Analysis of *German Security Police Administrative Documents, 1937–38 (File 8B)*

Content of the Documents

Types of Documents: The file primarily contains **official internal correspondence** – one-page memos and letters exchanged among Nazi security police agencies. These include formal **directives and orders from headquarters**, as well as **cover letters and reports** accompanying case files. For example, many pages are **forwarding letters** that send original case dossiers from one office to another (often from regional Gestapo offices to Berlin) in compliance with a standing order. Each letter has a **typed header with official designations, reference codes, and dates**, followed by a brief body of text. The documents often reference attachments (e.g. individual case files or lists) but the administrative pages themselves focus on instructions and record-keeping rather than the full content of those attachments.

Topics Covered: The subject lines (*"Betr.:"*) reveal the range of security matters handled. They frequently name **individuals or groups considered political enemies** of the Nazi state. For instance, letters discuss members of banned organizations like a *"social-democratic teachers' association"* or list *Communist Party (KPD) members in Coburg*. Many subjects are prominent **Social Democrats and Communists** – e.g. *"Friedrich Ebert… of the SPD"* (a Social Democratic leader) and *"Georg Dietrich… former SPD member and Reichstag deputy"* – indicating surveillance of the Nazi regime's political opponents. Others concern **suspected subversive activities** or émigrés, such as a case file on *"Werner Pietz… a precision mechanic and Russian returnee"* (a German who had lived in the USSR). There are also references to **anti-Nazi propaganda**, for example a memorandum on the *"distribution of leaflets of foreign content"*, which shows the security police monitoring clandestine pamphlets. Overall, the content is centered on **intelligence about opposition figures, dissident groups, and security threats** as perceived by the Nazi police in 1937–38.

Structure and Format: The documents share a highly formalized structure. Each begins with an **official letterhead or stamp** identifying the issuing authority. For example, correspondence from Berlin headquarters is headed *"Der Reichsführer SS, Der Chef des Sicherheitshauptamtes"* (Reich SS Leader, Chief of the Security Main Office) with department codes and file numbers. Letters from the Gestapo (Secret State Police) similarly display *"Geheime Staatspolizei, Geheimes Staatspolizeiamt"* and an internal reference number. The date and location (usually **Berlin**) are given, often stamped or typed. A **subject line (Betr.)** follows, briefly identifying the case by name or topic. The body text is concise and formulaic. Typically, it **requests compliance with a prior order** – for instance: *"Es wird gebeten, den anliegenden [Akt] gemäss dem Erlass C.d.S. B.Nr. 4957/37 vom 1.7.37 urschriftlich an das Geheime Staatspolizeiamt abzugeben."* This translates to "You are requested to submit the attached file in original to the Secret State Police Office, in accordance with decree no. 4957/37 of 1 July 1937". Many letters explicitly cite this **decree of July 1, 1937** from the *Chef der Sicherheitspolizei* (Chief of Security Police), indicating that the **centralization of case files** was mandated by policy. After instructing the transfer of documents, the memos often note how the communication will be filed: *"Dieses Schreiben geht z. d. A. I 133"* (This letter goes to file I 133) and that the local office's copy is to be

returned with an **"Erledigungsvermerk"** (completion note) to a specified unit. Each letter ends with a **signature block**. Rather than a personal name, the signatory is identified by position – e.g. *"Der Chef des Sicherheitshauptamtes i.A., Der Leiter der Zentralabteilung II 1"* (On behalf of the Chief of the Security Main Office, the Head of Central Department II/1) – followed by an illegible signature or initials. Many pages bear **stamps and handwritten notations** as well. We see incoming stamps with dates (e.g. *"Eing. 2. Dez. 1937"* received stamp) and marginal notes referencing file numbers or actions taken, which indicate the **bureaucratic processing** of each document.

*Example of an official correspondence (November 1937) from the **Reich Main Security office** to the Berlin Gestapo. The document header shows the letterhead of Heinrich Himmler's offices ("Der Reichsführer SS, Chef des Sicherheitshauptamtes") with file reference **II 121 – Abg.Nr. 733/37** and date. The subject is a banned Social Democratic teachers' organization, and the body instructs that the attached case file (no. 116656/37) be forwarded "in original" to the Gestapo office, pursuant to the **decree of 1 July 1937**. A form for confirmation of receipt is mentioned as enclosed. The letter is marked "Geheim" and carries a stamp indicating it was received on 2 Dec 1937. The signature line shows the **Head of Central Department II/1** signing "i.A." (on behalf of) the Chief of the Security Main Office. Handwritten notes at the bottom are staff remarks about filing and cross-references.*

Purpose and Administrative Objectives

Centralized Surveillance and Records: A clear purpose of these documents is to **centralize intelligence and police records** on groups and persons deemed threats to the Nazi state. The repeated instruction to send **original files to the Gestapo headquarters in Berlin** (with only a copy or note kept locally) shows an effort to concentrate all crucial information at the center. By late 1937, Heydrich's office (as *Chef der Sicherheitspolizei*, under Himmler) was ensuring that local offices forwarded dossiers on political dissidents, so that **Berlin could maintain master files**. For example, after a local Gestapo branch investigated a case (like a list of KPD members or an SPD activist), the entire file was transferred to Berlin. The central authority would then acknowledge receipt and integrate it into their archives, as indicated by letters stating *"Der dortige Vorgang… wurde unter obiger Buchnummer hier übernommen"* ("The local case… has been taken over here under the above reference number"). This central archive of security information enabled the regime to have a **unified overview of suspects and enemies**.

Coordination Between Agencies: The documents also served to **coordinate actions between different offices of the security police**. Many letters are essentially communications between the **Security Police main office, the Secret State Police (Gestapo) headquarters, and regional State Police offices**. They reference correspondence back and forth (e.g. citing a local office's letter by date and file number, then the reply from headquarters). The purpose here is to ensure that **orders from the top are implemented consistently** and that information flows upward. For instance, when headquarters received intelligence (say, from the *SD* or another source like the *Reich Youth Leadership* in the leaflet case), they would forward it to the Gestapo office with instructions to investigate or respond, rather than handling everything centrally. Conversely, when a local Gestapo office completed an investigation or had custody of important files on a person, they were required to send it to

Berlin and then got confirmation. This interplay ensured **inter-agency communication** and that no important action was taken without Berlin's knowledge.

Enforcement of Nazi Security Policy: The overarching objective reflected in these files is the **enforcement of Nazi political and security policies through bureaucracy**. The security police were consolidating their control over perceived enemies – **political opponents (Marxists, liberals), dissenting intellectuals, and other "undesirables"** – and these administrative orders are the paper trail of that effort. We see that **every case is tied to a policy directive**: most letters explicitly invoke the *"Erlass des Chefs der Sicherheitspolizei Nr. 4957/37 vom 1.7.37"*, which was a directive from Reinhard Heydrich's office laying down how information and files must be handled. In effect, the documents themselves exist to **implement that policy** – by requesting files, distributing orders, and requiring confirmations. The end goal was to make the repression of regime enemies **systematic and uniform**. By 1937–38, the Nazi security apparatus was increasingly organized: these memos show how **surveillance and preventive police action** (like putting someone in "protective custody" or monitoring a banned group) were managed through diligent paperwork and chains of command. The **subjects (SPD, KPD, etc.) highlight the regime's priorities** – e.g. tracking Social Democrats, Communists, and others even in the late 1930s, prior to the war. The purpose was both preventive (having dossiers ready for any needed arrests or bans) and punitive (coordinating arrests or incarceration like in concentration camps, which likely resulted from such files, even if not detailed explicitly in these pages).

Ideas and Principles Expressed

Ideological Attitudes: Although these administrative documents are terse, they implicitly convey the **ideological stance of the Nazi security police**. The choice of targets reflects Nazi ideology: **leftist parties (SPD, KPD)** and their affiliates are treated as dangerous "enemies of the state." The mention of a *Social Democrat teachers' league* or former elected officials in a neutral, bureaucratic tone belies the fact that the regime viewed them as subversive elements to be neutralized. There is also evidence of suspicion toward those with foreign ties or minorities (for example, a German who returned from Soviet Russia is noted as a special case). The documents do not overtly use derogatory language – they are formally worded – but the very existence of **secret police dossiers on these individuals** highlights the Nazi view that such people were to be surveilled and controlled. In essence, the files reflect a **mentality of authoritarian control**, where **political dissent, and even potential dissent, is criminalized or closely watched**.

Procedural Rigor and Hierarchy: A striking principle in these documents is the strict **adherence to bureaucratic procedure and chain of command**. The tone is impersonal and authoritative – directives are issued as tasks to be carried out, not debated. Every page shows a **meticulous reference system**: file numbers (e.g. *B.Nr. 12651/37*), *Abg.Nr.* (transfer numbers), *Az.* (file indices) are all noted to track each action. This indicates a **highly organized bureaucracy** where nothing proceeds without proper documentation. Subordinates are expected to follow orders to the letter. Phrases like *"Es wird gebeten…"* (You are requested…) really function as polite commands to comply with the referenced decree. The inclusion of details like *"Formular für Empfangsbestätigung liegt bei"* (a form for acknowledgment of receipt is enclosed) underscores how **accountability and verification** were built into the process. Likewise, the requirement that the local office return its disposition with an *"Erledigungsvermerk"* (note of completion) to department II/121 shows an insistence on **feedback up the hierarchy once tasks are done**. These practices illustrate

the broader Nazi bureaucratic principle that **security operations should be systematic, documented, and centrally supervised**.

Bureaucratic Language and Secrecy: The language used is formal, terse, and filled with administrative jargon – a hallmark of **bureaucratic culture**. Individuals are reduced to their names, birthdates, and affiliations; instructions reference **letters and numbers rather than emotional or moral justifications**. This dry approach conveys an underlying idea that maintaining state security is a *technical* and *administrative* task. Each document is typically marked **"Geheim" (secret)** and was intended for internal use only, reflecting the principle of **operational secrecy**. In one example, a security police bulletin is explicitly labeled *"Nur für deutsche Behörden bestimmt! ... unter Verschluß zu halten."* ("Only for German authorities – to be kept under lock and key"). While that quote comes from a later 1944 police bulletin included in the file, it echoes the ethos of 1937–38: these administrative papers were **not public directives but confidential police business**. Stamps, such as receipt stamps and classification markings, reinforce how **information was tightly controlled and circulated on a need-to-know basis** within the hierarchy.

Control and Efficiency: The documents convey an underlying belief in **administrative efficiency as a tool of state power**. The Nazi security apparatus is shown trying to be *comprehensive* (gathering all intelligence centrally) and *efficient* (using standardized forms, reference numbers, deadlines for replies). The flurry of file numbers and cross-references suggests a vast filing system in operation. There is also a sense of **urgency and thoroughness** – for example, headquarters asks a local office to promptly answer an inquiry from another Nazi authority (the example of the *R.J.F.* letter about foreign leaflets) and notes that no further formal order will be issued from above. This implies trust that lower offices will act **proactively once instructed**, reflecting the idea of a *disciplined, self-enforcing bureaucracy*. The **combination of authoritarian hierarchy and bureaucratic method** evident in File 8B illustrates how the Nazi police system sought to leave no loose ends – every person of interest catalogued, every order confirmed, and every action recorded. In sum, the administrative documents express a **fusion of Nazi ideological goals (eliminating opposition) with a rigorous bureaucratic process**, demonstrating how the regime's authoritarian control was exercised through careful documentation, inter-office coordination, and strict procedural compliance.

Sources: The analysis above is based solely on the content of *German Security Police Administrative Documents, 1937–38 (File 8B)*, as evidenced by the translated excerpts and references to the file's pages. The specific examples and quotations are drawn from the file's letters and directives, reflecting the original wording and format of these 1937–1938 Nazi police documents. All observations about structure, purpose, and principles are directly grounded in those primary sources.