

## **Dear Visitors,**

Welcome to the Lindenstrasse Memorial Site. As you pass through the 14 stations of the tour you will move chronologically through the history of the Lindenstrasse prison and court complex. This history is closely linked with the political and racial persecution perpetrated in Germany between 1933 and 1989.

The front house of the memorial site was constructed as a residence between 1734 and 1737 on the instructions of the Soldier King, Frederick William I. After being put to a variety of uses, it was adopted for City Council meetings from 1809 - 1817. In 1820 the Potsdam City Court took up residence, and in 1910 the new prison building which you can see from the courtyard was completed. In 1933 the National Socialists came to power in the German Reich and then exploited the Potsdam Court for their own purposes. From 1934 onwards the Hereditary Health Court sat in the hall.

As a result of the bombing of Berlin, the People's Court moved individual "senates" to Potsdam from 1943 onwards and used Lindenstrasse as a remand prison.

After the end of the Second World War, the Soviet secret service used the building complex as the central remand prison for the State of Brandenburg. In 1952 the prison was handed over to the Ministry for State Security (MfS) of the GDR. Up to the end of 1989 the MfS detained political prisoners in the Lindenstrasse prison. Since 1990 civil rights activists have used this former prison as a "House of Democracy".

## **2. Lindenstrasse under the National Socialists – The Hereditary Health Court**

When the National Socialists came to power in 1933, it marked the beginning of use of the judicial system for their own purposes. Legislation played a major part in the political and racial persecution perpetrated during the Third Reich. From 1934, the Potsdam Hereditary Health Court sat in the rooms of the local court in Lindenstrasse. It was one of more than 200 Hereditary Health Courts in the German Reich which had been set up on the basis of the new "Law for the Prevention of Progeny with Hereditary Diseases" (GzVeN). The law was an expression of the ideas of eugenicists and racial hygienists from the 19th and 20th centuries. The intention was to "genetically upgrade" a society by means of controlled reproduction. The Hereditary Health Courts decided on the forced sterilisation of those supposedly suffering from a "hereditary disease". Eight "hereditary diseases" were specified, including for example "hereditary blindness and deafness" and "epilepsy". Most of the compulsory sterilisation orders were issued on the basis of the arbitrary diagnosis "inherited mental deficiency". By 1944, the judges in Potsdam had ordered at least 3,300 compulsory sterilisations. For many of those stigmatised as having a "hereditary disease", compulsory sterilisation was not the end of the persecution: from 1939 the National Socialists began with the systematic murder of mentally and physically disabled people, as well as those with a mental illness.

### **3. NS perpetrators and the proceedings before the Hereditary Health Court**

The hearings before the Hereditary Health Court were conducted *in camera*. The proceedings were conducted by a lawyer and two doctors. Only rarely were the persons concerned given the opportunity to speak. So as not to give the impression that criminal proceedings were being conducted, the Hereditary Health Court did not pass any judgements, but issued decisions on compulsory sterilisation. This decision meant social stigmatisation for the persons concerned. They were often prohibited from pursuing their career and their choice of possible marriage partners was restricted. In addition there were the risks associated with a surgical procedure, plus traumatisation and chronic disorders. After 1945, compulsory sterilisation was not regarded as an injustice on the part of the National Socialists. For some time the victims were therefore not granted any compensation and were not rehabilitated. Only in 1974 did the Bundestag quash the Hereditary Health Law and in 1998 all the decisions made by the Hereditary Health Courts were rescinded. In 2007 the Law was finally condemned by the Bundestag as Nazi injustice.

Doctor Hans Heinze was director at the state hospital of Potsdam and Brandenburg. He was a convinced race hygienist: about 2/3 of all sterilisation applications submitted to the Potsdam Hereditary Health Court were initiated by him. From 1939 Heinze was also involved to a major degree in the "euthanasia" murders in the role of assessor. Heinze was never prosecuted by the German courts and continued to practise medicine after the war.

#### **4. The victims of the Potsdam Hereditary Health Court**

Günther B. and Martha L. are two of the 3,300 people whom the Potsdam Hereditary Health Court condemned to compulsory sterilisation.

Günther (born 1918) suffered from his first seizure at the age of 12. He had to leave school in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade and the Berlin-Kreuzberg Welfare Office registered him as an "epileptic" with "poor employment prospects". In 1933 his mother handed him over to the state hospital of Potsdam and hoped he would receive good care and treatment there. But the hospital director applied to the Potsdam Hereditary Health Court for a sterilisation order. In 1934 the Court decided in favour of sterilisation despite an objection by Günther's mother. He was sterilised in November 1935. It is not known what happened to him subsequently.

Martha (born 1912) grew up as a half-orphan. After her mother died, the welfare office in Berlin-Friedrichshain took over as her guardian. According to the public health officer, she was retarded in terms of her "mental development". Another doctor certified that the 19-year-old Martha "showed willing but was a low achiever and had a tendency towards depression". In 1933 he ordered that Martha be admitted to the state hospital of Potsdam. The hospital director diagnosed "medium to slight mental deficiency" and submitted an application for sterilisation to the Potsdam Hereditary Health Court. In December 1934 the Court decided in favour of compulsory sterilisation. It is not known what happened to Martha L. subsequently.

## 5. The Local and Regional Court under National Socialism

After the National Socialists came to power they began to implement the policy of discriminating against and persecuting Jews and depriving them of all rights in the Third Reich. As in many places, on 9 November 1938 National Socialists destroyed the Jewish-owned businesses and the synagogues in Potsdam.

The judges at the Local Court (Amtsgericht) conducted trials with increasing frequency along the lines of the racist National Socialist ideology. For instance, in 1942 Gerhard Schiller was arrested and detained in the Lindenstrasse prison because he allegedly appeared in public not wearing the "Judenstern" (Star of David). Similarly the Potsdam Local Court increasingly indicted foreign forced labourers, primarily from Eastern Europe. These were subject to a tightened special law and were severely punished for alleged wrongdoing or minor infractions. The accusations were mostly "refusal to work" or "theft of food". Among German nationals one of many charges was "prohibited contact with prisoners of war". The judges saw in such conduct a "danger to the Volksgemeinschaft (national community)".

In 1943 the 15-year-old Erika Klinikowski was arrested for alleged "Rassenschande" (racial defilement) and she was detained in the Lindenstrasse prison. During her labour service on a farm she had made friends with the Polish forced labourer Kazimierz Zaborowski and she was denounced. They were both subsequently transferred to a concentration camp and never saw one another again.



### **Newspaper display 1940s**

This display warned Germans to keep their distance from Polish forced labourers. From 1940 onwards, the Nazi state criminalised contact between Germans and forced labourers. Specifically, love relationships between German women and East Europeans were prosecuted and quite frequently the death penalty was imposed. In the spirit of Nazi ideology, the aim was to protect the "Volksgemeinschaft" (national community) from "foreign influences".

## 6. Remand prison of the People's Court

The People's Court was an important instrument of terror used by the Nazi state. As a special court authorised to prosecute in cases of high national treason, it consistently condemned all forms of resistance to the Nazi dictatorship. Numerous resistance groups and resistance fighters were charged and condemned to death in show trials: about every third case before the People's Court ended with the death penalty, and under the infamous chief judge Roland Freisler (in office 1942-45), even every second one.

Following the bombing of Berlin, the People's Court relocated individual senates to Potsdam from 1943 and used Lindenstrasse 54 as a remand prison.

Members of various resistance groups were detained – including communists like the groups around Robert Uhrig and Josef Römer. Among other things their members had distributed anti-Nazi leaflets and given forced labourers material support. In February 1942, more than 200 members of the group were arrested and 105 individuals were charged. About 40 were subsequently condemned to death, including Werner Seelenbinder (born 1904). This professional wrestler had joined the resistance group and had secretly distributed leaflets at international competitions. After 2½ years in detention, in the Lindenstrasse prison among other places, Werner Seelenbinder was condemned to death in September 1944 and executed at the end of October 1944 in Brandenburg-Görden.



## **7. Remand prison of the Soviet secret service**

In the early part of 1945 the French, British, US and Soviet forces brought the Second World War to an end. The Nazi system had collapsed. While Great Britain, France and the USA occupied the western parts of Germany, the Soviet Union established its military administration between the rivers Elbe and Oder.

Following the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, the Soviet secret services NKVD/MVD and SMERSH used the court and prison site as the Central Remand Prison for the state of Brandenburg. Initially the secret services targeted Nazi perpetrators and young people, and shortly afterwards the authorities also prosecuted cases of resistance against the new state power. In Potsdam there arose a network of detention locations: in addition to houses in the Leistikowstrasse and the Bauhofstrasse, the basements of requisitioned houses and villas were also used as prisons, known popularly as "GPU cellars". The prosecuting bodies – Soviet secret services, Soviet military secret services, German secret services and police forces – worked hand in glove. The reasons given for detention were "hostile activity against the Soviet system", "espionage", "sabotage", "banditry", "membership of underground organisations", "deviationism" and "terrorism". A large number of those involved were unjustifiably charged.

## **8. Conviction and penalties in the Soviet period**

One of a number of Soviet military tribunals (SMT) sat in the hall of the memorial site from 1945 to 1947 and from 1950 to 1952. The judgements were mostly passed on the basis of § 58 of the criminal code of the USSR and often involved 10, 20 or 25 years in a penal colony.

The confessions were forced and torture was common. The prosecuting authorities either sent those convicted to so-called special camps on German territory, such as Sachsenhausen, or to penal colonies (GULAGs) in the Soviet Union, such as Vorkuta.

At the same time numerous death sentences were imposed. Between 1950 and 1952 alone more than one hundred death sentences were carried out. The names and fates of the men and women convicted during this period were not known for some time. The secret service moved the condemned persons to Moscow. There they were shot in the Soviet secret service prison of Butyrka. While they were cremated and the ashes hastily buried in mass graves in the Donskoy cemetery, their relatives were not informed of the conviction or the execution. Many waited in vain for those who had disappeared to return. The majority of those condemned have now been rehabilitated by the military state administration in Moscow.

## **9. The prison conditions in the Soviet period**

The prison conditions in Lindenstrasse were geared to the prisons in the Stalinist Soviet Union. The single cells with an area of 7 square metres were over-occupied with four, five or more persons. The windows were blocked with wooden slats. The cells were lit night and day and were poorly heated. The detainees had only the clothes they were wearing when they were arrested. There was no possibility of maintaining physical hygiene or of receiving medical care. The food supply was inadequate. In the morning there was one slice of bread and weak tea and in the afternoon a thin cabbage soup. The cells rarely had a bed and there was mostly only a bucket to serve as a toilet. Many detainees became ill due to the prison conditions. A number of biographies can be seen in the cells. Among those detained there were, alongside Nazi perpetrators such as Werner Wächter (1902-1946), head of the staff of the NSDAP Reich propaganda management, also members of the Christian Democratic Party (CDU) such as the 2nd Mayor of Potsdam Erwin Köhler (1901-1950) and his wife Charlotte (1907-1950), who were executed in Moscow. Also detained in the Lindenstrasse prison were protesting students and young members of the "Combat Group Against Inhumanity" (KGU) from Werder Havel, a suburb of Potsdam.

### **Report by a detainee**

Herbert Paulmann (born 1914) was arrested in 1946 accused of espionage: "The treatment between the interrogations was the worst thing! The thugs came mostly in the early evening and then I was beaten with their short Russian whips. In the middle of December they handcuffed my hands behind my back; I had to spend four weeks like that. It was terrible."

## **10. Transfer of the prison to the Ministry for State Security of the GDR**

On 7 October 1949 the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was established in the Soviet-occupied zone. The GDR was a state on the Soviet model. As in the Soviet Union, all power rested in the hands of a single party: the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED). The SED's most important instrument of power was a large secret service apparatus: the Ministry for State Security (Stasi). The Stasi was built up only a few months after the GDR had been founded. To protect the SED's position of power, the Stasi acted on behalf of the party in prosecuting dissidents, oppositionists and those fleeing the republic. The Stasi head office was in Berlin-Lichtenberg, but district administrations were installed all over the GDR. In Potsdam alone the Stasi employed more than 13,500 people in 1989 (3,926 full-time and 9,633 unofficially).

On 18 August 1952, the Soviet secret service handed over the prison complex in Lindenstrasse to the Stasi, who then used it immediately as a remand prison for the district of Potsdam. In 1989, 48 employees worked here, among other things as guards or interrogators. In addition, about ten male and female prisoners worked in the prison.

### **Recreation room of prisoner work detail**

The prisoner work detail (SGAK) consisted of on average ten men who had been convicted of crimes and were now serving their jail sentence. In addition to the men, who worked mainly as craftsmen and stokers, there were also ten female prisoners. They were mostly assigned to the kitchen, laundry and sewing room. Their prison conditions differed starkly from those of the political prisoners.

## **11. The work of the Stasi – surveillance and detention**

Over time, the Stasi perfected the persecution of supposed enemies of the state. First and foremost, this meant surveillance: alongside the full-time employees there were also the unofficial ones who spied on local citizens. If there was sufficient "evidence" available, an arrest was made without prior warning – mostly with no indication of the reason. The persons affected were merely informed that they were required to come along "to clarify a certain matter". They were deliberately left in the dark in order to increase the feeling of uncertainty and of being at the mercy of forces beyond their control. A prison van took them to one of the 17 Stasi remand prisons of the GDR, such as Lindenstrasse. On their arrival, the first station was the double-door system in the reception area. When the van had driven in, the gate closed and the prisoners were taken individually out of the van. Then they were subjected to a body search. This procedure left an impression on many former detainees of being especially degrading and humiliating. A warder examined all bodily orifices and the detainees had all personal items and clothing removed. From the 1970s, men and women received blue tracksuits and slippers as prison clothing. The admission procedure also included identification formalities (photo, fingerprints).

### **Prison van in the courtyard of the Memorial Site**

From 1970 the Stasi used the "Barkas B 1000" to transport political prisoners. This van had five windowless cells which were smaller than half a square metre. In the confined and dark cells the prisoner often sat for hours at a time as they were being transported to a destination mostly unknown to them. In this way the Stasi generated a controlled atmosphere of insecurity and intimidation.



## **12. The detainees - oppositionists**

Rüdiger Schirner (born 1943) had already been critical of the SED regime as a young man. He harboured sympathies for the West German Social Democrats (SPD). In the summer of 1960, employees of the SPD eastern office located in East Berlin invited him and his best friend Jürgen Schomann to go on an educational trip to West Germany. One year later Rüdiger Schirner undertook another trip to the Federal Republic, this time financed by another party. He was shocked when he heard in the West of the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961. Nevertheless he decided to travel back to East Berlin. Shortly after his return the Stasi arrested both him and Jürgen Schomann. They were locked in the Lindenstrasse prison in Potsdam in single cells. The interrogators accused them of "espionage" and "agent activities". The prison conditions and the threats during the interrogations took a lot out of the young men.

The interrogators had been psychologically trained and systematically put the detainees under pressure. The aim of the interrogations was to force a confession so that they could be charged. Many former detainees suffer from the consequences of this psychological pressure for the whole of their lives, as in the case of Rüdiger Schirner. Finally the District Court of Potsdam sentenced him to a term of three years in prison. In the autumn of 1962 he was granted early release.

### **Cell fittings in the 1960s and 1980s**

Cells 67 and 68 have been reconstructed and are intended today to give an authentic impression of the fittings in the 1960s and 1980s. Normally the detainees were initially in solitary confinement. This was supposed to wear them down to prepare them for the interrogations. For most of the detainees it was therefore a relief if they had someone in the neighbouring cell with whom they could now communicate and enjoy some diversion.

### **13. The detainees – flight offences**

Between 1952 and 1988 more than 6,200 people were incarcerated in Lindenstrasse 54. Nearly 2,000 prisoners were there because they had attempted to flee the republic and failed or because they had provided assistance to people fleeing. One of them is Eike Radewahn. In the summer of 1983 this 18-year-old woman attempted to flee because, as a Christian, she was penalised in the GDR and was not allowed to travel freely. With her partner and a friend, she planned to swim across the Danube to Romania and then to travel to the Federal Republic of Germany via Yugoslavia. When they were already in the water Romanian border guards opened fire. The three were arrested and taken to Bucharest, from where they were flown to the GDR. Eike Radewahn had to spend five months remanded in the Lindenstrasse prison before she received a three-year sentence. At the end of 1985 the Federal Republic paid for her release and she was allowed to emigrate.

Hartmut Richter was also detained in the Lindenstrasse prison. After his own escape in 1966 he was active for years helping others to flee. In all, he helped 33 people flee the GDR before he was arrested in 1975. After almost one year on remand Hartmut Richter was sentenced to the maximum penalty of 15 years in prison for "human trafficking hostile to the state". After five years the Federal Republic bought him his freedom.

## **14. The Peaceful Revolution and the fall of the Wall**

In the 1980s more and more citizens of the GDR were openly criticizing the deplorable state of affairs in their country and initiatives were started in the whole of the GDR community. The criticism focused not only on the military rearmament policy, but also on environmental pollution and the denial of basic democratic rights. Many demanded freedom of travel, and more and more people were applying for permanent emigration to the Federal Republic. Various protest groups emerged in Potsdam in the 1980s, among them the Environmental Protection and Urban Design Working Group (ARGUS) and the Babelsberg Peace Circle. The reforms that had been initiated in the Soviet Union by Mikhail Gorbachev gave the people in the GDR hope that there would be reforms in their own country. But the SED leadership around Erich Honecker refused to make any political changes, and the population reacted with growing dissatisfaction. In the autumn of 1989, hundreds of thousands demonstrated for democratisation of the GDR. These mass demonstrations eventually made an impact: on 17 October Honecker was deposed and the first reforms were introduced. After a travel regulation was announced in a way that left it open to misunderstanding, the inner German border and the Berlin Wall were opened in the night of 9 to 10 November 1989. People were now able to travel freely from East Germany to West Germany.

## **Demonstration in Potsdam**

On 7.10.1989 SED functionaries were celebrating the 40th anniversary of the founding of the GDR. There were protests in many places. In Potsdam almost 2,000 people demonstrated on the Brandenburger Strasse. The police ("Volkspolizisten") suddenly formed a chain and called on the demonstrators to leave. A small group refused. More than 100 people were arrested and detained all night.

## **15. From the House of Terror to the House of Democracy**

After the border opened up the mass departures and protests continued. The civil rights movement was also split: whereas some held to the notion of two German states and wanted to achieve a democratic transformation of the GDR, others demanded unification of the GDR with the Federal Republic. In the confusion caused by the upheavals the Ministry for State Security, now called the Office for National Security, began to destroy its files. When civil rights activists heard this they formed Citizens' Committees and in December 1989 and January 1990 they occupied the Stasi centres all over the GDR. They managed to rescue the major portion of the files. On 5.12.1989 the district administration of the Stasi in Potsdam was occupied and the same evening civil rights activists were in control of the prison in the Lindenstrasse. They made sure that there were no longer any political prisoners present. The last detainees had already been released on 27.10.1989 under an amnesty. The building complex was returned to the City of Potsdam and subsequently placed at the disposal of various groups and parties, including the SDP (Social Democratic Party of the GDR) and the New Forum. As from January 1990 they installed offices at the site and convened citizens' surgeries. The House of Terror had been transformed into the "House of Democracy".