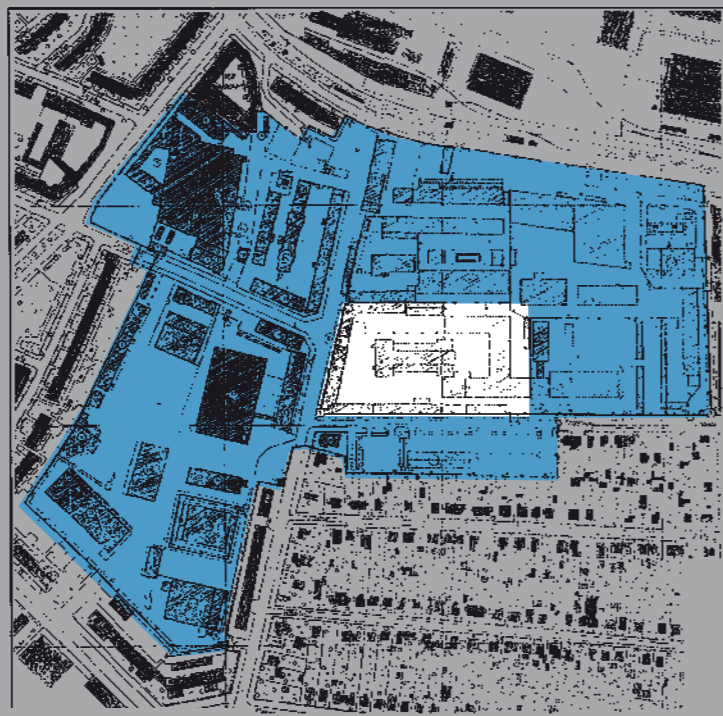


The Stasi prison

After the creation of the Ministry of State Security (MfS) the underground prison came under its jurisdiction in March 1951. Numerous opponents of the communist dictatorship were detained here during the fifties. The list of those arrested reached from leaders of the uprising of 17 June 1953 to members of the Jehovah's Witnesses movement. Disgraced politicians had to endure many months in the tomb-like cells such as the former GDR Foreign Minister, Georg Dertinger (CDU party), or the former SED Politbüro member, Paul Merker, as well as reform-minded communists such as Walter Janka, the head of the Aufbau publishing house. Even critics of the SED in the West were abducted by the MfS and taken to Hohenschönhausen such as Walter Linse, a lawyer from West Berlin, kidnapped in 1952 and executed in Moscow one year later.

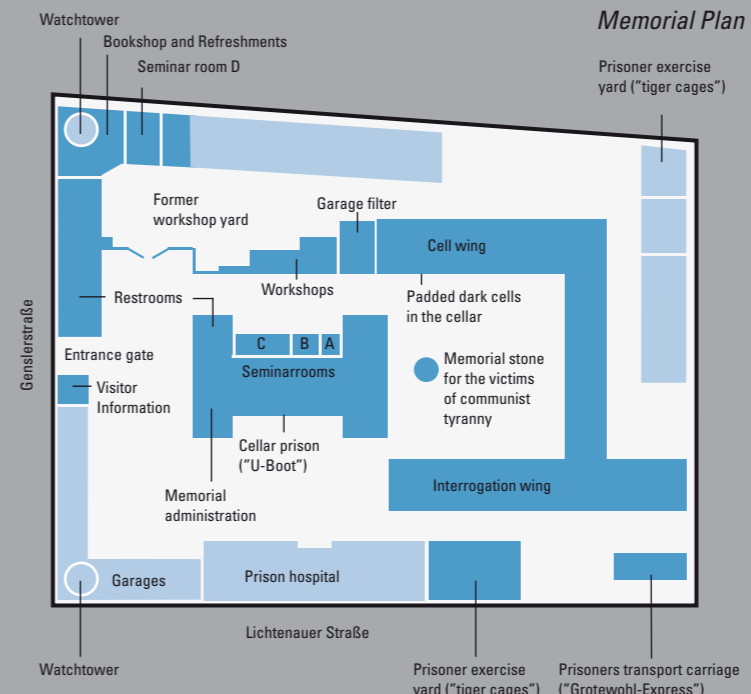


Map of restricted area

The Memorial

Following the unification of the two German states, the prison in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen was closed in October 1990. Former prisoners spoke out in favour of establishing a memorial at the site. In 1992, the prison complex was listed as a historical monument. The Berlin-Hohenschönhausen Memorial Site was established two years later. Since 2000, it has been an independent foundation under public law. The memorial has been charged with 'exploring the history of the Hohenschönhausen prison between 1945 and 1989, informing about exhibitions, events and publications and inspiring visitors to take a critical look at the methods and consequences of political persecution and suppression in the communist dictatorship'.

In 2011, more than 340.000 people including about 160.000 school children, have visited the former Stasi prison. Most of the memorial's guided tours are conducted by former inmates.



Visitor services

- Guided tours:** Guided tours for visiting groups available by prior arrangement between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. Public tours in German for individual visitors available every day at 11 a.m., 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. Regular English-speaking tour for individual visitors every Wednesday and Saturday, 2,30 p.m. Special tours of the former no-go area can also be arranged.
- Exhibitions:** There are alternating exhibitions on the subject of political persecution in the GDR.
- Events:** The memorial hosts regular lectures and book presentations, as well as discussions and cultural events.
- Seminars:** Upon request, visitor groups can avail of seminars and project days assisted by former prisoners (by appointment only).
- Pedagogical supply:** There is a coordination office with two teachers for the care of school classes.
- Commemoration:** Commemoration and wreath-laying ceremonies are regularly held at the memorial stone and the nearby DENKORT (place of remembrance).
- Bookshop:** A bookshop offers memorial publications and a large variety of books on the history of communist dictatorships.

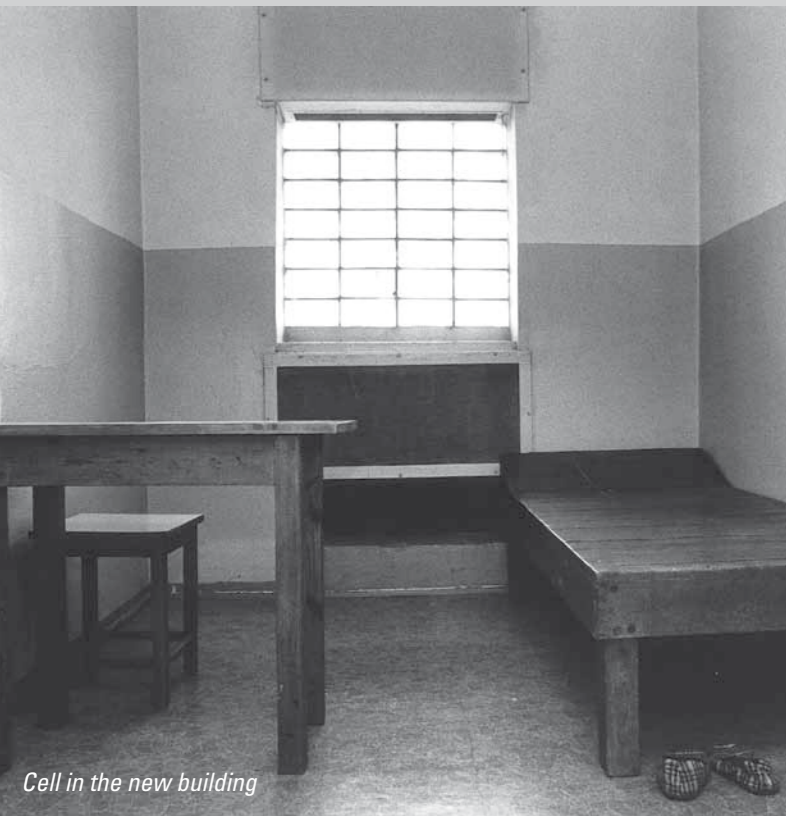
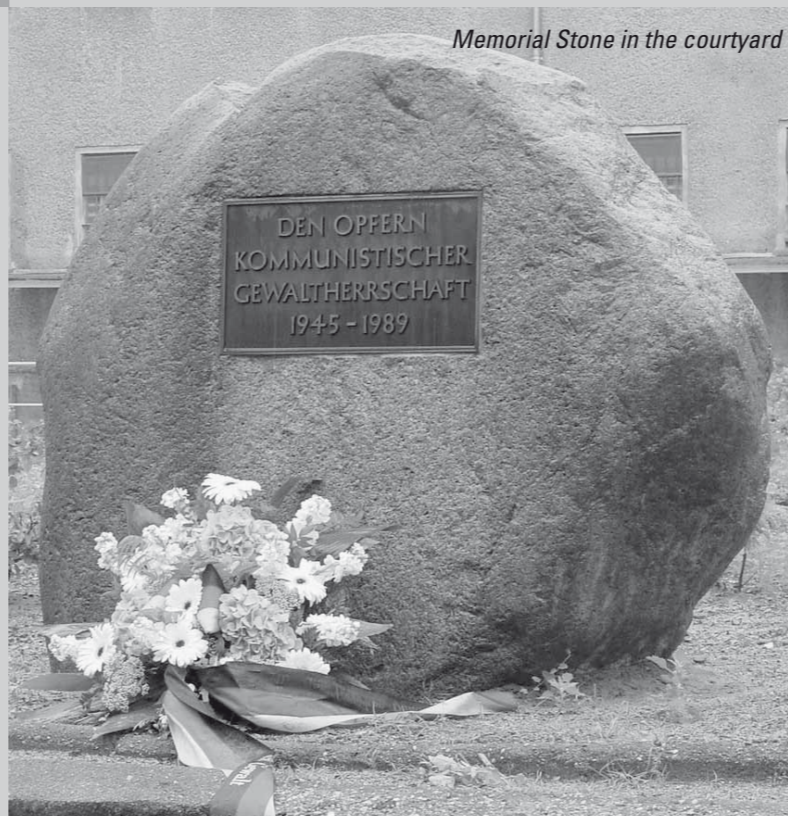
The STASI-prison



At the end of the fifties prisoners from the adjoining MfS labour camp had to construct a new building with more than 200 prison cells and interrogation rooms. The vast prison complex was part of an extensive secret area – no ordinary citizen of the GDR was allowed to enter. Most of the prisoners had tried to flee or emigrate from the GDR or had been persecuted due to their political views, such as the dissident Rudolf Bahro and the author Jürgen Fuchs.

Physical violence became psychological cruelty – methods and techniques to break the prisoner's resistance and will. It was prison policy not to inform newcomers of their exact whereabouts. They were systematically subjected to the feeling of being helpless at the mercy of an almighty authority. Being completely cut off from the outside world and their fellow prisoners, they were subjected to months of questioning by expert interrogators aimed at coercing them into making incriminating statements. The peaceful revolution in the autumn of 1989 overthrew the SED dictatorship and resulted in the dissolution of the State Security Service and the ultimate closure of its prisons.

Memorial Stone in the courtyard



Cell in the new building

Gedenkstätte
Berlin-Hohenschönhausen

Former
Soviet special camp
and remand prison of the
Ministry of State Security

The centre of communist repression

The location of the Berlin-Hohenschönhausen memorial embodies like no other the 44-year history of political persecution in the Soviet Occupation Zone and the German Democratic Republic. A Soviet internment camp was set up here at the end of World War II and subsequently transformed into the main Soviet remand prison for Germany. In the early fifties, the secret police of the SED (the ruling party in the GDR) took over the prison. Until 1990 the Ministry of State Security (MfS) used it as its main remand prison.

The MfS or “Stasi”, being the “shield and sword of the party”, was the most important instrument in enforcing the communist dictatorship in East Germany. At the end 91,000 full-time Stasi employees and 189,000 unofficial collaborators ensured the blanket surveillance of the population. Thousands of people offering resistance or trying to flee the country were banished to one of the 17 MfS remand prisons, which were controlled by the headquarter in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen.

Soviet camp enclosure
(photo from 1956)



The camp

ambiguity

The basis of internment was justified by Soviet directive No. 00315 issued on 18 April 1945, according to which spies, subversive elements, terrorists, Nazi party activists, police and secret service personnel, administrative officials and other “hostile elements” in Germany faced mandatory arrest. Many of those detainees were only slightly – if at all – involved in the Nazi system. The internees included not only a large number of non-Germans (mainly Poles and Russians) but also women and adolescents. Unsubstantiated denunciations often resulted in arrest and detention, as was the case with the famous actor, Heinrich George. In 1946 he was brought to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, where he died shortly after.

Many internees were incarcerated for years on end without recourse to legal proceedings. An increasing number of political enemies of the Soviet occupation forces disappeared in the camp – notable casualties included Karl Heinrich, the social democratic commander of Berlin’s police force, who died there at the end of 1945. Not at least because of the anxious inquiries of the citizens of Berlin, the camp was dissolved in October 1946. The prisoners were moved to other places.

Entrance filter



Originally, the area of the later remand prison in the northeast of Berlin housed a large canteen for the National Socialist People’s Welfare Organisation (NSV). In May 1945, the red-brick building dating from 1939 was confiscated by the Soviet Occupation Forces and transformed into “Special Camp No. 3” which served as an assembly and transit camp. From here, about 20,000 prisoners were transferred by foot or truck to other Soviet camps, including also the former Sachsenhausen concentration camp of the Nazis.

The living conditions in the camp were catastrophic – sometimes holding over 4,200 inmates penned in like animals. Hygienic conditions were equally abysmal, food rations totally insufficient. Due to the lack of blankets, prisoners were constantly exposed to the elements in the unheated factory building. Conditions were further aggravated by the fact that internees were kept in the dark with regards to their ultimate fate. Many of them fell ill or died. According to Soviet statistics, 886 people died here between July 1945 and October 1946. However, it is estimated that more than 3,000 detainees actually perished in the camp. Their remains were buried in bomb craters and rubbish dumps in the camp’s vicinity.

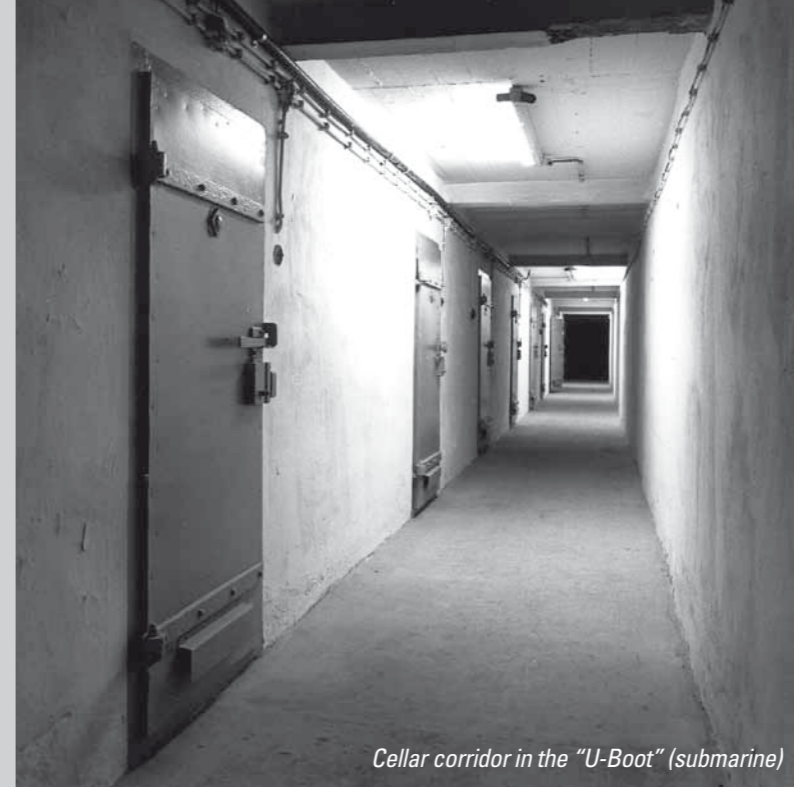


Bilingual “keep-out” sign

The “U-Boot” (submarine)

Shortly afterwards the main Soviet remand prison in East Germany was set up in the vast factory building. Prisoners had to construct a maze of subterranean, bunker-like cells in the basement of the former canteen – known as “U-Boot” or submarine. The damp and cold cells were equipped with a wooden bed and a bucket serving as a lavatory. A light bulb was burning 24 hours a day. Interrogations were usually held at night in an atmosphere of physical and psychological violence. Former prisoners described being forced to sign confessions due to the combined effects of sleep deprivation, standing still for hours on end, arrest lasting for days or being detained in water cells. The prison population included both alleged Nazis and suspected political opponents such as supporters of democratic parties (SPD, LDPD and CDU) along with communists and Soviet officers who had been regarded as not toeing the official party line. Most of them were sentenced to many years of forced labour by Soviet Military Tribunals. Almost each former prisoner, who at the end of the SED dictatorship in 1990 filed an application for rehabilitation, has been subsequently declared innocent by the Russian authorities.

Cellar corridor in the “U-Boot” (submarine)



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Bank account for donations
BIC: BELADEBEXX
IBAN: DE 11 100 500 00 0730014193

Please notice, that up to now a visit of the memorial is only possible with a guided tour.

Guided tours for groups
Guided tours for visiting groups are available by prior arrangement between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. Special tours of the former no-go area as well as foreign language tours can also be arranged.

Guided tours for individual visitors
Monday to Friday at 11 a.m., 1 p.m and 3 p.m. (in German)
Saturday and Sunday every hour between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. (in German)
Wednesday and Saturday 2,30 p.m., English-guided tour

Admission
5 Euro/2,50 Euro/Students 1 Euro

Subject to alterations.

How to get there
S-Bahn (suburban train): to S-Bahn station Landsberger Allee, then tram 5 to Freienwalder Strasse, or tram 6 to Genslerstrasse
From Alexanderplatz: tram 5 to Freienwalder Strasse or tram 6 to Genslerstrasse
From train station Lichtenberg: Bus 256, station Liebenwalder Straße/Genslerstrasse.



Gestaltung: Jan Lenger, Zenon