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 at least three times a day. Regular English-speaking tour for individual visitors daily at 2.30 p.m. From March to Oktober daily at 11.30 a.m. and 2.30 p.m.

- Permanent exhibition Open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., entrance is free. Audio-guide and catalogue available.

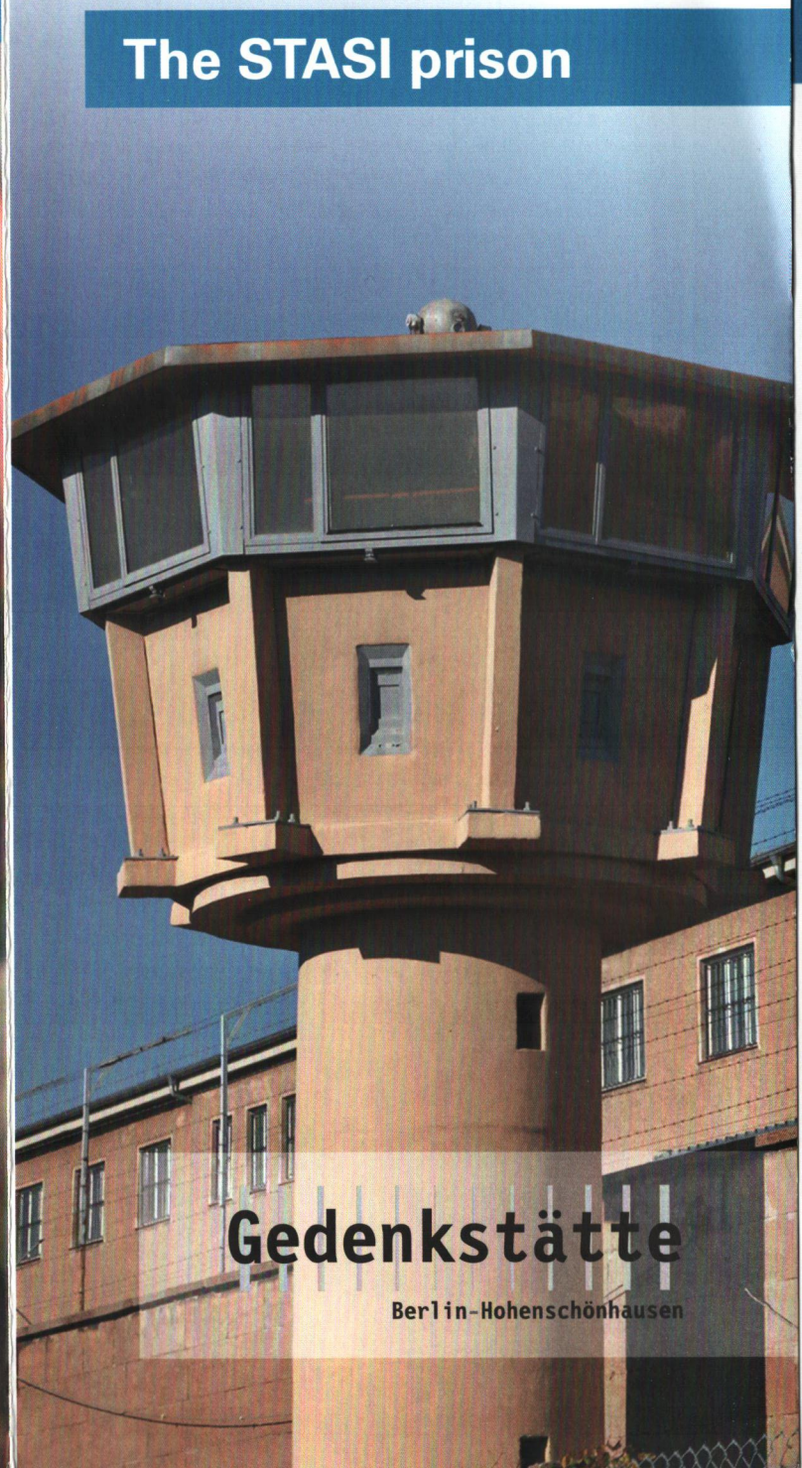
- Seminars Upon request, visitor groups can avail of seminars and project days assisted by former prisoners (by appointment only).

- 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



Gedenkstätte

Berlin-Hohenschönhausen

Gedenkstätte Berlin-Hohenschönhausen

Genslerstraße 66, 13055 Berlin
Telefon 030 – 98 60 82 30
Telefax 030 – 98 60 82 464
info@stiftung-hsh.de, www.stiftung-hsh.de

Bank account for donations (Förderverein)
BIC: BELADEBEXXX, IBAN: DE95 1005 0000 0190 2057 41

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

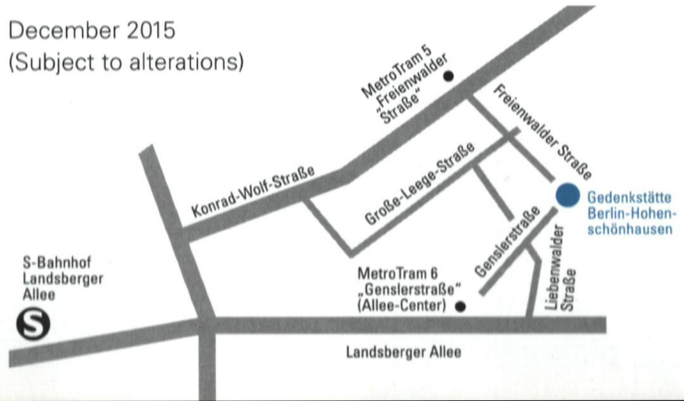
- Guided tours for individual visitors
  Monday to Friday 11 a.m., 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. (in German)
  (March to October also 12 a.m. and 2 p.m.)
  Saturday, Sunday every hour 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. (in German)
  In English: Daily 2.30 p.m., week-end add. 11.30 a.m.
  (March to October daily 11.30 a.m. and 2.30 p.m.)

- Admission
  6,00 Euro, reduced fee 3,00 Euro, school students 1 Euro

- Guided tours for groups (by prior arrangement)
  Daily 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

- How to get there
  From S-/U-Bhf. Alexanderplatz or S-Bhf. Landsberger Allee:
  Tram M 5, Freienwalder Straße or
  Tram M 6, Genslerstraße
  From Bhf. Lichtenberg:
  Bus 256, Liebenwalder Straße

December 2015
(Subject to alterations)

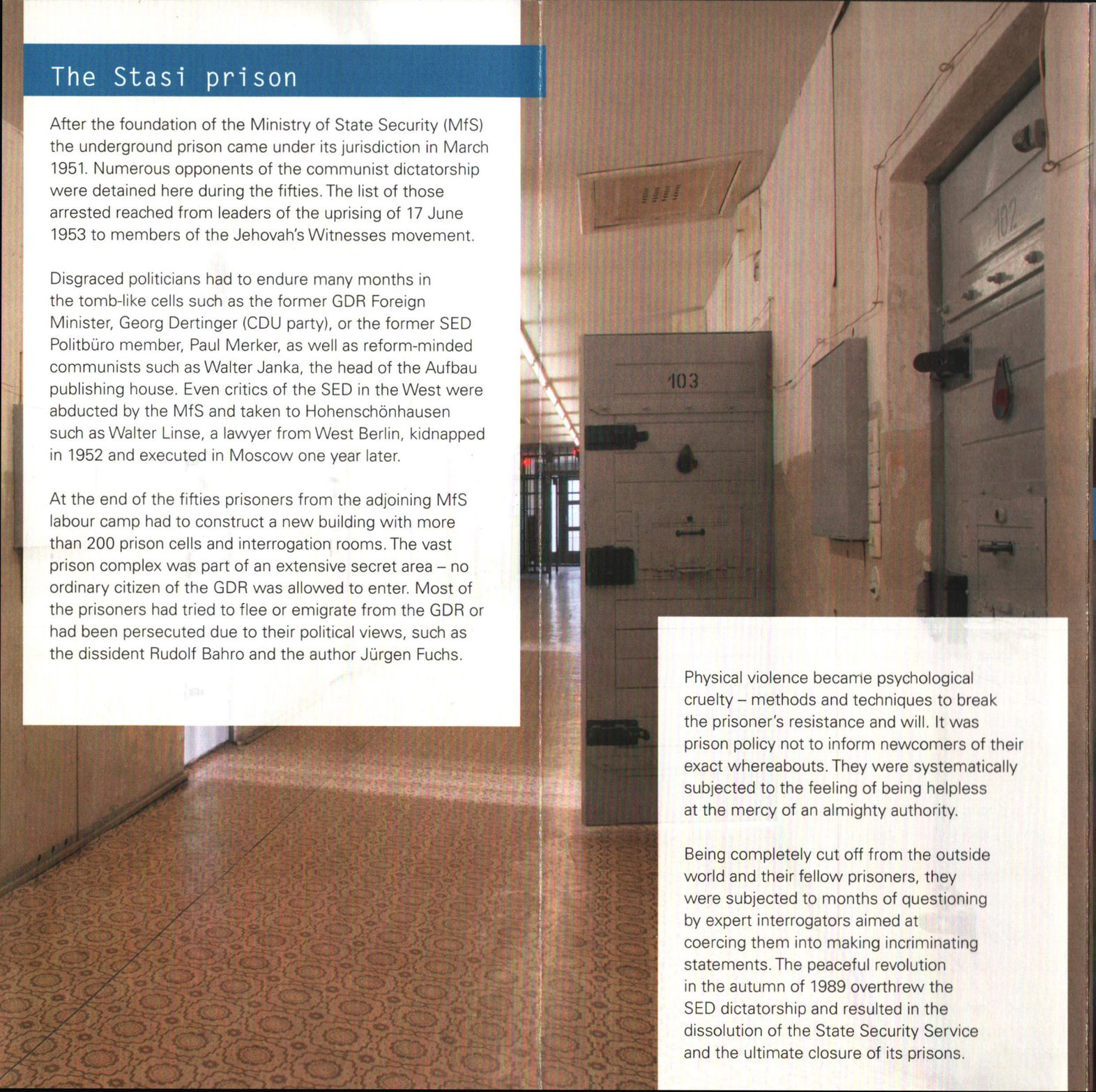


The Stasi prison

After the foundation 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.

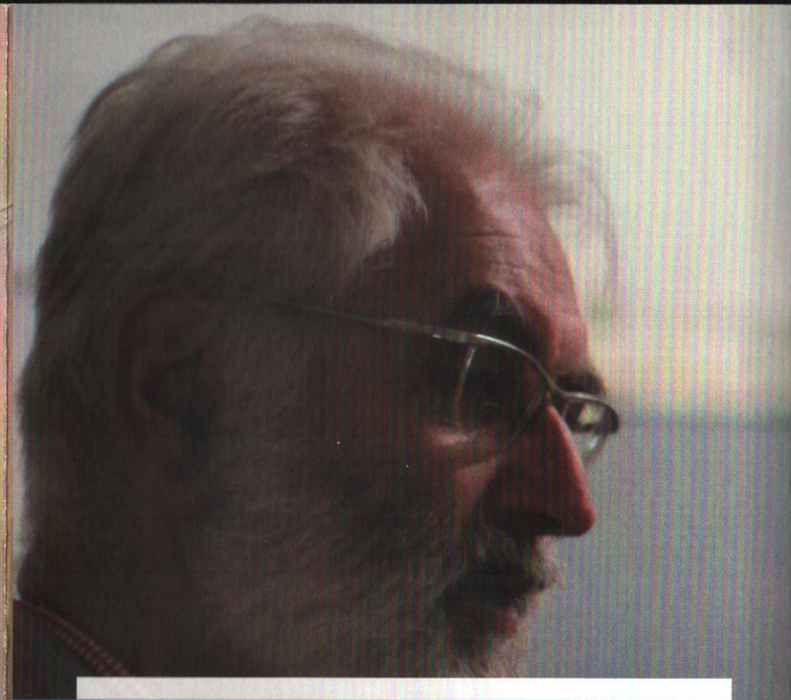
Disgraced politicians had to endure many months in the tomb-like cells such as the former GDR Foreign Minister, Georg Dertinger (CDU party), or the former SED Politbüro member, Paul Merker, as well as reform-minded communists such as Walter Janka, the head of the Aufbau publishing house. Even critics 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.

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.

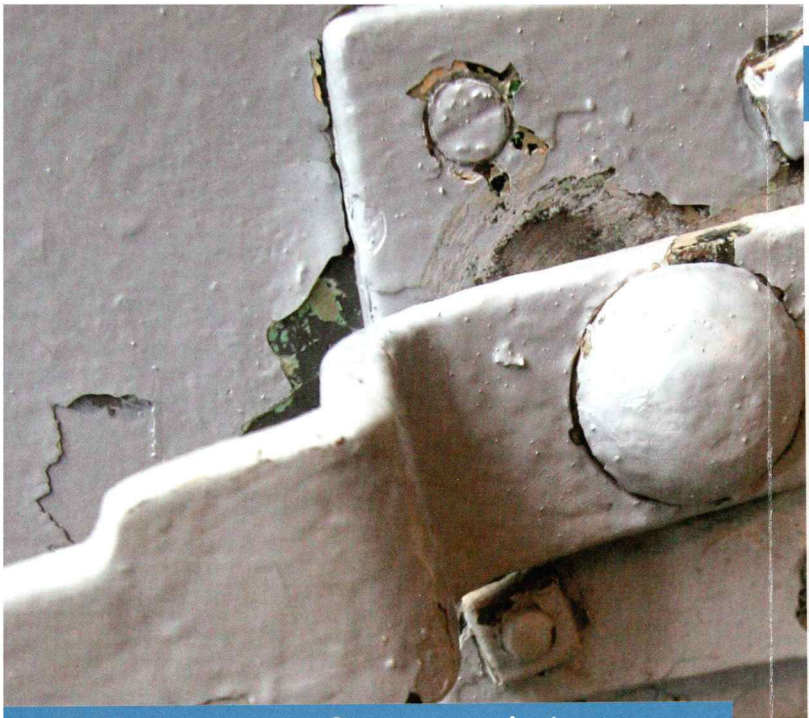


The Memorial

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 2015, more than 440.000 people, including about 200.000 young people, have visited the former Stasi prison. Most of the memorial's guided tours in German are conducted by former inmates.



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 Stasi remand prisons, which were controlled by the headquarter in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen.

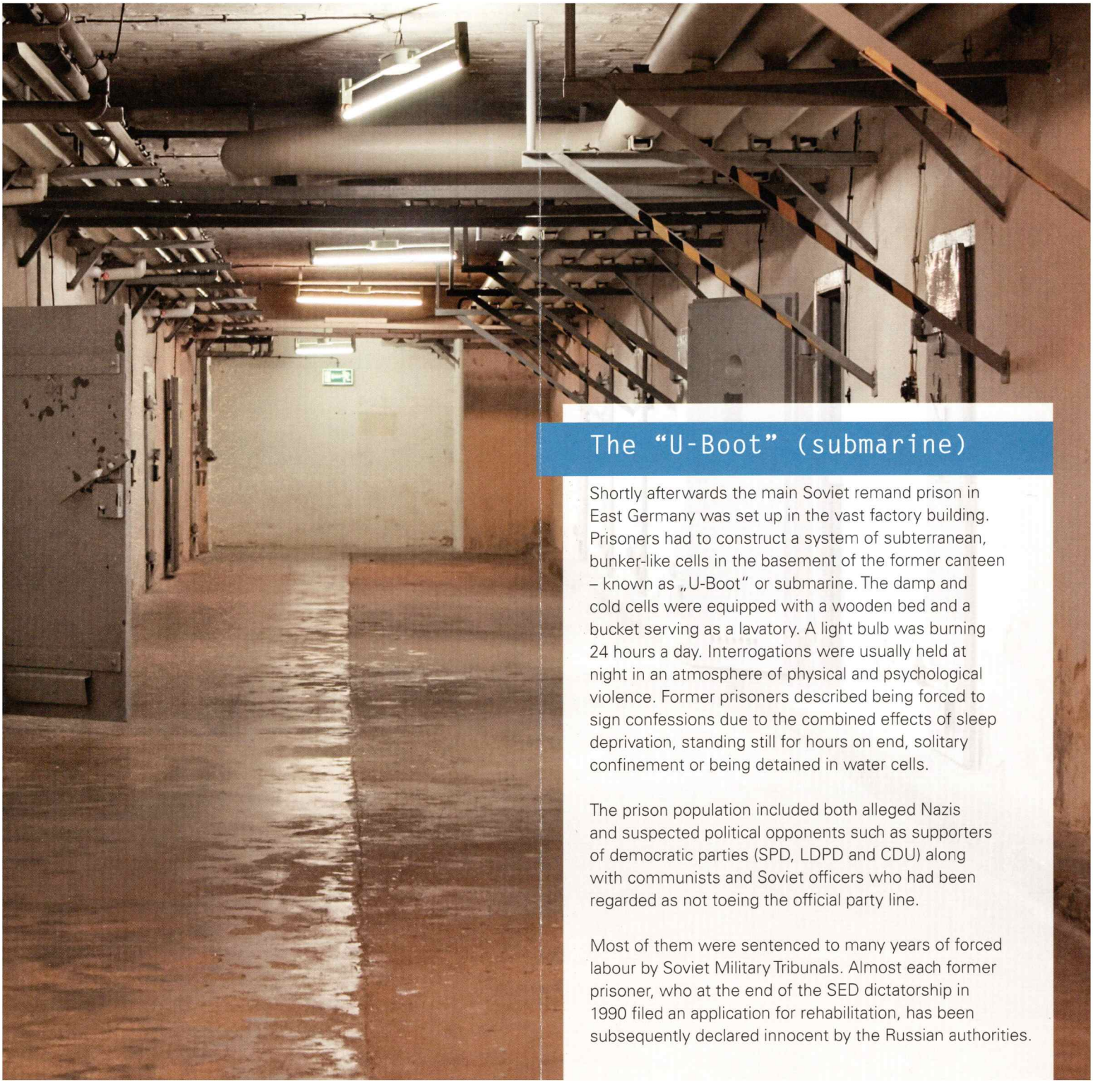
The camp

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 for about 20,000 prisoners.

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. Nearly 1,000 people died. Their remains were buried in bomb craters in the camp's vicinity.

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. One of the most famous prisoner was the actor Heinrich George. In 1946, he was transfered to the Sachsenhausen camp, where he died shortly afterwards.

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 – among them Karl Heinrich, the social democratic commander of Berlin's police force. He died at the end of 1945. Eventually, the camp was dissolved in October 1946, the prisoners were transported to other places.



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 system 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, solitary confinement 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.