

Political Persecution of the Former Concentration Camp Inmate and Communist Ernst Busse (1950s)

Abstract

In the 1950s, even former concentration camp inmates were not safe from politically motivated persecution. The case of KPD functionary and Reichstag deputy Ernst Busse, who had been incarcerated from 1934 to 1945, makes that clear. But Busse's case also illustrates the profound distrust between returning representatives of the exiled SPD leadership and the Communists who had remained in Germany. In 1945, Busse became interior minister and deputy minister president of Thuringia. Investigations into his alleged cooperation with the SS in the Buchenwald concentration camp (where Busse had been a "Kapo") were launched the next year. Busse was arrested in 1950 and sentenced to life in prison by a Soviet military tribunal. He died in Siberia in 1952. His wife did not find out about his death until 1956.

Source

I. A Family Friend to Anna Busse, July 10, 1950

Dear Annie!

It's been nearly eight weeks since I found out that Ernst is in detention. But it was only fourteen days ago that I was able to find out that he is being investigated for his activity as a hospital Kapo in Buchenwald.

You already know that I worked with him in Wehlheiden (already in jail, that is), and then later in the concentration camp Lichtenburg, and finally in Buchenwald. I undertook resistance and political-faction work with him in a tight-knit group, which means that I was one of his closest collaborators and therefore know about all of the phases of the struggle.

I have included a general report as an appendix to my research questionnaire. His [Busse's] incrimination might possibly have resulted largely from Soviet, Polish, Czech, French, and Dutch prisoners, something that happened in ignorance of the fact that he was under constraint.

I have decided to present a report on my research: / "My resistance work with Ernst Busse" / One cannot hold him responsible for this hospital activity, because, from the beginning, he asked and informed his faction and group about each job and every task. The group included the unfortunately deceased: Walter Stöcker, Theo Neubauer, Albert Kuntze [Kuntz]. I am one of the few survivors. Walter Bartel, Harry Kuhn, Robert Siewert, and Ottomar Geschke could give you crucial support. I can fully imagine that all of the accused SS people, from [Martin] Sommer, [Max] Blancke, Dr. [Waldemar] Hoven, and even Ilse Koch are trying to incriminate him in order to exonerate themselves. / Therefore, please write to me and explain, if possible, where the chief allegations are coming from; perhaps I can respond to them specifically.

II. Anna Busse to the High Commissioner of the USSR in Germany, Vladimir Semyonov, October 20, 1953

Back on March 29, 1950, my husband, Ernst Busse, a resident of Berlin-Niederschönhausen, Wahnschaffestr. 38, was taken from his office, where he worked as the chairman of the agricultural cooperatives, by the Soviet Control Commission. He was taken for a discussion and has not returned to this day.

On the evening of March 29, 1950, at 11 o'clock, I received a phone call in our apartment from the Soviet Control Commission. During the call, I was informed that my husband was with the commission and that I need not worry. With the sense of trust I have always had, and have, toward the Soviet Union, I waited every day for my husband's return. But when, after eight months, the time became too long for me, I trustingly turned to our state president and chairman of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, of which my husband was also a member and to which I still belong today. Unfortunately, Comrade Wilhelm Pieck could only tell me that there were accusations against my husband dating back to his time in the Fascist concentration camp Buchenwald, and that the investigation was in the hands of the authorities of the Soviet Union.

I was also questioned by the Soviet authorities in December 1950. From that questioning, it is still unclear to me to this day whether the accusations against my husband have any grounds.

That is why I am asking you to give me and my husband's mother, who is 77-years old and emotionally deeply shaken by this uncertainty, a sign of life from my husband through your office.

I assure you that I will show understanding for every measure that might have been taken by your office regarding my husband. But in my life, which I have devoted to the progressive and peaceful development [of society], it is now nearly impossible for me (indeed a strong impediment, given the uncertainty over my husband's fate) to continue to work as a person fully ready for service.

With the utmost confidence that you will view this entreaty as a request from one human being to another, I look forward to your esteemed response.

Most respectfully yours,

Anna Busse

III. Anna Busse to the Head of the Private Chancellery of the President of the GDR, Otto Winzer, November 4, 1955

Esteemed Comrade Winzer,

You can well imagine that I can only focus my thoughts on one thing these days. You know that in March of this year we had many telephone conversations about my personal matter, and you promised to clarify the issue of my husband's case in the swiftest possible way.

At the time, you promised to definitely inform me [about him]. Now, after many people were released from the Soviet Union, we find ourselves in a situation in which I can no longer explain to myself why, to this day, I have not heard anything from you or Ernst.

Can you even begin to imagine my state of mind today? I must go on living as a comrade, a fighter, but also as a human being. I can no longer bear to watch as Ernst's now nearly eighty year-old mother virtually falls apart on account of this new and absolute uncertainty. Likewise, I can no longer endure this situation either.

Perhaps I may ask you to grant me a meeting with you. I assume that, in your office, in particular, there is now complete clarity about the people released from the Soviet Union. I ask you with equal measures of courtesy and urgency to answer me as quickly as possible.

With Socialist greetings!

[handwritten addition by Anna Busse]

June 17, 1956

Note[:] died 1952

Source: Lutz Niethammer, ed., with Karin Hartewig, Harry Stein, and Leonie Wannemacher, *Der ›gesäuberte‹ Antifaschismus. Die SED und die roten Kapos von Buchenwald. Dokumente..* Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1994, pp. 384–87, 398 f.

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