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A COMEDY, WHAT ELSE?

The Swiss director Micha Lewinsky has always wanted to film the "Fichen (secret files) scandal". Here he tells how he finally came up with the sparking idea and from this he made his new film MOSKAU EINFACH! (ONE-WAY TO MOSCOW) .

A guest contribution by **Micha Lewinsky**

The internet was not yet invented. So I picked up the phone. I dialed the number of the Russian embassy in Bern. A grumpy-sounding male voice asked me about my concern. I got straight to the point: I asked for information about the Trans-Siberian Railway.

Maybe there was a crack on the line. I do not know that anymore.

What I can say with certainty: The call took place on November 19, 1987. A month before my 15th birthday. An officer of the Zurich Cantonal Police overheard the conversation and recorded it. Another officer shortly thereafter clamped a pale green fiche in his typewriter. "Nothing negative is known about L.", he noted. And that's right. I was a student from Zurich-Seebach who was supposed to make a presentation on the Trans-Siberian Railway.

Now, 30 years later, I have made a film about the Fichen affair: ONE-WAY TO MOSCOW!. It has become a comedy. What else? Time doesn't heal wounds, but it does make it possible to laugh at injuries.

When National Councilor Moritz Leuenberger published in 1989 the extent to which Switzerland had monitored its citizens, an outcry of indignation spread across the country. 900,000 secret files were found at that time. Anyone who was committed to the left of the political centre had a good chance of being registered. It might be enough to hand out a few leaflets. Or to call the wrong embassy. Parents denounced their own children, professors denounced their students. And the entries sometimes had tangible consequences. In order to protect Switzerland from subversion, biographies were ruthlessly interfered with.

Comedy is tragedy plus time, they say. If the pain is still too great, jokes are tasteless. You can only enjoy your own suffering with a little distance. (Laughing at other people's suffering is easier. There is often enough distance that you are not affected yourself.)

The first idea for this film was on my desk ten years ago. It wasn't the secret files that sparked my interest at the time, but the insiders.

In the 1980s, Zurich city police officers were provided with makeshift identities. They let their hair and beards grow and thus mingled with the eventful youth. In the Autonomous Youth Centre they collected leaflets and the next morning they brought them to their superiors in Criminal Police Commissioner III on Stauffacherstrasse.

I imagined how these policemen, who often came from the country, tried to imitate the jargon of the left-wing city youth. I might not directly sympathized with them. But I could identify with them. Who does not know the lonely longing of the outsider to want to belong to a group? As a director, I still sometimes have the suspicion that I am actually an impostor who can be exposed at any time. The nightmare of having to give a lecture in your underpants to many viewers is universal. How many times these policemen must had this nightmare back then?

The fear of being caught lying is the oldest and most effective dramaturgical fuel that I know of. I've used it in all of my screenplays.

In STERNENBERT, Matthias Gnädinger conceals that he is the father of the teacher to whom he goes to school. In THE FRIEND, Philippe Graber hides the fact that he hardly knew his late girlfriend. In THE REGISTER, Marie Leuenberger hides that she would rather marry the groom she is supposed to trust. And in NONTHING HAPPENS, Devid Striesow conceals that a crime has happened under his paternal care.

In ONE-WAY TO MOSCOW! I wanted to tell about someone who has to hide in the left subculture that he is an informer. But the dramaturgical fuel never reached the end of the story.

Anyone can be a secret service today

Chekhov has established the rule: if a rifle hangs on the wall in the first act, it will be fired in the last.

Only: there was no bang in Switzerland. There was no RAF. The opera house never burned. And when a bomb was discovered in front of the El Salvador consulate in 1984, it soon turned out to be a dummy, made by a police insider who wanted to help the revolutionary goings-on. It is difficult to reproach Swiss state security that nothing serious has ever happened (even if it would undoubtedly have benefited domestic filmmaking). Switzerland was spared the threat that would have given state security its legitimacy.

The cold war ended surprisingly quiet after decades of saber-rattling. This is a successful conclusion for a military conflict and world peace. But not for a screenplay.

In 1989 I was 17 years old. Back then, what the young people worry about the climate was the fear of another big war. I was therefore enthusiastic about the courageous GSoA-Initiative that the army wanted to abolish. And I was looking forward to JONAS AND HIS VETERAN, a play Max Frisch had written for the current occasion. "Imagine it's war and nobody's going!" we wrote on the walls of public toilets. That was the energy I was hoping for from this evening of theater. Instead, Frisch tortured the audience with a tenacious and self-referential sermon, slowly recited. In the end I was too sedated to be indignant.

Max Frisch had always been closely monitored. His last older work was the artistic processing of his own secret file.

I thought about that two years ago. I imagined the dutiful state guard who was sitting next to me in the theater hall and how I was fighting against sleep. And then I had the best idea ever: I told Barbara Sommer and Plinio Bachmann about it. The two are experienced theater dramaturges and clever screenwriters. They were able to do something with the initial situation and simply wrote the ONE-WAY TO MOSCOW! script completely new.

They invented the figure of the police spy Viktor Schuler (Philippe Graber), who is sent to the

Schauspielhaus for camouflage as an extra. At the rehearsals for Shakespeare's TWELFTH NIGHT, actually a play that is also powered by the tried-and-tested dramaturgical fuel, the good officer then falls in love with his fellow actor (Miriam Stein). The longer he doubts, the more about his manager's assignment (Mike Müller). He stumbles through history like a mirror cabinet. There is no gun hanging on the wall, and still in the end there is a bang.

It has become a script that I read with gratitude and filmed it with humility. Knowing that I could never have imagined something so complex and intricate. That is the only reason why the film can now be seen in the cinema 30 years later.

Today I willingly write my political intentions and intentions myself on the Internet. Without seriously considering the consequences. Anyone who has an apartment to rent or a job vacancy checks the attitude and lifestyle of the applicants as a matter of course and without hesitation. Not doing so would be negligence. One could say that the accessibility of private information has become more democratic. Anyone can be a secret service today. The dangers we are exposed to through this transparency can only be guessed at.

What I can say with certainty thanks to the Internet today: at 9288 kilometers, the Trans-Siberian Railway is the longest rail link in the world.