do that makes their activity antigovernment?

OVERVIEW of TYPES of NEGATIVE-DECADENT YOUTH CULTURES in the DDR

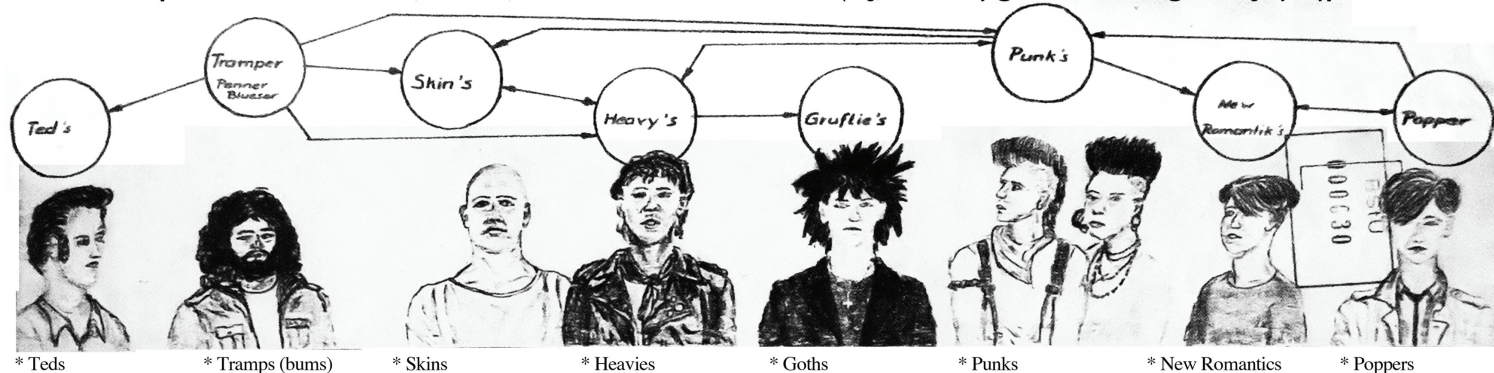
[Secret Police "Stasi" document, circa 1985; from Museum in der Runden Ecke in Leipzig, translated by @thomashuehn and @amorningodyssey]



* Ted's	* Tramps (bums)	* Skins	* Heavies	* Goths	* Punks	* New Romantics	* Poppers
Age: 15-30 years	Age: 20-30 years.	Age: 15-22 years.	Age: 15-25 years.	Age: 15-20 years.	Age: 15-22 years.	Age: 15-18 years	Age: 13-20 years old
Very small group by numbers, fanatic supporters of 50's Rock'n'Roll. Usually organized in respective fan clubs.	Classic manifestation of the negative-decadent youth in the 70's. Blues fans. Participation in traditional events.	English: "skinhead". society-threatening manifestation of negative-decadent youths as lone wolves or in loose groups without firm structures.	Fan of the so-called Heavy-Metal music (extremely hard rock).	New heavy scene, originating in hostility to the original. Glorification of creepy effects, satanic and death cult, fans of the group "The Cure".	English: Garbage/trash. Characterized by documented decadence, society-adverse to -threatening. No firm structures.	Dropout / slacker movement. Has been developing out of the punk movement but represents a more moderate social form.	Appearance as breakdancers. Striking characteristics, exclusively interested in disco and dance.
Clothing in 50's style: Skinny jeans, winklepickers shoes. Hair in the style of R&R-times (Elvis quiffe, "Duck").	Long hair, jeans parka, tramping, Birkenstock (literally: "Jesus slippers"), beards, sometimes fashion accessories similar to Hippies.	Outer attributes: baldness or very short hair, bomber jacket, skinny jeans, high steel-toe boots studded with nails and iron.	Similarity to rockers in the west: black leather clothing, leather cap, Rivet-studded jackets and pants, wearing heavy chains etc., normal to semi-long hair.	black or white dyed hair, sticking out in all directions. White powdered face, black clothing. Wearing of symbols like crucifixes upside down.	Filthy, torn, paint-sprinkled clothing, utensils like safety pins/razor blades. multi-coloured, scraggy hair, Mohawk ("Iriquois" haircut).	Black or grey clothes, often red / black colour contrasts as a symbol of anarchy.	Adolescent with extremely modern clothes. Hairstyle similar to New Romantics, multi-coloured.
Politically uninterested.	Not bound to any political worldview.	Deprecative negative to hostile political attitude, partly neo-fascist tendencies, glorification and use of violence, brutal action.	Originally deprecative attitude towards state and society, growing integration into organizations forms of the Free German Youth with society-conforming attitudes.	Totally uninterested in politics and society.	Deprecative to hostile political attitude, rejection of all state forms and societal norms. Glorification of anarchist thoughts, "total freedom".	Hair mostly dyed black, kept short at the back and at the sides but longer at the front, falling into the face, obscuring the eyes	Completely uninterested in politics
Hardly noticed operationally, activities mostly at birth and death days of idolized rock stars.	Noticed through organizing inter-regional meetings, no firm attachment to church groups, hardly growing.	In danger of criminality (hooliganism, battery, resistance to state action. Partly in open church youth groups.	Originally aggressive attitude, partly neo-fascist tendencies after the example of the west, with the proliferation of Heavy music increasingly society-conforming.	Hardly noticed operationally. High profile by collecting grave artifacts, sometimes grave desecration. Calm, isolated from other youths.	Violent appearance, criminal actions and antisocial ways of life, often regulars in public church youth groups, instructed by Deacons.	Same negative and hostile positions as punks but with a full rejection of violence or its glorification. At times involved in Christian youth work, decrease in occurrence.	So far we haven't dealt with such a case. Mostly involved in fights with Heavies.

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Document Title: Overview of Types of Negative-Decadent Youth Cultures in the DDR

What hints does the title give you regarding what type of information might be contained in this document?

After looking at the representations of German youth on the document, which group(s) are of most concern to the Stasi?

Why?

Read the descriptions of the youth groups in the document and fill in the chart below

Groups that concerned the Stasi most.		Groups that were of little concern to the Stasi	
Group	Reason(s) for Concern	Group	Reason(s) for little concern

How do you think the Stasi came upon the information in the group descriptions?

Do you think the information on the youth cultures is accurate? Why or why not?

What might the Stasi do with this information?

Ost-Punks

Retrieved on June 6, 2023 from: <https://www.jugendopposition.de/themen/145334/too-much-future-Punk-in-der-ddr>

Translated by Sophie Grebner

Source 1: „Klärung eines Sachverhaltes“

Bh., den 9.04.89

Sie werden gebeten, wegen der Klärung eines Sachverhaltes / einer Kfz-Umschreibung / einer Fahrerlaubnisangelegenheit / einer Personalausweisangelegenheit / einer Meldeangelegenheit / eines Antrages auf Auslandsreise (*) auf der umseitig angeführten Dienststelle der Deutschen Volkspolizei vorzusprechen. Zur Vermeidung unnötigen Wartens wird Ihnen als Termin Dienstag der 10.04.89 um 11⁰⁰ Uhr, vorgeschlagen.

Im Falle einer dringenden Verhinderung wird um Mitteilung eines anderen Ihnen genehmen Termins gebeten, der jedoch aus Sachgründen in der Zeit bis zum liegen mußte.

Sie werden gebeten, sich zum o. a. bzw. vereinbarten Termin im Zimmer einzufinden und diese Mitteilung und Ihren Personalausweis mitzubringen.

*) Zutreffendes unterstreichen

S 12 (87/11) Ag 106/81/82/83/84

Unterschrift Börner OSt. d. VP
CBV

Viele Punks bekommen eine solche Vorladung zur Kripo. Das heißt dann „Klärung eines Sachverhalts“. Hierbei wird der Punk ausgefragt und manchmal auch zu einer Zusammenarbeit mit der Stasi aufgefordert. Quelle: Archiv Substitut

Image 1 Subtext in English: "Many Punks get such a summons to the CID. This is then called "Clarification of a Fact". Here the Punk is questioned and sometimes also asked to cooperate with the Stasi. Source: Archive Substitut"

English Translation

Summons of a Punk to the Criminal Investigation Department for "Clarification of a Fact".

Berlin, 9.04.89 [April 9, 1989]

You are requested to appear at the office of the German People's Police listed overleaf to clarify a matter.

If you do not appear, you will be taken to the police station.

In order to avoid unnecessary waiting, we suggest Tuesday, 16.04.89, at 16.00 hours. If you are prevented from attending urgently, you are requested to notify us of another date which is convenient for you, but which, for reasons of expediency, would have to be within the period up to ().

You are requested to be present in room () at the above-mentioned or agreed appointment time and to bring this notification and your identity card with you.

(Signature)

Börner, Olt. of the VP ABV

Document- Summons of an Ost-punk to the Criminal Investigation Department 1989-
"Clarification of a Fact"

Why was the Punk who received this document summoned by the police?

What happens if this Punk doesn't show up at the police station?

Why might the German police/security system issue these vague orders when they want a citizen to meet with them?