



Federal Ministry
of Finance

The Detlev Rohwedder Building

German history reflected



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Introduction

The Detlev Rohwedder Building, home to Germany's Federal Ministry of Finance since 1999, bears witness to the upheavals of recent German history like almost no other structure.

Constructed as the Reich Aviation Ministry, the vast site was the nerve centre of power under Nazi rule. It was from here that Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring, head of the Luftwaffe, drove the regime's war plans forward. The road to death, destruction and suffering for millions of people was marked out here, one of the places instrumental in preparing the systematic mass murder of Europe's Jews. Yet resistance, too, was alive within these terror-steeped walls, in the form of the Rote Kapelle group.

After the war, the colossal construction developed into the political powerhouse of socialist Germany. The German Democratic Republic (GDR) was founded and its first President elected here in October 1949. From then on, the building served as the "House of Ministries" of the GDR. The utopian ideals of the young state are symbolised in a monumental mural, which can still be seen in the colonnade at the Leipziger Strasse entrance. Only a few months after the mural was unveiled, reality painted a very different picture of its own. On 16 June 1953, protesters gathered in front of

the House of Ministries, foreshadowing the country-wide uprising on 17 June. Eight years later, the Berlin Wall began to cast its shadow just a few steps away.

After reunification, the Treuhandanstalt, the body charged with the GDR's financial liquidation, moved into the building. Its president, Detlev Karsten Rohwedder, emphasised the importance of people over the letter of the law, thus setting the tone for a careful approach to privatising the GDR's approximately 8,500 state-owned enterprises. Rohwedder was only able to perform his duties for a few months. He was shot dead on 1 April 1991. The police found a note at the scene written by the RAF terrorist group claiming responsibility for the murder. The building was renamed in his memory in 1992.

Is it possible, and is it right in democratic times, to continue to use such a site, a place tainted in so many ways? This question was the subject of intensive discussions in the 1990s. The answer is yes. After two dictatorships, freedom and democracy have moved in. This does not mean that the past has been erased, but rather that the story continues.





1935–1945

The Reich Aviation Ministry



Inception

The imposing state cars arrive at the ceremonial entrance. The Nazi elite and the heads of the Luftwaffe, Germany's newly founded air force, take their positions. Leading the ranks is the man in charge of the new Aviation Ministry. Hermann Göring, second only to Hitler in the Nazi regime and loyal servant of his Führer, takes his place as Reich Minister for Aviation. Beside him stands Professor Ernst Sagebiel (1892–1970), the architect responsible for the complex. Just three years previously, Sagebiel was a construction and business manager for the famed Jewish architect Erich Mendelsohn. It is 12 October 1935. On the very day on which Germany officially bans radio stations from playing swing and jazz, the country's brown-shirted ruling class gathers to celebrate the topping-out of this Third Reich prestige project.

Göring's pride and joy is a monumental endeavour, one virtually unparalleled in its expression of Nazi megalomania – the construction of a new Reich Aviation Ministry. The chosen location is at the heart of Berlin, where Wilhelmstrasse meets Leipziger Strasse, within sight of two other buildings housing the infamous apparatus of the dictatorial state, the Gestapo secret police headquarters on Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse and the Propaganda Ministry on Wilhelmplatz, headed by Göring's rival Joseph Goebbels. At the end of 1934, Göring, who had never concealed his scorn for democracy, had given

free reign to his boastful disposition and announced, looking at the Reichstag, that he would build an Aviation Ministry five times larger, with a roof on which aeroplanes could take off and land.

Although that part of his plan never comes to fruition, a colossus begins to take shape on a previously unknown scale. The people of Berlin take an ironic view of the prestige project. "Plain and simple – whatever the cost" is their comment on a construction which, in keeping with the senseless pace and grandstanding typical of Nazi ideology and propaganda, breaks all records. The foundation stone is laid in January 1935. A little less than ten months later, the first 1,000 offices are in use. Just eight months after that, Göring's headquarters are complete. Five thousand workers toil day and night to shift 260,000 cubic metres of old rubble and erect new building sections. Once complete, the ministry boasts a floor area of 56,000m², spread over 2,100 rooms. The maze-like corridors have a combined length of almost 6.8 kilometres, with some corridors up to 440 metres long. The underbelly of the gigantic building has space for 250 cars.

Seventeen staircases and seven lifts connect the different levels in the confusing complex, which is designed to achieve one main aim: to intimidate

Floodlights shine over the construction site of the Reich Aviation Ministry at night, 1935.



by means of its menacing proportions. Old Prussian landmarks, such as the War Ministry building and the Prussian Herrenhaus, former site of the Prussian parliament's upper chamber, are incorporated into the new behemoth or swept aside in its path. This is an early indication that, contrary to their public claims, the Nazi leadership has no intention of continuing along traditional lines, but instead seeks to break with the past. Even the mural of marching Wehrmacht soldiers and reliefs of Prussian military leaders are essentially little more than gestures intended to suggest continuity.

The Nazi planners apply extreme pressure to carry through their tremendously ambitious plans. Privately-owned buildings that are needed are acquired within a single day at the end of March 1935. There are no records to show whether Erich Cohn, the Jewish merchant representing the owners, ever receives any part of the agreed price of 1.4 million Reichsmarks. The unusual speed with which ownership is transferred indicates that part of the reason Cohn agrees to the sale is to expedite his own emigration to the USA.

The spectacular dedication ceremony just half a year on carries a clear message to the world. By building up an air force, defying an explicit ban in the Treaty of Versailles, the Nazi rulers demonstrate their determination to rearm and restore Germany's status as a major military power once more. Sagebiel, the

architect, cites the ministry's inaugural deed in his celebratory address, noting that the construction marks an era in which Germany is "regaining the freedom to exercise military might". He continues by expressing his wish that the building should be a place of hard, dedicated work for all those called to assist in re-establishing Germany's power and greatness in developing the country's aviation potential.

"For the honour and defence of Germany", the building's motto, is a saying that Göring, recipient of the Pour le Mérite order, First World War fighter pilot and Hitler's obedient right-hand man, makes his own. He accumulates official titles and revels in pomp and pathos more than almost any of his fellow Nazi party climbers. His later titles of Reichsmarschall and Reichsjägermeister are invented specifically for him. The power-hungry Göring showed his true unscrupulousness and brutality as early as the end of January 1933 after Hitler had been nominated Chancellor and the Nazis began setting up their dictatorship. At the time, Göring was Interior Minister of Prussia and in charge of the Gestapo. He conducted an unprecedented campaign of terror against opponents of the regime, obliging the members of his police to make indiscriminate use of their weapons.



Left: Dedication ceremony in the Reich Aviation Ministry courtyard on 12 October 1935: Ernst Sagebiel, Hermann Göring, site foreman Franz Hecht and State Secretary Erhard Milch. Right: View of the building site on Leipziger Strasse.

Now he aims to create a Luftwaffe that will descend upon the enemy “like a choir of vengeance” if the hour should strike. Two of Göring’s former wartime comrades, Lufthansa board member Erhard Milch and the flying ace Ernst Udet, who became famous in German films such as “The White Hell of Pitz Palu”, are brought on board as willing helpers in the mission to make the German forces invincible in the air.

Göring himself is a rare sight at his ministry, preferring, much like a Renaissance-era prince, to hold court at his private mansion Carinhall in Schorfheide, near Berlin. Like Hitler, Göring, a rumoured morphine addict, shuns the routines of officialdom. Like the Führer, he rules by playing his subordinates off against one another, fostering rivalry and provoking conflict over responsibilities. A typical example of this is the manner in which Göring answers rumours surrounding Milch’s Jewish ancestry. “I decide who is a Jew” Hitler’s champion declares, glossing over his anti-Semitism with a thick layer of pragmatism.

In spite of reservations about his person, Erhard Milch is initially appointed State Secretary at the Aviation Ministry. Thanks to his organisational

talent, he becomes increasingly indispensable to the essentially incompetent Göring. Ernst Udet’s telling fate sheds light on the culture of nepotism within the Nazi dictatorship. Celebrated as a hero for his aerial exploits in the 1920s, Udet is clearly out of his depth when put in charge of the Aviation Ministry’s technical office, where he is responsible for aircraft production and technical development. This situation does not escape Göring’s attention, but he fails to move Udet from the position. Lacking the necessary knowledge and understanding, Udet finds himself in charge of 26 departments with around 4,000 staff. His appointment results in chaos and blunders at almost every level, with dramatic consequences with regard to the quantity and quality of the finished aircraft. Two years into the Second World War, the pressure becomes too much for Ernst Udet. Seeing no way out, he shoots himself at home on 17 November 1941. This will not be the last suicide among Hermann Göring’s closest subordinates before the collapse of the Third Reich in May 1945.

The nerve centre of power

The German Luftwaffe is by no means the brainchild of Hermann Göring. Following the First World War, the victorious powers forbid Germany from having an air force in the Treaty of Versailles. Even at the time of the Weimar Republic, however, the Reichswehr breaches this condition in April 1922 by arranging a secret cooperation with the Red Army under a supplementary agreement to the Treaty of Rapallo. For years, German fighter pilots complete their military training in various prototype aircraft developed by German companies abroad and transported to an airfield at Lipetsk, 440 kilometres south of Moscow.

The leaders of the Reichswehr begin to flesh out their plans to assemble squadrons of fighter, bomber and surveillance aircraft at the end of the 1920s. This trend continues – initially still in secret – after the Nazis seize power. Hitler gives top priority to building up an air force that will take its place alongside the army and the navy to form a three-pronged military structure.

Göring, who is catapulted from the rank of retired Captain to General of the Infantry by Hitler in August 1933, gets straight to work, some two years before the immense Reich Aviation Ministry building, which is to become his headquarters, rises from its foundations. By 1935, secret armament has only taken place on a modest scale. With less than

100 ageing fighter planes, 60 bombers and 45 reconnaissance aircraft, Germany's air power falls far short of what was needed to fulfil Hitler's foreign policy ambitions. This development gathers pace in March 1935 after Göring and then Hitler openly admit to building up an air force in contravention of the Treaty of Versailles, and groups of German military aircraft conduct a fly-pass at the annual Nuremberg Rally in autumn of the same year, sending out a clear message.

With the occupation of the Rhineland in March 1936, the world comes to the chilling realisation that, contrary to Nazi propaganda, German armament, with the Luftwaffe at its fore, is by no means purely defensive in nature. The desire to act as an aggressive force becomes apparent when, following the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936, Göring and his Reich Aviation Ministry lend their support to General Franco and his anti-Republican followers in a coup against the democratically-elected government in Madrid. German transport aircraft fly in rebel troops from Morocco to Spain, followed in quick succession by military support from the air provided by several squadrons comprising almost 140 aircraft for the German expeditionary force,



Celebration in the Great Hall in honour of the tenth anniversary of the Nazis' seizure of power on 30 January 1943.

the Condor Legion. The devastating attack by German fighters and bombers on the Basque town of Guernica in April 1937, which killed many civilians, remains an unforgettable travesty, its memory preserved for posterity by Pablo Picasso's painting.

Even after the Second World War is over and Göring stands trial before the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg, he appears proud of the devastation he caused. He claims that it served to "test" the technical capabilities of his new Luftwaffe.

In October 1936, Hitler appoints Göring Commissioner for the Four Year Plan, in charge of preparing Germany's economy for war and mobilising

all reserve capacity for the necessary process of armament.

As a result, the Reich Aviation Ministry, headed by Göring, becomes one of the nerve centres of the Third Reich for a time. Göring impresses upon his officers that an imminent danger of war should be assumed when carrying out any action. At the end of the year, he supplements this by insisting on the need for calm until 1941. But he emphasises readiness for action, on the grounds that unexpected

Left: Göring watches the Luftwaffe parade from in front of his ministry in November 1938.

Right: Udet (centre), chief of aircraft procurement and supply, speaking to Göring (right) on the sidelines of a staff meeting in 1941.

complications might arise before that date. As he puts it, “we are already at war; it’s just that no shot has yet been fired.”

Within Germany, the Nazis’ war is already well underway – a war against every form of political opposition, free thinkers of all kinds, ‘undesirable’ minorities and, above all, against the Jews. Following the assassination of German diplomat Ernst vom Rath in Paris by Herschel Grynszpan, which is triggered by the deportation of 18,000 Polish Jews (including Grynszpan’s family) from the German Reich to Poland, Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels instigates a pogrom against the Jews on an unprecedented scale throughout Germany in the night of 9 November 1938. This wave of violence gains the name of Reichskristallnacht (Reich Crystal Night) among the Nazis, a cynical reference to the large numbers of windows broken. Also known as the “The Night of Broken Glass”, the events mark a first peak in the campaign of anti-Semitic persecution and annihilation, which is to culminate during the Second World War in the Holocaust. In the course of the Night of Broken Glass, incited mobs destroy 1,400 synagogues, loot and demolish thousands of Jewish shops and homes, beating and torturing their owners, and killing at least 91 people of Jewish faith. Tens of thousands are carried off to concentration camps.

Shortly after the mob has finished its rampage, the course for stripping Jews of further rights and ousting them from economic life is charted out at the Reich Aviation Ministry. A conference takes place at the ministry on 12 November 1938 chaired by Göring and attended by leading Nazis such as Goebbels, Interior Minister Wilhelm Frick, Economics Minister Walther Funk and Reinhard Heydrich, head of the security police force. The resulting catalogue of repressive measures banishes the Jews definitively from German society. Their physical annihilation is but a small step away. With his characteristic disregard for human life, Göring commented on the destruction caused by the Night of Broken Glass by saying: “I would have preferred it if you had beaten 200 Jews to death and had not destroyed such valuable property.”

To accelerate the “Final Solution to the Jewish Question”, it is decided that the insurance pay-outs should not go to the victims, but to the state. On top of this, the German Jews are forced to pay a so-called Atonement Tax of one billion Reichsmarks. They are banned from commerce, and from carrying out a trade or profession. As part of what is referred to as



Aryanisation, compulsory purchases are ordered on any real estate, companies and shares owned by Jews, at a ludicrous fraction of the true value.

At this stage, the Nazi racial fanatics are still attempting to force Jews out of Germany by destroying their means of subsistence. In the course of the Second World War, however, plans to deport and drive out Jews give way to mass murder. Göring announces at the meeting on 12 November 1938 that there will be a big score to settle with the Jews in the event of a large-scale international conflict. Around two and a half years later, on 31 July 1941, Göring gives SS Senior Group Leader Reinhard Heydrich written authorisation to prepare “a total solution to the Jewish question in those territories of Europe which are under Germany’s influence.” This step towards the Final Solution, the physical extermination of the Jews, reflects Hitler’s wishes. Göring has thus penned the order for genocide and passed it on to the executioner. On 20 January 1942, at a time when the mass killing has already begun in the east, Heydrich chairs the Wannsee Conference, which seals the fate of European Jews.

Germany’s aerial war effort is badly planned and coordinated by Göring’s ministry, despite State Secretary Erhard Milch’s vigorous efforts. The German Reich finds itself at an increasing disadvantage.

A crippling lack of attention was paid to developing aeronautical technology and training of new pilots

could not keep up with the rapidly rising number of casualties. After the Luftwaffe bombings of Warsaw, Rotterdam, London, Coventry, Belgrade and other towns, the British and Americans retaliate with ever more devastating strikes of their own on German towns. Hermann Göring, who once bragged that he would eat his hat if ever an enemy aircraft reached Germany, falls out of favour with Hitler.

Although he is Reichsmarschall and head of the Luftwaffe, Göring becomes a rare sight at the ministry he constructed. Although he has vast meeting halls at his disposal, nowhere in the building does he have a proper office to work in. After defeat in the Battle of Britain and the failed airlift for the cornered 6th Army in Stalingrad, he does not stop short of deriding the victims. On 30 January 1943 in the Court of Honour at the Reich Aviation Ministry, in a pathos-laden radio broadcast speech commemorating the tenth anniversary of the rise to power, he compares the Battle of Stalingrad to Leonidas’s Battle of Thermopylae. The capitulation of the German 6th Army under Field Marshal Paulus comes on the very next day. It marks a turning point in the war Hitler has unleashed, which ends in the total defeat of Germany.



Courage to resist: the *Rote Kapelle*

The thugs from SS regiment six start their brutal attack. The military lynch mob bursts into the Schellingstrasse editorial offices of “Der Gegner”, a revolutionary opposition monthly, and sets about destroying everything in the building. Editor Harro Schulze-Boysen and two of his friends are dragged away to a makeshift concentration camp on the outskirts of the city. This is just one of many such events in April 1933, occurrences that have become part of daily life since Hitler’s entry into office on 30 January that year. Schulze-Boysen and his colleague Henry Erlanger are repeatedly forced to run the gauntlet between two columns of SS troops baying for their blood. Schulze-Boysen survives torture with a lead-tipped whip. Henry Erlanger dies of his injuries.

Schulze-Boysen, who is also the great-nephew of Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, is eventually freed by his torturers, but only thanks to his mother’s intervention. She convinces Berlin’s police chief to have him released.

Even before this shocking personal brush with the new lawless regime, Schulze-Boysen is a determined opponent of Nazism. In October 1930, he writes in a letter to his parents that he has read “Mein Kampf” and found it to be an unrivalled collection of senseless platitudes, which should serve as a deterrent to anyone who reads it. In particular, he comments that the theory on race is utter nonsense. Schulze-Boysen’s own political ideals are less clear. Born in

1909, the young man is subject to romantic impulses that led him to lean towards National Bolshevism. Like many others of his generation, he is influenced by the dissolution of political and scientific certainties at the end of the Weimar Republic. Using this loose-knit group of “left-inclined right-wingers” as his starting point, Schulze-Boysen continues to search for a footing in the resistance against the Nazi dictatorship, even after 1933, building up a network of contacts in the process.

His decision to fight National Socialist tyranny from within takes him to one of the centres of the Third Reich’s power – the Aviation Ministry. Following training as an airman and in spite of having been arrested (without reason) in spring 1933, he is taken on in the communications department in 1934. This position allows him access to valuable sources of information. He also gains the trust of Colonel Erwin Gehrts, a conservative who is opposed to Hitler. Gehrts is unaware of Schulze-Boysen’s active role in the opposition, even incorporating him into his inner circle and revealing military secrets. Schulze-Boysen operates on two levels. One is to organise regular meetings of friends from a wide range of backgrounds who are critics of the regime. This he does together with his wife Libertas, daughter to a wealthy and educated family well-versed in

the arts. The group includes the artists Kurt and Elisabeth Schumacher, the writer Günther Weisenborn and the dancer Oda Schottmüller. The second element of Schulze-Boysen's strategy is based in the Aviation Ministry, where he tries to piece together a picture of the Nazi leadership's war aims and plans.

In 1938, arranged by the married poets Greta and Adam Kuckhoff, the Schulze-Boysen group makes contact with resistance members led by Arvid Harnack. The latter holds a position at the Reich Ministry of Economics and maintains ties to opposition circles, even including communists. At a later point, former pupils of Berlin's Scharfenberg school, including Hans and Hilde Coppi, join the group. The membership is diverse, drawing in people from

many different walks of life with many different views of the world and involving a remarkably large share of women. What holds them together is their opposition to the National Socialist dictatorship.

During the Cold War, various rumours emerged from both East and West suggesting that the group was controlled by communists or was a Moscow-led spy ring. More recent research has dismissed these claims.

The Wehrmacht's attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, in particular, leads the resistance group surrounding Schulze-Boysen and Harnack to believe that the only way to keep the German state intact is to bring the war to a swift end and adopt

Harro Schulze-Boysen (left) with colleagues from the Reich Aviation Ministry in 1941.





Resistance fighters Hilde and Hans Coppi.

a policy of reconciliation towards the Soviet Union. In retrospect, this may well seem unrealistic, but it must be seen in the context of the information and options available to those involved at the time. Anyone who wishes to topple a criminal regime is almost always forced to commit treason in the process.

The resistance group distributes flyers during the night, hoping to enlighten the German people about the false Nazi state and the war crimes committed on the eastern front. At the same time, they pass on military secrets to the Soviet authorities. They warn Moscow of the forthcoming German attack, relying on information gained by Schulze-Boysen in the Aviation Ministry's "research office", an intelligence agency. Following this Wehrmacht invasion, Soviet agents approach the Schulze-Boysen/Harnack group in the hope of establishing a radio connection between Berlin and Moscow. However, they are unsuccessful. Despite their desire to defeat Hitler, the German activists are not good conspirators.

This contact with the Soviet agents also attracts the attention of the Gestapo, who have long been observing a Soviet spy ring in western Europe under the codename Rote Kapelle (Red Orchestra). A total of 119 Nazi opponents linked to Harro Schulze-Boysen and Arvid Harnack are arrested in September 1942 on the false grounds that they are members of the Rote Kapelle. Following interrogation and torture, more than 50 of these German patriots are sentenced to death, accused of spying and treason against both the internal and external security of the state. Before his execution, Harro Schulze-Boysen tells his father that he acted in full awareness of the dangers and is now determined to bear the consequences.



Architecture under the Nazis

The young architect Ernst Sagebiel, born in 1892, worked for Cologne architect Jacob Koerfer for five years. At that time, Koerfer was building the Hansa-Hochhaus in Cologne and the Deutschlandhaus in Essen, both in the Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) style. In 1929, at the age of 37, Sagebiel moved to Berlin. He started work as a project and business manager for Erich Mendelsohn, whose ventures included the Universum cinema (today Berlin's Schaubühne theatre), drafts for what are now the IG Metall building in Berlin and the Columbiahaus. The years spent with these avant-garde architects influenced Sagebiel but did not leave a lasting mark. He joined the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) and the storm troopers as soon as Hitler seized power. His high-flying career as an architect started to take off. In 1933, Sagebiel found a position as a worker at the German Air Transport School, a front organisation for the Luftwaffe, and built barracks for airmen. Yet just one year later, he planned the Reich Aviation Ministry for Hermann Göring. Work on Tempelhof Airport commenced a year after that.

Not forgetting the lessons he had learned under Koerfer and Mendelsohn, Braunschweig-born architect Sagebiel was still very much enamoured with the modern. Nonetheless, he was willing to bow to his clients' stylistic wishes. Unlike any other architect of the Nazi period, his structures thus reflect the requirement to take a two-track approach to planning and construction. His large buildings

and airports are primarily conceived as ultra-modern functional buildings, adorned almost as an afterthought with certain quasi-classical elements favoured by the Nazis at the time.

The Reich Aviation Ministry was no exception. Contrary to its appearance from the outside, the building is a modern construction based on a frame. The record time of 18 months taken to complete the project was only possible thanks to the extremely strict planning and construction methods used. The concrete frame structure prescribed a fixed grid of three by six metre units, creating opportunities for rationalisation and enabling work to start at eight different points simultaneously.

The northern end of the complex incorporating the Leipziger Strasse entrance and the section around the main entrance and Great Hall were constructed around a steel frame. As many sections were pre-fabricated, building could proceed quickly but still allow for wide areas to be spanned and special elements to be included in the floor plan. Smaller sections of the construction, such as the wing adjoining the former Prussian Herrenhaus building and the south wing facing Wilhelmstrasse, were brick-built.

Reich Eagle and swastika, symbols of Nazi rule, at the entrance to the Court of Honour on Wilhelmstrasse.

Left: View of the meeting room now known as the Euro Hall.

Right: Great Hall in 1936 showing the Reich Eagle on the front south-facing wall.

After the concrete frame was filled with bricks and the steel frames with lightweight pumice concrete, the 30,000 square metres of façade were given an outer shell of large natural stone slabs. The construction framing the windows is made of solid cut stone and is set deep into the walls. The light grey shell limestone used came from Frankish quarries. Natural stone used for the building's interior platforms, columns, stairs and floors was taken from an additional 28 sources within Germany.

Disguising a frame construction with natural stone, thus imitating traditional solid construction methods, may have apparently contradicted the principles of modern architecture set out by Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier, but it was more a matter of common practice than ideological stance. Many renowned architects of the 1930s used this technique, including Wilhelm Kreis, Peter Behrens and Hans Poelzig. Even aspects designed to give the building a certain nobility, such as symmetry, rustication at the base and square-columned porticos were hardly cutting-edge – similar examples could be seen throughout the country. The real signs of the new architectural doctrine, shaped by Paul Ludwig Troost and – during construction – by Albert Speer, were the sense of the monumental the building was trying to achieve, the carefully planned reduction and abstraction of classical design features and the resulting severity that precludes any harmony. The final installation of Nazi emblems, along with corresponding paintings and reliefs, left a building entirely in tune with Third Reich ideology.

An unusual contrast to the classical solidity of the stone architecture is achieved through the use of aluminium inside the building for the handrails and for the window and door handles. At the time, this lightweight metal was not considered cheap and flimsy, but was highly respected as a modern material and the most important metal used in aircraft manufacture. The balusters supporting the handrails were given different designs, presumably to serve as reference points in a vast building with 6.8 kilometres of corridors and 17 stairwells.

The internal organisation of the building was in keeping with the latest developments in functional administrative architecture. The supply and transport routes, along with the perfect positioning of stairwells and three paternoster lifts to ensure that the long corridors, which were lined with easily dividable offices, were all well connected, were very much state of the art.

The rooms and corridors used for representative purposes were given an extra theatrical touch. For example, a visitor entering via the main entrance across the Court of Honour on Wilhelmstrasse, and proceeding to an event in the Great Hall, would follow a consciously planned route. First came the vestibule with its two adjoining rooms – one dedicated to victims of the Great War and the other containing the visitors' book. The visitor would then



pass into the half-darkness of the tripartite Stone Hall. The well-lit rear wall, bearing the Reich Eagle and a quotation from Hitler, indicated the way forward, ascending a wide staircase, which divided to the left and right from an initial landing, up to the level of the Great Hall. Entering the Great Hall itself, with its monumental square pillars and the effect achieved by the indirect lighting of the coffered ceiling, one could only be astounded by the dimensions of the place. The walls were decorated with powerful reliefs, the front wall dominated by a gigantic ceramic Reich Eagle on a golden base. Such was the overpowering welcome for the visitor.

A second well-scripted path through the building started at the Leipziger Strasse entrance. Entering from the colonnade outside, the visitor would pass into a dark stone atrium lined by square columns and proceed to the right into a lighter entrance hall, at the end of which an unassuming door off to the left reveals the 300-metre-long main corridor. A short, wide staircase filled the far wall, showing the way forward. From the low landing, two remarkably narrow staircases that were otherwise not distinguished lead upwards, one to the staircase to higher floors, the other to the second-floor meeting room at the head of the building facing Leipziger Strasse. Nine tall windows in the façade accentuated this

end of the building, while wall-length wood paneling lent it a dignified air.

In spite of the underlying baroque tendencies, particularly in the Court of Honour and in the Great Hall on the piano nobile, the representative areas between rooms lacked the space and visibility required for stately receptions. This was initially interpreted as a tactic to create uncertainty. However, it may also simply have been due to certain weaknesses of the young architect, who lacked experience in designing monumental and representative spaces.

What remains undisputed is that, thanks to its size and profile, as well as its importance as Göring's ministry, the construction had an enormous influence on the planning of subsequent public buildings, ministries, police headquarters and similar buildings in Berlin and throughout the German Reich. Sagebiel's plans for the Reich Postal Ministry never reached the construction stage. It was to be erected on Wilhelmstrasse opposite the Aviation Ministry like a mirror image, transforming the former Prussian government district further still into a centre of power for the Nazi regime.



UNSEREN GRUSS DEN DELEG
DER SOZIALISTISCHEN EI





1945–1989

The House of Ministries



The changing face of a colossus

At the start of August 1945, three months after Germany's unconditional surrender, communist functionary Willi Stoph enters the Reich Aviation Ministry building in Berlin, finding it scarred by grenade and bomb attacks. The once mighty labyrinth of Nazi power towers into the summer sky like a ghostly shadow over the rubble of the Reich's capital. The "stone colossus", as he describes it, badly damaged and partially destroyed, makes a grim impression on Stoph, who is later to become the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

Stoph reports coming across dead bodies and weapons stores in the cellars. Walking around the giant complex, the trained bricklayer and building engineer concludes that barely ten rooms are in a fit state to use. But amidst the ruins is a glimmer of hope. The well is still functional. After the downfall of Hitler's dictatorship in the inferno of war, clean drinking water is elementary to the survival of the population at Zero Hour.

In reality, the clocks have by no means stopped in 1945. The Allies are quick to occupy the former regime's centres of power in their respective occupation zones. They aim to lay the political foundations for administering the defeated Germany, under the banners of liberalism and democracy in the West, and socialism and communism in the East. The former Reich Aviation Ministry is in the Soviet occupation zone of Berlin. The building is certainly damaged, but not beyond repair. The decision of the

Soviet Military Administration in Germany to take over this emblem of excessive, power-oriented architecture is probably inspired by the building's strategic central position.

Work to restore the various parts of the building begins as early as August 1945. With an initial budget of 500,000 Reichsmarks and an 1,800-strong workforce, the transformation to a centre of power for the new leaders in the Soviet occupation zone takes place in record time – just as the original construction had done under the Nazis. Seventy rooms are available for use by September and, according to Soviet orders, 500 more will be ready by the end of the year. Almost everything has to be repaired or replaced, from plumbing, sewerage and heating to the windows and, of course, the roof. The use of a steel frame in the original construction makes the work easier to the extent that even more severe damage was avoided during the war. Once restored, the building still has a grim militaristic feeling to it. Its first use is as a command centre for the Red Army. The next occupants are their successors from the soon-to-be communist-dominated Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), led by Walter Ulbricht, Wilhelm Pieck and Otto Grotewohl.

The SED is founded under communist pressure on 21–22 April 1946 as a forced merger of the German

The damaged building of the former Reich Aviation Ministry following the end of the Second World War.

Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party in the Soviet sphere of influence. Its leaders, Moscow's German protégées, in particular Walter Ulbricht, are quick to tighten the reins. To preserve a semblance of democracy, the Soviet Military Administration brings in Germans from across the political spectrum to occupy posts in the new administrative bodies, provided that their opposition to fascism stands beyond doubt. The key positions, of course, go to committed communists. This tactic is best summed up by the Stalin loyalist Ulbricht, with his statement in spring of 1945 that while it is important to achieve an appearance of democracy, the communists must have everything under their control. Hand in hand, Soviet and German comrades march on together to spread their influence throughout Germany and secure their bastions of power within the Soviet occupation zone.

At the same time, a clear rift is developing between East and West Germany.

The Marshall Plan, a comprehensive programme to rebuild the economy and thereby contain communist attempts to expand, is announced in early summer 1947. It marks an initial climax in the integration of the American, British and French occupation zones with the West. Moscow is swift to react. The Soviet Military Administration issues order no. 138 on 11 June 1947, creating the German Economic Commission, which will later grow into the provisional government of the GDR. The Commission takes up office in the renovated Aviation Ministry building. From here, the institutions and structures required to introduce a planned

Damage done to the former Reich Aviation Ministry.





The German Democratic Republic is founded on 7 October 1949 in the Great Hall; Wilhelm Pieck (right) is its president.

economy, controlled from above, are gradually put into place. The first part of this process is to bring together and coordinate central administrative bodies responsible for industry, finance, transport, trade, energy and similar tasks. The German Economic Commission is also responsible for controlling the delivery of goods paid in reparations to the Soviet Union. This is a key aspect of Stalin's post-war policy. At the same time, the groundwork is being laid for the division of Germany into a democratic, capitalist Western state and a communist Eastern state with a planned economy, with the USA and the Soviet Union positioned as supreme, protecting powers.

The Russian leader is quick in his response to the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany in May 1949. On 7 October 1949, the German People's Council, an assembly designed to give an impression of democracy, changes its name to the provisional People's Chamber (parliament) and proclaims the founding of the GDR. The location chosen for the new state's naming ceremony is the Great Hall

of that all-too-familiar hulk, resurrected from its ruins, the old Nazi Aviation Ministry building, which, until recently, accommodated Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring in lavish style. The former social democrat Otto Grotewohl is elected the first Prime Minister of the GDR. Wilhelm Pieck, a loyal communist, takes on the role of president, putting him at the head of a new, separate East Germany.

Among SED comrades behind the scenes, the vast disparity between the regime's goals and reality is no secret. At a meeting of the party leadership on 4 October 1949, Gerhart Eisler, head of information at the German Economic Commission, is quoted as saying: "If we establish a government, we shall never abandon it by means of election or by other methods."



The government clashes with the people

It is the morning of 16 June 1953, on what is set to be a warm early summer's day. As on any other day, the barber waits outside the minister's office at 8:00 a. m. sharp, ready to give him his daily shave. Alongside Prime Minister Otto Grotewohl, Industry Minister Fritz Selbmann also enjoys this privilege in the GDR, the self-proclaimed first republic of German workers and farmers. Horst Schlafke, who works as a building labourer in East Berlin's Stalin-alley, a prestigious boulevard conceived by the SED leadership, has been on his feet for more than three hours by now. The mood among his colleagues on site is one of outrage. They have just read an article in "Tribune", the trade union paper, explaining a recent decision to increase quotas. In simple terms, it means more work for less money.

The workers start to release the dissatisfaction they have long bottled up. Three hundred of them assemble behind a banner demanding that the quotas be reduced. Their numbers quickly swell to 2,000 and they begin a protest march towards the government district. On the way they pass the Soviet embassy, the windows of which remains firmly closed. More and more people join the procession, responding to Horst Schlafke's call to the people of Berlin to march for freedom. The emotional crowd of protesters, now around 10,000 in number, reaches the House of Ministries on Leipziger Strasse, the building that was once Göring's Aviation Ministry and is

now home to the government of the GDR and several ministries. However, there is something that the crowd does not know. Prime Minister Grotewohl and the top brass of the SED government are no longer based here. They have recently moved to the renovated Alte Stadthaus building.

Initially, the angry workers' calls fall on deaf ears. "Fat gut, glasses and goatee – that's not what the people need!" come the cries from the crowd, addressed towards the three political leaders who claim to speak and act for the people – General Secretary of the SED Central Committee Walter Ulbricht, President Wilhelm Pieck and Prime Minister Otto Grotewohl. State police draw a security fence across to block the main entrance and line up behind it. The demonstrators repeatedly call for Ulbricht or Grotewohl. No-one emerges and the unrest builds. Finally, at around 11:30 a. m., the door opens. Industry Minister Selbmann appears, along with a table to serve as a speaker's podium. He looks for a place to stand and address the crowd. Horst Schlafke clears a path for him. The German Communist Party veteran tries to shout over the crowd's shrill whistling, saying "I'm a worker too, like you". "That's something you've forgotten. You're a traitor to the workers", comes the reply. Selbmann promises to fight to have the quotas reduced to their previous

State police cordon off the House of Ministries from protesting workers on 16 June 1953.

level. But it is too late – no-one believes him. He is shouted down and has to jump from the table to safety. The crowd is angry. Shouts of “Get out of here!”, “Resign!” and “Bring us Ulbricht or Grotewohl!” ring out.

The mass demonstration in front of the House of Ministries on 16 June 1953 is the prelude to a GDR-wide popular uprising. A delegation of protesters contacts the radio station RIAS (Radio in the American Sector) on 16 June. They are agitated and ask the broadcaster to call for a general strike in the Eastern zone on 17 June. For the American-controlled radio station, this is politically inconceivable. Nonetheless, RIAS reports on the protests and the demands of the workers. It calls on listeners to assemble on the morning of 17 June at Strausberger Platz. News about the strike spreads across the country.

On 17 June, hundreds of thousands of police officers fill East Berlin’s streets. A large demonstration gets underway at the heart of the government district, near Potsdamer Platz. Then the state police and Soviet tanks start a charge. One eye-witness reports: “A salvo of machine-gun fire sweeps across the crowd, followed by another, then a third. At first the shots are fired overhead, then at body height. Men clasp their chests, pull back their blood-drenched hands and collapse. Many are wounded, seriously injured or killed.” The unrest spreads through the entire country like wildfire. The demonstrators’ demands cease to address economic problems only. The protesters in East Berlin and more than 250 other cities, towns and villages begin to call with increasing determination for the

Left: Construction workers demonstrate in front of the building on Leipziger Strasse on 16 June 1953.

Right: Protesters demand that the recently-raised quotas be lowered.





Several thousand people gather in front of the House of Ministries on 16 June 1953.

government to be deposed, for elections to be held for all of Germany with secret ballots and for the Soviet army to withdraw. The East Germans become the courageous vanguard in the struggle for peace and unity in divided post-war Germany.

The SED officials are only able to gain control of the revolutionary situation by declaring a state of emergency and enlisting the help of the occupying Soviet forces. “It’s us or them” is the accurate assessment of the situation offered by Wilhelm Zaisser, Minister for State Security. This is the sad outcome of the crushed uprising, which continues to flare up sporadically well into the summer: A total of more than 50 demonstrators are killed and at least 20 people shot by the Red Army under martial law. A wave of arrests sweeps through the country, with around 16,000 women and men being taken in. In West Germany, the uprising of 17 June 1953 is commemorated until reunification in October 1990 as the

Day of German Unity. How was it possible that less than four years after the foundation of the GDR, which had quickly assumed the mantle of fighting fascism and always represented itself as the better, morally superior Germany, the SED leadership could easily have been swept away by the people, if their “Soviet friends” (in Wilhelm Pieck’s words) had not intervened? The socialist writer Bertolt Brecht, a man ever loyal to, but critical of, the GDR, which had become his home as an artist, exposes the dilemma faced by the SED regime in his poem “Die Lösung” (The Solution). If the people have lost the government’s confidence, he asks with cutting irony, would it not be easier for the government to dissolve the people and elect another?

Socialist aspirations meet social reality

The scene is the House of Ministries on the corner of Leipziger Strasse and Wilhelmstrasse. On 16 and 17 June 1953, Berlin's builders and citizens and others on strike gather here, making up a group of around 10,000 people. The crowd is demonstrating peacefully, demanding free elections and the resignation of the government. On 17 June 1953, Russian tanks thunder through East Berlin. The uprising is brutally quashed.

Just a few months earlier, a painting is attached to the wall in the open colonnade on the Leipziger Strasse side of the building, a picture to represent the new socialist society. Its title translates as "The importance of peace for the cultural development of humanity, and the necessity of struggle to achieve this goal". Max Lingner's mural now hangs in the exact location of the earlier relief of marching soldiers by Arno Waldschmidt. One symbol replaces another. Both stood and stand for the beginning of a new political era.

Lingner has to make a number of artistic and political concessions before the Party approves his mural. His first version shows a married couple with a child, followed by a group of protesters, young women, musicians, children, workers, farmers and a young family (from left to right). There is no sign of any banners, blue shirts indicating membership in the Free German Youth organisation or the neckerchiefs emblematic of the younger Pioneers. The only group remaining by the final version are the musicians.

It is the sixth revision. The married couple with a child are removed to make way for a larger demonstration. The women are given Free German Youth shirts and the children Pioneer neckerchiefs. New sections are added to represent heavy industry and construction. At the right-hand end of the picture, the architecture of the Stalinallee is shown, the largest building project at the start of the 1950s and the place where the strike of June 1953 originated.

The first clash between such ideals and reality comes to this site as early as 1953. Forty-seven years on, in 2000, Wolfgang Rüppel revisits the conflict, creating a work of art to make it visible and accessible. His piece incorporates the existing mural by contrasting it with an image of the 17 June 1953 demonstration. The image, in a horizontal pane of glass, has the same dimensions as Lingner's mural (24 metres by 3 metres) and is set in the ground opposite the older work. The image is a photograph of the crowd demonstrating peacefully, etched into the sheet of glass in the manner of a screen print. Parts of the photo are duplicated. The image is repeated in a layer beneath, this time printed on a light-coloured surface. The small gap between the two identical images creates an impression of depth. It is as if this outdoor space is again filled with protesters. They are opposing a view of society that in no way reflects the reality of the GDR.



The 17 June 1953 memorial by Wolfgang Ruppel: The image of peaceful protesters set into the ground contrasts with Max Lingner's socialist mural behind.

The connection between the two images and the contradiction therein are emphasised by the layout of the outdoor space. Lighter-coloured lines in the stone make the colonnade's columns look longer. This directs the viewer's gaze upwards from the demonstrating masses set into the ground

to the representation of happy people in the mural. The two are thesis and antithesis. Each comments on the other; combined, they show socialist aspirations and social reality.

Isolation and separation

An interventionist state that was out of touch with the people and a shadowy parallel universe – the very things Brecht criticises in his poem – were characteristic of GDR policy and of life in the House of Ministries from 1949 onwards. While from 1952, the SED leadership pursued the class struggle through the “systematic construction of socialism” (as Ulbricht put it), thus creating economic and political dissatisfaction, the House of Ministries gradually became a closed system, a carefully formed cocoon within which a society based on privilege existed for an inflated bureaucratic administration. This tone was ultimately not set by the bureaucrats in the House of Ministries, but by the SED, particularly its leadership in the form of the Politburo. The Politburo decided on the correct communist course to follow politically, economically and socially.

The building served as the office of the Prime Minister until spring 1953 and its various obscure floors and wings initially housed nine government agencies and ministries. By the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, up to 16 ministries and central bodies, whose task was to deal with economic issues, made the site a hive of activity. They included ministries for finance, for the glass and ceramics industry, for heavy machinery and plant equipment and for locally controlled industrial and food production. In a state that shunned the free market as a work of evil, other institutions were needed to regulate supply and demand. These bodies, the root causes of penury in the GDR, were the office in charge of prices and the State Planning

Commission. Around 6,000 employees and civil servants filled the 2,000 offices, the corridors and lifts, planning the construction of socialism. The building virtually became a town in its own right. Almost everything was provided. There were two medical centres, one for the normal employees and the other for higher-ranked officials, a bank, a hairdresser’s, a railway ticket office, a dressmaker’s, a florist’s, a grocery, places to buy lottery tickets and have stockings repaired, a bookshop and a pharmacy. To meet the comrades’ recreational needs, sports facilities were provided, including two tennis courts.

Ordinary people had no access to these facilities which, by GDR standards, were luxurious. It thus seems all the more ridiculous that, until Wilhelm Pieck’s death in 1960, there was an office for time-tabling the GDR president’s public consultation hours.

There could be no talk of tensions easing in the crisis-ridden year of 1953. The SED’s grip on power was at stake. Following the death of the Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin in March, the new leaders in the Kremlin put pressure on the government in East Berlin to gently change the course they were taking in the construction of socialism. Such changes were necessary to avoid completely alienating the population and to stem the flood of emigrants fleeing



The Berlin Wall between Berlin's Kreuzberg and Mitte districts. It runs directly past the House of Ministries along Niederkirchnerstrasse.

to the West. The new approach that was announced, however, failed to repeal the increased quotas for labour. This proved to be the final straw, leading to the uprising of 17 June 1953. After the uprising had been crushed, the SED regime entrenched itself behind the tentacles of the Stasi secret police. At the same time, the government attempted to make small material improvements to the low standard of living, in the hope of reducing discontentment. These efforts were to no avail; more and more people left the GDR for the neighbouring Federal Republic.

Its very existence on the line, Ulbricht's regime sealed the division of Germany. On 15 June 1961, an international press conference took place in the Great Hall at the House of Ministries. Without prompting, Walter Ulbricht, the new chairman of the Council

of State reaffirmed in connection with Berlin that "No-one has any intention of building a wall." Two months later, on the morning of 13 August 1961, construction workers from East Berlin began to put up a wall through the middle of the city, under the watchful supervision of the state police and the army. Almost thirty years would pass before the wall fell, in autumn 1989; years during which at least 134 people – according to the most recent research – came to a violent end trying to overcome this barrier.

Escape from the state

One, two, three, and throw! The hammer flies down from the edge of the roof, clears the wall and plunges into darkness. The grass below softens the sound of the impact. Heinz Holzapfel has been preparing this moment for months and practising his throw for weeks. Now that it is actually happening, the situation seems unreal to him. But he has no time for doubts. Everything has to go according to plan – a plan he has gone over and over in his mind...

It is the afternoon of 28 July 1965. The 34-year-old industrial economist Heinz Holzapfel is hurrying from the station at Friedrichstrasse to the House of Ministries, accompanied by his wife, Jutta, and their nine-year-old son, Günther. The plan: to escape from the GDR to West Germany. They are calm, largely thanks to the bromide sedative they have taken. Heinz Holzapfel has a valid pass for the building. He has old passes for his wife and son in his pocket. The security guard at the entrance gives the passes no more than a cursory glance. The family have made it into the building.

They decide to escape from the GDR back at the end of 1962. The only problem is: how? At first, Holzapfel considers using a hot air balloon, but the materials needed to build one are not available in the GDR. Then he has a moment of epiphany. His job requires him to travel regularly from his

home in Leipzig to the House of Ministries in Berlin. He starts to use every trip he makes to scope out the building, which is located right next to the wall. He finally notices a toilet window that leads directly to the roof, and has an idea.

“At first, I thought he was crazy,” says Heinz Holzapfel’s brother-in-law. “Then I understood that there was nowhere else in all of Berlin where you could get so close to the wall.” He is one of four people who travel from southern Germany to Berlin on the day of the planned escape to provide assistance. When they check in to a West Berlin hotel near the wall on the evening of 28 July, they make a fatal discovery. There is a Russian sentry-post on the roof. They want to abort the escape plan, which they judge simply too risky. One of the four crosses to East Berlin to warn the family. But they are already in the building. To be precise, they are in the toilet that leads to the roof. Holzapfel has locked the door from the inside and affixed an “out of order” sign outside.

At 5 p.m., almost all of the office workers have gone home for the day and silence takes over the building. The family of three blacken their faces with soot. They have sewn sponges to the bottom of their socks



Left: Heinz Holzapfel and his son show the harness the family used to escape to West Berlin down a steel rope.

Right: One part of the building, in Niederkirchnerstrasse, is located inside the no-man's land around the Berlin Wall.

The Holzapfel family made their escape from here.

to avoid making any unnecessary noise. When darkness falls the three climb onto the roof. It takes them almost two hours to make their way across to the far edge of the roof of the city's largest office building. Now there is no turning back. The father of the family takes the hammer, to which a nylon rope is attached. He throws it over the wall, just a few metres away, and into West Berlin. The helpers are ready and waiting on the other side. They tie the rope to a car trailer, to which they also attach one end of a steel rope. Holzapfel hauls the other end back up. Relying on a home-made winch and harnesses made of upholstery material, Holzapfel first sends his nine-year-old son down the line to

freedom, then his wife. He follows. In an unbelievable twist, the helpers' fears are confirmed. An armed guard in an observation post has watched the escape from start to finish. The only reason he did not intervene is that he thought he was witnessing a smuggling mission by Stasi operatives.

The Holzapfel family settle in Munich after their escape. They are just one example of the more than 5,000 people who successfully escape the East German regime over the Berlin Wall between 1961 and 1989.

New paths and a dead-end

Until the wall was built, the SED leadership alternated between distancing itself from West Germany and making concessions to improve relations. Similarly, domestic policy was a mix of repression and half-hearted economic reforms. In the late 1950s, the collectivisation of agriculture and craftsmanship was being promoted. This resulted in a massive increase in the number of refugees and shortages in supplies. The construction of the Berlin Wall was a necessary measure from the state's point of view.

The Stasi had a strong presence even in the House of Ministries. The entire complex was subjected to heightened surveillance and security checks, as the south face of the building was located in the border area near the Berlin Wall. Stasi staff had around thirty offices in the House of Ministries, a telephone tapping centre and equipment to spy on radio communications in West Berlin. Paramilitary Combat Groups controlled by the SED had secret weapons stores and shooting ranges in the cellar rooms. The fact that changes, no matter how cautious, could not be pushed through, was illustrated by the tragic fate of Erich Apel, head of the State Planning Commission. Apel was a reformer who wanted to decentralise the rigid planned economy cautiously. When, in 1965, his efforts failed because of opposition from Ulbricht, he shot himself in his office in the House of Ministries. Following recent speculation, the possibility that he was murdered can no longer be excluded [source: Schroeder, "Der SED-Staat"]. As part

of the politics of international détente, a web of relationships grew between the two Germanys following their signing in 1972 of a treaty on the basis of their relations. One effect of this "change through rapprochement", a policy which increasingly brought people from East and West together, was that, against its will, the GDR became increasingly financially dependent on West Germany. As early as the start of the 1980s, one high-ranking SED official noted that the GDR's ability to settle international transactions was already in danger. Bonn provided two loans worth billions of marks to save the state from impending bankruptcy. West Germany's politicians had no desire to fuel unrest in East Germany nor to intensify the Cold War, and thus did their part to help.

Shortly afterwards, in that historic autumn of 1989, the demonstrating masses in Leipzig, East Berlin, Halle, Schwerin and Cottbus taught the leaders on both sides of the Wall a lesson. They showed that revolution is when the ruling classes can no longer rule in the old way and the oppressed will no longer be ruled in the old way, an axiom that Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, founder of the Soviet Union, had once applied to the ailing political systems of his time. The House of Ministries, too, was destabilised by the peaceful revolution in the GDR. A secret, unflattering report submitted to the SED leadership



Federal Minister Egon Bahr (l.) and GDR State Secretary Michael Kohl (r.) following a discussion on 16 May 1973 about the succession arrangements in the basic treaty.

on 30 October 1989 by Gerhard Schürer, chairman of the State Planning Commission, concluded that the republic of workers and farmers was on the verge of insolvency. After the Berlin Wall fell on the night of 9 November 1989, the House of Ministries slid into a phase of chaos and disintegration. In a final bureaucratic surge, an Economic Committee was founded at an administrative level above the State Planning Commission and all of the ministries for various industries. These were the last steps taken by a state apparatus that had tried to control every aspect of the economy for over 18 million inhabitants.

Dietrich Rothe, who had worked in clerical roles in the building since 1953 and was a section leader in the State Planning Commission from 1978 onwards,

observed and took part in the disintegration of state power. “The apparatus was preoccupied with itself during those days. The realisation that socialism, in its real form, had come to an end, spread like a tidal wave. For most staff of the state apparatus, this was an hour of bitter truth. People were gripped by fear of the future.” In the end, the system was revealed to be a nightmare personified. Rothe states that people were constantly moving office within the building, so that it was almost impossible to keep up with who worked where. The old Aviation Ministry was still a fraught place, its oppressiveness comparable only to that of the castle in Franz Kafka’s book of the same name.

Architecture after the war – a building is transformed

From an architectural point of view, the building survived the war with comparatively little damage. The central section was protected by a 70-centimetre thick concrete ceiling designed to withstand bombs. The south-east wing of the building had severe bomb damage to its stairwell area. All of the south-facing outer walls had scars left by artillery fire from the Red Army as it advanced from that direction.

The Soviet Military Administration moved in to the parts of the building that were still intact. They were joined by the German Economic Commission in 1947. The first step was a thorough process of “denazification”, meaning that all of the emblems, reliefs and inscriptions were removed. After this, pragmatism dominated the approach taken to the building. Structural elements that had been destroyed were bricked up and the windows and facilities put into working order. Soon, however,

architectural interest in the building was awakened. Soviet architects modified the decoration of the stately rooms in a relatively reserved manner, following the classical style of Stalin’s era. The coffering – made with half-rounded vaulted panels – in the ceilings of the entrance halls was filled in. Outer sleeves were fitted around the tops of the pillars in the northern hall, giving the impression that they were crowned with capitals.

The Great Hall was completely remodelled in 1946/1947. The pilasters were given a new coating and capitals. A decorative addition was made to the end walls in the form of a pair of mock-classical pilasters on each. The wooden coffered ceiling was replaced by one in classical pastel shades with indirect lighting. This took away the hall’s feeling

The mural “Aufbau der Republik” by Max Lingner (1952/53).





Left: View of the meeting room, now the Euro Hall. Today there are modern interpreters' booths where the podium once stood. Right: Great Hall showing the south wall, where a Reich Eagle hung until 1945. A podium for press conferences was installed here in 1946/1947.

of stern heroism and gave it a much more celebratory atmosphere. These changes, carefully orchestrated by the political decision-makers, marked the coming of a new architectural spirit.

When the building was put to a new use for the GDR ministries from 1951 onwards, further changes and modifications ensued. On the whole, they were of low quality and poorly thought through from an architectural point of view. As such, they were undeserving of preservation. Because any free surface was filled with fixtures, no consideration was given to spatial effects and the representative function of the rooms. The main task was to create space for 6,000 staff to work, which meant doubling the building's original capacity. Additional partition walls were built, corridors closed off and extra rooms built in the ample stairwells.

In 1960, a canteen with aluminium and glass walls, by architect Kurt Tausendschön, was added to the western flank, in the courtyard opposite the Prussian Herrenhaus. For the 1971 meeting of the Four Powers, only the Court of Honour was renovated. Smaller slabs from the façade were replaced using stone cannibalised from the rear walls. For pragmatic reasons, the building's past was ultimately ignored in the GDR era and the most efficient use possible made of the space. Max Lingner's mural beneath the colonnade was considered sufficient to dedicate it to a new political direction. Overall, the building was not judged to be a valuable piece of cultural heritage, so there were no efforts to preserve its architecture during restructuring work.

In conversation with Jürgen Dröse

Jürgen Dröse, born in 1942, worked at the building in Wilhelmstrasse from 1968 to 2007. In his almost 40 years of service, he was head of on-site services, head of property management and, from 1989 onwards, worked in facilities management.

Mr Dröse, how did you feel when you first walked in to the House of Ministries?

When I set foot in this building on the corner of Wilhelmstrasse and Leipziger Strasse in 1968 to start my new job, I looked along 300 metres of corridor and felt like turning right around and leaving – I was so struck by the weight of the building and of the task I would face.

You stayed though, for almost 40 years, in which you were responsible for internal procedures.

What did your work consist of?

It was all about creating reasonable conditions for people to work and live in. The job covered managing the technical side of the building and its infrastructure, such as preservation and maintenance work. It also included cleaning and caring for the outside areas, keeping them clear of snow and ice in winter, as well as security and the canteen. Before reunification, many of these jobs were done by an in-house team of 170 staff. Bear in mind, we are talking about providing for and looking after up to 6,300 colleagues. We used to compare our work to the jobs that need doing in a small town.

At the time of the GDR, the population used to call it the ‘island of the blessed’...

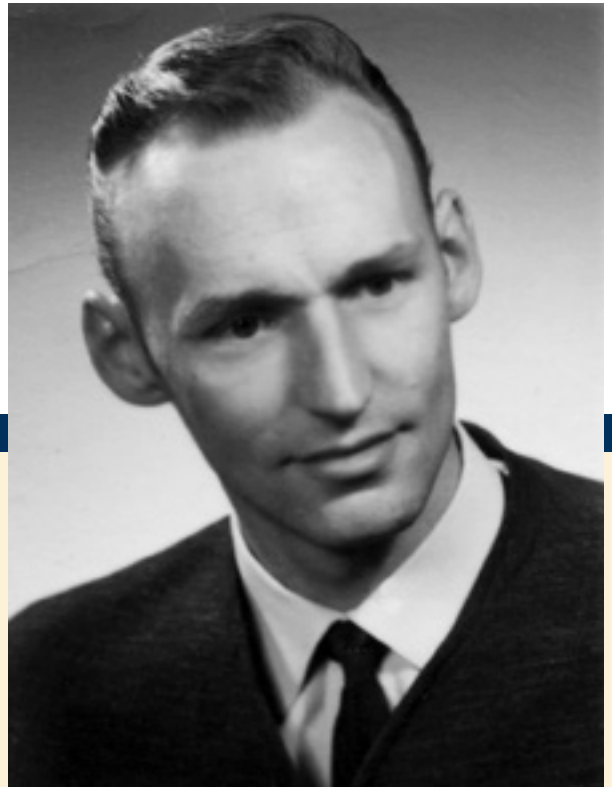
Yes, that became something of an umbrella term. Because this was the most important building after the Council of Ministers, a lot of money was spent. We had a medical centre, a bookshop, a pharmacy, a florist's, a lottery counter, even a dressmaker's and a crèche. There were up to 25 different services and, before I forget, the tennis court, a volleyball court and the bowling alley. The health centre had a sauna, too. The idea was to motivate people to do good work.

Where was there space for all these facilities?

We used rooms ranging from the single to quadruple unit size, that is, from 15 to 60 square metres. Most of the facilities were accommodated in the basement and the ground floor. Each ministry had its own particular requirements. Temporary barracks were built in the courtyard. We called them the low-rises. Then what was supposed to be a provisional solution became permanent. The oldest barracks had stood since 1950 and weren't demolished until the 1990s.

The building has two large halls. How were they used in the GDR era?

More than a hundred events a year took place in the Great Hall, including many receptions for foreign delegations and official celebrations by the Party and various mass organisations. All of the ministries had their own official holiday in the GDR. For example, there were special celebratory days for the trade staff,



Jürgen Dröse takes up service at the House of Ministries in 1969.

for the finance staff, for the communications staff. The smaller hall was almost exclusively reserved for use by internal departments. No changes were made to it for years. The lights hanging from the ceiling were still the originals from 1935/1936.

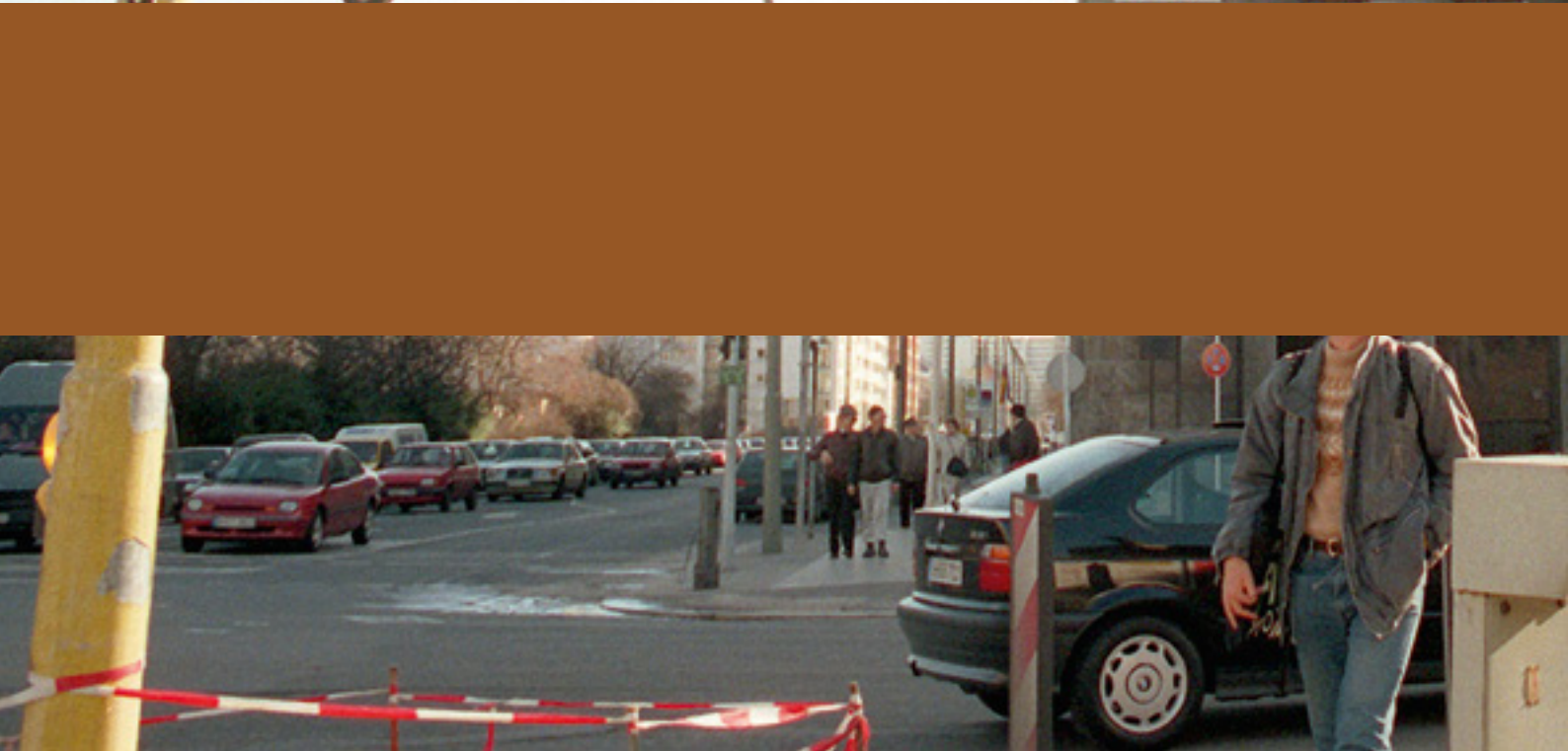
Then came the events leading up to reunification. What did they mean to you and your colleagues?

Many of the staff had to leave. Those of us that were able to stay had the task of dismantling, throwing away or finding alternative uses for everything, starting with the stock in the stores. For example, we had Soviet-issue gas-masks, still in their original packaging. We sent those back. The office furniture and equipment went to the administrative offices of Berlin's districts and other public establishments. Business people also came from the West, seeing a chance to make a lot of money, which they did. They bought things up cheaply, hired warehouse space

and did a good trade. We had barely half a year to clear the way for building work to get things ready for the Treuhandanstalt, the next occupant.

Alongside the Treuhandanstalt, the Federal Court of Audit and a branch office of the Bonn-based ministry of Finance moved in. You kept your job as building administration manager. Did the staff from the German federal authorities have any influence on your work?

We were effectively on the brink of an administrative reform at the time, and had to learn a lot. Admittedly, we sometimes thought, we've been working here all these years, what do these West Germans want? But such thoughts were nothing more than that, and they soon passed. We were determined to cope with the future. All in all, I got on very well with the new staff. It was a new start and you could feel that East and West wanted to grow together. For the most part, we all pulled together, whatever questions arose.





1990–1999

Reunification and Change

The euphoria of unity

“The citizens’ movement on the streets mobilised against the apparatus of the state and counted the number of employees at the entrance to the House of Ministries in the morning”, recorded the head of department for the Planning Commission, Dietrich Rothe, in the turbulent weeks of autumn 1989. The people had turned the tables. Those who had once been spied upon by the Stasi seized control of the machinery of communist power and planning. It was time to put the productivity of socialist economic practices to the test. The stone dinosaur in Wilhelmstrasse was about to be taken to account. The thousands of staff who had kept this giant on course must have felt distinctly uneasy, knowing that a fresh wind was about to blow through the dusty corridors.

At the time, the Treuhandanstalt, the body charged with the GDR’s financial liquidation, was not yet at the door, and the last SED-led government under Hans Modrow continued its fight for the GDR to be preserved, albeit with a reformed socialist veneer, into early 1990. The plan was to involve opposition parties in round-table talks. However, the desire of most East Germans to achieve unity in freedom was stronger. At the first and last free elections to the People’s Chamber, held on 18 March 1990, the conservative Alliance for Germany, supported by the Federal Republic’s Chancellor Helmut Kohl, won a convincing victory, taking 48 per cent of the vote. The way was paved for reunification. The result of this democratic vote was officially announced

at a location that had been untouched by democracy until then: the House of Ministries. The birthplace of the GDR thus became the backdrop for the vote that sealed its fate. The task of negotiating East Germany’s way to the desired unity fell to the Christian Democrat Lothar de Maizière, the last Prime Minister of a state that was being dissolved.

The speed with which changes took place was a source of disquiet and some degree of chaos. The new GDR Economics Ministry took up office in the House of Ministries. A first large wave of staff was sent into early retirement. The winding-up process and staff evaluations took place without any clear strategy behind them. Files were not systematically reviewed or passed on. Mountains of documents piled up in the offices – it turned out to be fortunate that the files had been preserved at all. Committees of citizens had learned of the old order’s attempts to destroy the files and intervened to prevent them. Further chaos was caused by the fact that the new Economics Minister Gerhard Pohl did not want to be based in the old House of Ministries. He chose to move into the former Ministry for Foreign Trade building on Unter den Linden. It now became necessary to find space there for members of staff from the House of Ministries who were going to be transferred. Any former staff who stayed in Wilhelmstrasse stood to face the “liquidation” of their jobs.



View of the former House of Ministries at the intersection of Leipziger Strasse and Wilhelmstrasse in August 1991.

These were times marked by constant coming and going. As one group moved out, another would move in. One such group consisted of Regine Hildebrandt, the Social Democratic Minister for Labour and Social Affairs, and her team, who moved into the Abgeordnetenhaus building, once the lower house of the Prussian parliament. On the ground and first floors, the foreign trade department, a vestige of the old Planning Committee, continued its ghost-like existence. Higher in the building, on the fourth floor, a commercial company had illegally set up shop. It took the threat of legal measures to compel it to move out.

After the reunification celebrations on 3 October 1990, the House of Ministries' new tenants soon moved in. They were the Berlin branch of the Federal Ministry of Finance, the Federal Court of Audit, the Berlin

Regional Finance Office and the Treuhandanstalt. It was the Treuhandanstalt that initiated the first wave of renovation work, on floors four to seven. This was carried out with the best intentions, under the watchful eye of Berlin's conservation chief. The aim was to restore the affected parts of the building to their original 1936 condition, reflecting its status as an historic monument. Yet was it possible, and was it right, simply to turn the clock back to Göring's Reich Aviation Ministry, as if nothing had happened? Did the new democratic order not call for a break in architectural politics, in full awareness of the symbolism involved? The debate was just around the corner.

A tainted place

As the discussion about the future of Göring's former empire unfolded in late 1992, the question that had been raised during the controversy surrounding the choice of capital for a reunited Germany came up once again: was the continued use of a building so tainted by its history not sending the wrong signal for a Germany that was committed to peace and freedom? Was this seamless continuity not likely to resurrect the ghosts of past evils?

The initial trigger for the debate at the end of 1992 came in the form of pragmatic objections to the renovation of Sagebiel's building, listed in a confidential report by the Federal Building Ministry headed by liberal Free Democratic Party politician Irmgard Schwaetzer. The report expressed doubts as to whether it was worth renovating the former House of Ministries, pointing out that it would be possible to construct a new building at the same cost. Further reports would confirm that renovation was not economically viable. These arguments were just what the Building Minister and her party colleagues, Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel and Education Minister Jürgen Möllemann, were hoping for. The same applied to Interior Minister Rudolf Seiters, a Christian Democrat. Like the Free Democratic Party ministers, he too considered the "musty" hulk in the middle of Berlin to be overburdened by its GDR and Nazi past, and thus worthy only of demolition.

Berlin's Senator for Construction Wolfgang Nagel, of the Social Democratic Party, voiced his horror at this demand, denouncing a "demolition-ball" approach to dealing with the past. He received back-up from his party colleague Wolfgang Thierse, later president of the Bundestag (Germany's parliament), who mockingly said: "All those who are suggesting demolition at this point do not know what they are talking about. It would be the same as dropping bombs on Unter den Linden." In the heat of the argument, all those concerned had failed to notice that the controversial building now had listed historic status. The result was a suitably indignant response from Helmut Engel, who was in charge of conservation in Berlin. The proponents of demolition he confronted even included such prominent experts as the American art historian Barbara Miller Lane. Engel insisted that the listed status could only be revoked if it was a matter of "public interest taking substantially greater precedence". Miller Lane, for her part, stuck to her guns, arguing that it was impossible to re-use any site with such negative historical associations.

"Monumente", a magazine specialising in monuments and historic sites, joined the fray: "Is the Federal Republic of Germany going too far in its role as curator by carefully preserving such buildings as the Reich Ministry of Aviation?" it asked. Part of this question had already been dealt with. All Nazi symbols had long been purged from the building at the time of the GDR in accordance with the legitimising tenets of antifascist ideology.



The current main entrance of the Federal Ministry of Finance on Wilhelmstrasse.

In any case, it was and still is doubtful whether the Nazis can be said to have had a building style of their own. As in other areas, the Nazis tended to take an eclectic approach to architecture with an ostentatious touch designed to visually evoke the submission of the individual to power. Everything was, to some extent, a copy. Antiquity and classicism here, elements borrowed from *Neue Sachlichkeit* and Bauhaus there. The result was an embodiment of the state, with stylistic elements similar to those found in other countries' representative buildings. One example of such is the Pentagon, built between 1941 and 1943 to house the United States Department of Defence.

A comment by the conceptual artist Jochen Gerz helped break ground in terms of political history. He drew attention to the openness of historical processes, comparing the Berlin behemoth to a bus which had called at many stops and experienced many changes of personnel along its way. Extending this metaphor, he argued it would be a fallacy to assume that the journey's end had come.

The proponents of demolition slowly began to relent at the start of 1993, particularly as they had come round to the idea that it was possible to engage in a critical dialogue with the site's inherited burden. Furthermore, they saw that the democratic environment provided space for a rational search for identity.

Finally, the numbers also argued in favour of renovation. A new building was expected to cost up to 600 million marks. The final cost of renovation was 290 million marks. So it was a combination of financial considerations and the politics of memory that informed the German federal government's decision to renovate the Detlev Rohwedder Building in 1994. Work was completed two years later. As part of the government's transfer from Bonn to Berlin, the Federal Ministry of Finance started to move into Sagebiel's construction in August 1999, two thirds of which had been renovated. After more than half a century of existence, spanning two dictatorships, the building had found a new purpose as a base of democratically legitimate and accountable government activity.

The Treuhandanstalt

The phrase “what belongs together will now grow together”, coined by former Social Democratic chancellor Willy Brandt, refers to the events of the revolutionary autumn of 1989 in Germany. The political “growing together” through the unification of the two Germanys by 3 October 1990 happened much faster than most people at the time could have dreamed when the process started. The question remained, however, as to how the two economies were to be made compatible. Official statistics placed the GDR among the world’s ten leading industrial nations. Looking behind the façade of the planned economy’s balance sheets, however, the situation was ruinous. Productivity was an estimated 50 per cent below that of the Federal Republic. At best, 25 per cent of GDR goods could compete with their western equivalents. Claus Köhler, one-time member of the executive board of the German Bundesbank, made an admission that would apply to most western observers: “We just didn’t have the least idea what things were like over there.”

Köhler was on the supervisory committee of the Treuhandanstalt, an institution that moved into the dissolved House of Ministries in the second half of 1990. The Treuhand had the task of picking over the leftovers of the GDR economy, saving what would be of use in the social market economy and liquidating anything that was likely to be crushed by

capitalist competition. Detlev Karsten Rohwedder, president of the Treuhand from August 1990 onwards, set the tone for this modernisation process, speaking of “quick privatisation, determined stabilisation and gentle closure.” Rohwedder, a Social Democrat quoted as saying that “people come before the letter of the law”, had worked as state secretary at the Economics Ministry in Bonn for almost a decade. He was by no means a cold authoritarian, but an energetic manager capable of thinking on a human scale. In his time as manager of the steel company Hoesch, he had successfully turned the firm around. This recommended him as a candidate for his new task – a formidable challenge which few would envy. The Treuhand had more than 8,500 state-owned enterprises on its books. After they were broken down, they numbered more than 12,000. Some four million jobs were affected. The Treuhand was also responsible for some land holdings and property, the trade sector and the assets of the GDR’s parties, civil and state organisations.

The Economic, Monetary and Social Union created in the summer of 1990 (the first step towards German unity), introduced the Deutsche Mark in East Germany and thereby destroyed any profit margin



Left: Treuhandanstalt President Detlev Rohwedder (centre) at a press conference in November 1990.

Right: Detlev Rohwedder in 1991, in conversation with Birgit Breuel, who would later succeed him in office.

the companies there still had. Swift action was needed to stop the situation getting even worse than was already to be feared. Around 500 state-owned enterprises had been privatised by the start of 1991. The social consequences in terms of job losses were still limited. Then, on 1 April 1991, a Red Army Faction terrorist shot Treuhand President Rohwedder, killing him. The group tried to justify this ludicrous act with the absurd accusation that Rohwedder was a white-collar criminal who would stop at nothing to achieve his goals. In memory of the murdered man's contribution to establishing democracy and the social market economy in the newly-acceded East, the then Treuhand building, which had been home to two dictatorships over half a century, has been called the Detlev Rohwedder Building since 1992.

Led by Rohwedder's successor Birgit Breuel, the Treuhand continued the reorganisation of the GDR's moribund economy, with mixed results. By the time the organisation was dissolved in 1994, around 8,000 enterprises had been privatised or handed over to local authorities. More than 3,700 had to be closed. This came as a hard blow to the people involved.

Almost two thirds of the posts were lost. Nevertheless, 1.5 million jobs survived the kill-or-cure treatment or were newly created. Was the glass half full or half empty, then? If we consider the mountain of debt of approximately 270 billion marks accumulated by the Treuhand, a public body supervised by the Federal Ministry of Finance, it becomes clear that all Germans have paid, and continue to pay, a high price for the GDR economy they inherited. At the same time, no secret should be made of the fact that huge losses were recorded during this economic feat, partially due to fraud. These losses can only be estimated, but may have reached 10 billion marks. Treuhandanstalt spokesman Wolf Schöde hit the nail on the head with his comment: "We learned while we made mistakes." He also explained why: "Never before had an entire state been reorganised like this."



The architecture of reunification

Following the period of occupancy by the Treuhandanstalt and the decision to use the complex as the Ministry of Finance, fundamental work was needed to restore the fabric of the building. At the same time, the facilities had to be brought up to date and renovation carried out in a manner that respected the site's listed status. Building surveys and discoveries made after work had started showed that many parts of the concrete construction were in poor condition. Thorough renovation work was needed on the structural frame, particularly in the south section. The stone façades were in a similarly precarious condition.

An initial suggestion to remove the outer stone cladding and plaster over all of the outside walls was rejected. Replacement stone was again to be brought in from Frankish quarries. Sections of wall that had been plastered as a stop-gap solution in GDR times now had their stone exterior restored. It was only in the southern courtyards that insulated façades were used instead, for reasons of economy. It was decided to open out the passageways at ground level, which had been bricked up. Now staff and visitors could experience the two courtyards and their landscaped gardens from Wilhelmstrasse. Inside the building, restoration work followed the recommendations of a comprehensive preservation report. The underlying principle was to conserve the building in

a state that would reflect the various phases of its history. Only modifications that had no historic value would be reversed.

When the fixtures were removed, the original interplay of spaces was revealed once more. In particular, the sequence of rooms followed when entering the building from the Court of Honour was reintroduced. The original, dramatic use of light was no longer required, so new ceilings were fitted, incorporating modern lighting. The skylights above the vestibule, which were filled in after the war, remained closed on grounds of cost.

It was decided that the Great Hall should be restored to its 1947 appearance. However, extensive work was required to fit modern ventilation equipment. Among other things, the ceiling had to be completely renovated and special heaters, which are very thin but 6.5 metres high, were placed discretely next to the windows. The stage, which dated from GDR times, was removed.

Much more comprehensive changes were made to the meeting hall at the Leipziger Strasse end of the building. Now called the Eurosaal (Euro Hall),

1930s burl wood panelling in the Euro Hall, now restored and seen alongside modern conference technology.

it is used for international conferences. Once several layers of wallpaper and paint had been removed, the original burl wood panelling emerged. Reworked and with missing sections replaced, this panelling once again adorns the room. A glass wall at the end of the room, behind which six booths for interpreters or technical equipment are located, along with a video wall, speak a modern architectural language. Column-shaped speakers assure good sound quality while blending in with the historic wall behind them.

In this room, too, the ceiling needed complete renovation, in the process of which it was equipped with modern lighting and video equipment. Each of the ceiling's coffers has a sheet of transparent glass set into it, thus echoing the pattern of the wall.

The corridors and stairwells are largely in keeping with their original appearance as planned by Ernst Sagebiel, with the exception of areas rebuilt after the war following a reduced design. Fire regulations, however, dictated that 350 doors had to be fitted to separate the building into different fire sections. The poor lighting was also in need of improvement. Vertically-mounted fluorescent tubes on the corridor walls and cross-shaped light fixtures built into the ceilings now provide better lighting.

The offices still have the original document safes, wooden cupboards and shelves built in to the wall to the corridor. Heaters and electrical installation ducts were fitted beneath the windows, and the windowsills widened to cover them, thus avoiding the need for drop ceilings.

This careful renovation allowed two characteristics of the Detlev Rohwedder Building to become clearly visible once again. The first was the excellent functionality of the building, independent of ideology, as developed by Sagebiel. The second was the successful removal of the monumental features, carried out by the Soviet architects shortly after the war.

The most recent modifications have continued along the same lines, adding innovative lighting and numerous works of modern art. The building is now imbued with a new spirit that befits its use as the German Federal Ministry of Finance.

The stairwells and banisters were renovated following Sagebiel's original plans.



In conversation with Hans-Michael Meyer-Sebastian

Hans-Michael Meyer-Sebastian, born in 1939, came to Berlin in 1989 as Deputy Head of the Permanent Representation of the Federal Republic of Germany in the GDR. He was head of the Federal Ministry of Finance's Berlin office in the Detlev Rohwedder Building for eight years, starting in 1991.

You came to the GDR in early summer in 1989.

What was your experience of the time before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall?

I experienced the political changes at first hand. We had 131 refugees at the office who needed food, drink and intellectual stimulation. They were mostly young, well-educated individuals. The most important event at that time, from my point of view, was when my then counterpart from the Soviet embassy, Igor Maximychev, informed me in October 1989 that the Red Army would not interfere with what was happening in the GDR.

What were your main tasks?

To start with, the most important job was to help prepare the first budget for reunited Germany, for the year 1991. In addition to this, I worked on a law dealing with assistance for inherited debt that applied to the property market in the new Länder (federal states), the recovery of any Deutsche marks fraudulently exchanged for East German marks, and settling import and export trades in transferable roubles. There was also the task of administering a redemption fund for

inherited liabilities, clarifying land-ownership issues and compensating for damage caused by NATO and Soviet troops.

Hundreds of staff worked for the Finance Ministry in the GDR. Were they transferred to the new ministry?

To start with, there were around 30 staff from former West Germany and 280 from the GDR Finance Ministry. Everyone hoped for continued employment. Of course, we did not keep staff members on if it was proved that they had worked for the secret police.

What were your early experiences at the Berlin office, in terms of the work and the people there?

Our work ran smoothly from the outset. The East German employees were particularly cooperative, loyal and hard-working. We were dependent on their support, for example, when it came to clearing transferable rouble trades and getting to the bottom of cases of malpractice and fraud related to these trades. The same was true of establishing the extent of the GDR's Western-currency assets and liabilities. Relationships based on trust developed very quickly between the staff. Part of the reason for this was that financial issues and the completion of the necessary financial transactions can be dealt with essentially free of ideology.



Hans-Michel Meyer-Sebastian, head of the Berlin branch of the Federal Ministry of Finance, which was housed in the Detlev Rohwedder Building, from 1991 to 1999.

At first, the plan was to knock the building down. What do you believe brought about the change in opinion?

I remember Ms Schwaetzer, who was Federal Minister for Spatial Planning, Building and Urban Affairs at the time, walking through the complex with her team and saying that the whole thing would be demolished. Later, as discussions about sites for the various ministries in Berlin got underway, Federal Minister of Economics Günter Rexrodt, who knew the building from his time at the Treuhandanstalt, said that he would take it if the Finance Ministry was not interested. I think that was the key point that ushered in a new way of thinking. Minister Waigel then also gave the site his strong support, because of the historical significance of Harro Schulze-Boysen's resistance group, who opposed the Nazis.

You operated in the complex while extensive renovations were being carried out. How did that work? Working conditions at the time were difficult. Looking back, they were almost irresponsible, in my

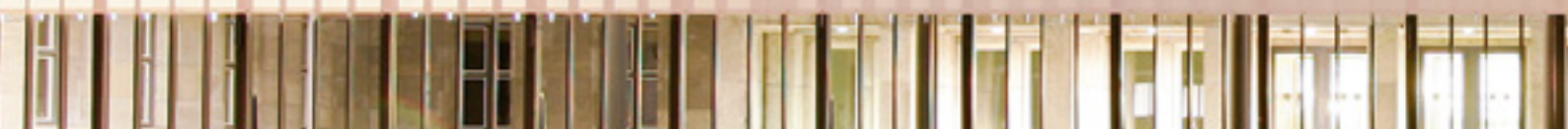
opinion. There was dust everywhere, there were no doors in the corridors and the protective plastic sheets that had been hung up by no means kept everything clean. We could have moved to the nearby Europahaus building for the duration. But it was located in former West Berlin, which meant the staff would have been entitled to the pay-scale for western Germany, almost 22 per cent more than they were getting. The ministry did not want to set a precedent.

What do you think of the building today?

I think it is a success. You can definitely feel the Bauhaus tradition coming through. The doors between adjoining offices help communication, which is another very positive aspect. I have to say, though, that most of the art on display is not exactly from the top drawer.



„Mein politisches Ideal ist das demokratische. Jeder soll als Per





son respektiert und keiner vergöttert sein.“ Albert Einstein www.einsteinjahr.de

1999 – 2019

The Federal Ministry of Finance



A living place today

What does fair financial and tax policy mean? What does the state actually spend taxpayers' money on? How can we shift Germany's mountain of debt? And what is wrong with working for cash in hand? The Federal Ministry of Finance openly asks these questions – and delivers answers too.

There is a great deal of hustle and bustle in the office complex on Wilhelmstrasse. Members of staff are chatting and laughing as they walk across the front courtyard. Two school classes from Leipzig, 50 girls and boys, surge into the foyer. They are one of the 300 visitor groups that come to have a closer look at the ministry from inside and out each year. The school group gathers in the visitor centre right next to the main entrance. They have taken a ride in the paternoster lifts, seen the Great Hall, the 350-metre-long corridors and the endless staircases. Are they just here for a spot of sightseeing? No, their motivation is far more serious.

In fact, they want to know why Germany is so indebted and how the debts are going to be reduced, especially since the need for cash in every field is supposedly growing all the time. The Head of the Public Enquiries Division patiently explains the federal budget, new borrowing, spending and revenue.

Her division is one of around 140 that are staffed by between four and 200 people, depending on the area of activity.

The Ministry of Finance's personnel of 1,970 in total, 70 percent of whom are civil servants, specialise in diverse fields. From core fiscal and economic affairs to the spirits monopoly, from customs and excise, to federal real estate, to European policy and in-house services.

The Federal Minister of Finance receives reports on the federal budget, overviews and graphs on borrowing, current economic data, drafts of the annual tax act, queries and suggestions for meetings he should attend. One employee once calculated that the minister only has around five minutes to digest each complicated proposal he receives and reach a decision. This means every word has got to be right. A 'normal' working day is a rare thing for the minister.

Ultimate responsibility for the German government's budgetary and fiscal policy lies with the Federal Minister of Finance. The minister is accountable to the Bundestag and Bundesrat, the parliament and legislative chamber representing Germany's 16 federal states, for all state revenue and spending as well as assets and debts. He is also bound by the Basic Law, Germany's constitution, which, for example, states that the finance minister must approve expenditures in excess of budgetary appropriations or for purposes not set out in the budget, and that the finance minister may only grant such approval in the event of an unforeseen and unavoidable necessity.

Till Brönner and cellists of the Berlin Philharmonic.

This right of veto in government decisions affecting public finances does not always make finance ministers popular among ministerial colleagues.

One of the minister's tasks is therefore all the more enjoyable as a result: issuing special postage stamps. Not many people are aware that in addition to the Post Office, the Federal Ministry of Finance is also responsible for stamps and that this serves a good cause too. To date, more than 500 million euros has flowed into social projects from the sale of charity stamps alone since the first one was issued in 1949.

Towards 3 o'clock in the afternoon, the ministry's internal postal staff make their last round with the day's correspondence. The post is delivered four times a day, every two hours. What the postal staff see remains a mystery to most visitors. Behind the office doors lie connecting corridors between the individual offices that are not visible to regular

visitors. However, that does not imply that there is something closed and hidden in the ministry. Quite the opposite, there is a new openness and the wind of change is blowing through the hallways – not last as a result of the staff age structure. More than half the employees are under 45.

The Finance Ministry is transparent, friendly and responsive to public needs. The nine colleagues in the Public Enquiries Division receive up to 3,000 queries from the general public each month and endeavour to reply as quickly as possible. Straightforward letters and e-mails are answered in a few days, while more complex matters can require up to four weeks.

The schoolchildren from Leipzig got the answers they wanted and there is one thing they definitely learned: reducing the level of government debt, which is currently almost 2 trillion euros, is the most important objective, both now and in the future.

A press conference in the Matthias Erzberger Hall.





The Latvian choir “Balta” at an event in the “Sound of Europe” series.

This is because they, and future generations to come, will ultimately have to bear the burden of the interest payments and these debts of the past. A website on the federal budget, www.bundeshaushalt.de, provides clear and detailed information (in German) about the budget and financial planning of the federal government.

The Federal Ministry of Finance is not just responsible for the budgetary policy of the federal government. In addition, the ministry plays a key role in European fiscal policy, in which stabilisation of the euro is the most important goal. This became especially clear during the financial crisis.

What is the European rescue fund and who can request assistance? Do we have to foot the bill for other countries? What requirements do countries have to fulfil before they can introduce the euro as a currency? Who sets the requirements? – The fiscal policies of the European Union are a complex topic. For many citizens, they are difficult to understand.

Many countries seem far away. The Finance Ministry has invited some to the Detlev Rohwedder Building. In the event series “The Sound of Europe”, outstanding musicians from eurozone countries perform at the Finance Ministry. Visual artists create a piece of art during the evening event and visitors can look over their shoulders as they work.

Music, art and above all the people who create them make the cultural diversity of Europe tangible at these events. Everyone who wishes is welcome to attend and to experience a journey through Europe.

Experiencing and creating history

Heinz Jakob “Coco” Schumann seems to become one with his guitar. The music gives wings to the 87-year-old musician. He transports you back to the era of swing music, in a building built by the Nazis, who demonised the style.

Coco Schumann discovered jazz and swing in the 1930s. Schumann, whose mother was Jewish, played in various bars and dance clubs in Berlin at a time when both playing that kind of music and performing as a person of Jewish descent were forbidden. In 1943, he was arrested and taken to the Theresienstadt concentration camp. There, he played drums with the “Ghetto Swingers”. On 4 March 2011, he stands on the stage with the Coco Schumann Quartet in the Great Hall of the former Reich Aviation Ministry, together with Till Brönner (see page 60).

“Notes of caution: prohibited entertainment 1933 to 1945” is the title of the first event in the three-part series “Musik.Zeit.Geschehen” (Music.Time.Events). The Federal Minister of Finance is hosting an evening of lectures, art and music. At first, this might seem like an unconventional way to engage with the history of the building, and yet it is effective. Music and art serve to narrate history.

The second event of the series tells stories about life and culture behind the Berlin Wall. The opening of the event on the evening of 15 February 2012 is highly emotional. “From the ruins risen newly, To the future turned, we stand ... Germany, our

fatherland.” – the national anthem of former East Germany is sung by the RIAS chamber choir, addressing German history in a very personal way. The song is moving for some, painful for others.

Free jazz and the works of important composers from the GDR era are the topics for the evening’s lectures and musical performances. The whole building becomes a stage. A work composed by Helmut Zapf especially for the evening is sung by RIAS chamber choir members from one of the paternoster lifts. The song resonates differently on each floor of the building and changes from moment to moment, depending on which of the two lift compartments are coming together.

The finance minister himself is surprised when, on the afternoon of 17 June 2012, students from the Friedrich Ebert secondary school make music with coins on the minister’s reception desk.

This sound performance forms a part of the concluding event of the “Musik.Zeit.Geschehen” series. Lectures, concerts, performances and discussion panels focus on the topic of digitisation in relation to culture and finance. Visitors are able to wander through the rooms, corridors and courtyards of the building and through the canteen, ending up in the garden of the Detlev Rohwedder Building.

The musical high point is provided by top-class artists like the 12 cellists from the Berlin Philharmonic and Trombone Unit Hannover. The day has a festive quality that offers space for interaction and dialogue. It is a brilliant conclusion to a musical journey through Germany's history.

Square of the Uprising of 1953

The date 17 June is closely connected to the Detlev Rohwedder Building and to German history.

On 16 June 1953, around 10,000 demonstrators gathered on the square in front of the House of Ministries and demanded free elections and the reduction of work quotas that had been recently increased.

On 17 June 1953, the uprising was violently put down.

In honour of the demonstrators and victims of the uprising, the square at the intersection of Leipziger Strasse and Wilhelmstrasse is renamed "Square of the Uprising of 1953" – exactly 60 years later. Klaus Gronau, who stood on the spot years before as a 16-year-old, is visibly moved as he unveils the street sign for the square on 16 June 2013.

The renaming occurs as the result of the concerted efforts of the Finance Ministry with support from survivors' organisations, institutions that deal with recent German history and Berlin authorities. With this initiative, the Federal Ministry of Finance underscored its ongoing commitment to addressing the historical events that took place outside and inside the Detlev Rohwedder Building.

Better late than never – a memorial for Matthias Erzberger

The renaming of the former Great Hall, now the Matthias Erzberger Hall, also shows how much the ministry cares about addressing its own history, belated honours are bestowed on the former Reich Finance Minister Matthias Erzberger.

During Erzberger's short term of office as minister during the Weimar Republic, from June 1919 to March 1920, he initiated important financial reforms that characterise Germany's financial system up until today. As state secretary and head of the German Armistice Commission, he signed the armistice agreement of Compiègne in 1918 and supported the Treaty of Versailles. In the end, his commitment to peace cost him his life. On 26 August 1921, he was murdered by former officers of the Freikorps, a right-wing paramilitary organisation. The largest hall in the Detlev Rohwedder Building was renamed the Matthias Erzberger Hall on 26 August 2011.

History is not just in the past, it also affects the present. The Federal Ministry of Finance demonstrates how history can be interpreted and made tangible in the variety of ways it deals with the history of the Detlev Rohwedder Building – independent of political considerations.



How do you feel about working in this building?

“The Detlev Rohwedder Building has been my place of work for the last 28 years. Right at the beginning of my time here, I was often asked about my thoughts on working in a building with a past like this one. My answer was, and still is, that it is not the building but rather the people who work in the building who are taking responsibility for the country and shaping it with their convictions. Nonetheless, it is absolutely necessary to be aware of the history of the building and to address it explicitly.”
[State Secretary Werner Gatzer](#)

“To be honest, most days when I go to work, I am so preoccupied with the here-and-now that I’m not very aware of my workplace as a historically important location. However, an experience in the building with my five-year-old twins showed me quite plainly how important and valuable it is to preserve historical places in order to pass history down to the next generation.

At this year’s Open Day, my children discovered the exhibition and installation about the Holzapfel family’s escape over the Berlin Wall from the ministry building. They wanted to know all about it. So I tried to explain it to them in as child-friendly a way as possible. I never thought that they would comprehend it the way they did. Since that day, they now tell our friends and family who don’t live in Berlin about the escape story. ‘Once there was a wall in Berlin. Did you know? People were very sad about it. But one family managed to make it over the wall. They went out a window in Mum’s office and slid on a cable over the wall. But people weren’t really happy until the wall was gone, though. Some grown-ups even cried.’

That’s the story my children tell about the Berlin Wall – and it’s linked closely to the Detlev Rohwedder Building.”
[Astrid Westhoff](#)

“Today it’s commonplace for me to enter the Detlev Rohwedder Building from Wilhelmstrasse and the Court of Honour, from Niederkirchner Strasse, or from Leipziger Strasse, depending on which direction I’m coming from.

This wasn’t always possible. I’m not often consciously aware of the fact that there are no borders here any more and that things here used to be different. When I came to this building for the first time, it was from Leipziger Strasse. I was six years old. I held my father’s hand. I was barely one metre tall, and the handles on the doors were so high that I could barely reach them, even if I jumped. The halls were dark, dimly lit, long and narrow – I wasn’t able to fathom where they ended. It was an imposing, unsettling, almost scary atmosphere.

Today, when I think about the normal everyday routine in the administration, it’s clear that things haven’t changed that much. The correct and upright German bureaucracy has survived over the centuries – independent of any location – just like this building. And both defy structural changes: Today when I walk through the long halls and stairwells of the building, which are brightly lit nowadays, I don’t feel unease any more. I don’t feel any sorrow. In fact, the opposite is true. I’m happy and even proud of the opportunities I’ve been given to experience and help to shape our changing times in this building.”

[Claudia Oehm](#)

“The Detlev Rohwedder Building shows how ambivalent structures can be. Built under one dictatorship and used by another for two decades, now the building serves a democratic country that observes the rule of law. All of the people who work here contribute to keeping the country this way. The building isn’t intrinsically ‘bad’, but it’s also not ‘good’. It needs to be filled with positive work.”

[H.C. Fraenkel](#)

“I moved into my first office in mid-April 1991. At that time, the building was still called the House of Ministries. Birgit Breuel had just taken office following the murder of the Treuhand president Detlev Karsten Rohwedder.

The office looked like it had been frozen in time at the end of the GDR. Empty schnapps bottles and glasses still stood on the desk, probably leftovers from a farewell toast. Kind of spooky. What could have been running through the heads of the people who used to work in my office?

Frenetic construction work was underway on every floor. The Treuhand was spreading out through the building little by little, conducting major renovations all around me ... everything was of the best quality ... I remember how stunned I was when I saw workers just tossing all of the GDR office furniture in great arcs out of the windows. Other people could certainly have made use of it. I was able to rescue a few items. They’re now on display in what is now the German Museum of Technology.”

[Birgit Schöneberg](#)

“During the government’s move in 1999, I transferred from Bonn to Berlin, and moved into my assigned office. At that point, the office was still under construction, a third phase of construction was underway. It was planned that the office would be the future flexitime office for the Federal Ministry of Finance, an important service centre for the building. Historically speaking, the mid-2000 is noteworthy because the plans were finally implemented, and the flexitime office began serving the building’s employees by recording and administrating electronically logged time clock data. Today, the flexitime office of the ministry has become firmly established and is a well-known and important place – and not just because sensitive data is administered here.”

[Karsten Schlichte](#)

“Both of us were born in 1949, we first became acquainted at the Federal Ministry of Finance. It was the fall of the Berlin Wall that brought us together professionally in the Public Enquiries Division.

I was born in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. Hartmut was born in West Berlin. Today, the two of us lead building tours – tours through time – and we see it as our duty to keep the history of the building from being forgotten.”

Harmut Wohlfarth: “I remember the construction of the Berlin Wall very clearly, just as I remember its fall. The 13th of August [the day work began on the Berlin Wall] was in the middle of the holidays and I was travelling with my father. We were afraid we wouldn’t be able to return home because we didn’t know if through-traffic to West Berlin was also suspended. I’ll never forget an escape that I witnessed on Bernauer Strasse.”

Uwe Pakull: “On building tours, I’m often asked whether this building is a ‘tainted place’ and why the finance minister uses it. – My answer is that we live in an era of democracy and we have to fulfil this responsibility: to be aware of history and look positively towards the future.”

[Uwe Pakull and Hartmut Wohlfarth](#)

“For me, the Detlev Rohwedder Building symbolises the path to a united Europe. This place was the epicentre for an earthquake that shook Europe – brought about by the work of the Reich Aviation Ministry. After the Second World War, the building symbolised the division of Europe as the ‘House of Ministries’. Today, as the home of the Federal Ministry of Finance, which had lead responsibility for the introduction of the European monetary union, the Detlev Rohwedder Building represents a united Europe.”

[Oliver Kannenberg](#)

“My office looks out on Niederkirchner Strasse, with a view of what is left of the Berlin Wall. Every time I look out the window, I feel happy all over again that the Wall fell peacefully and without bloodshed because of the dedication, bravery and persistence of courageous citizens of the GDR, and that Germany has been reunited now for 25 years. Unfortunately I get the feeling every now and again that the wall still exists inside some people’s heads. My wish is that these last walls would finally fall so that the reunification can truly be complete.”

[Petra Knebel](#)

A stroll along Wilhelmstrasse

In the spring sunshine, this grey colossus at the heart of Berlin loses a little of its austere appearance. Tourists glance at the countless windows behind the high fence, walk around the corner and find themselves on the narrow side of the building, which, incidentally, is located on one of the noisiest streets in the city. Yet even from this angle, the true dimensions of this building remain concealed.

The former Reich Aviation Ministry stands like a vast fortification in the heart of Berlin's historical government district. Casement windows, floor upon floor, five and seven storeys high. Shell limestone on the outside – the entire construction put together in just 18 months. Workers numbering 1,000 every shift, a symbol to showcase 'new' Berlin for the Olympic Games in 1936. This was the first Nazi government building produced as part of the war

plans. A masterpiece of construction, whatever you think about the architecture. Stage-managed megalomania, created to last a thousand years, and not Speer but Sagebiel as architect, more modern, while still seeking similar impact.

The anti-aircraft batteries on the roof have long since been banished. The air-raid shelter on Leipziger Strasse has been ripped out too. But the grid set into the flagstones used for orientation in mass parades is still visible in the Court of Honour on Wilhelmstrasse. Overhead is the balcony in front of the Great Hall, the windows of which rise several floors upwards. The straight construction framing the windows conveys pathos and severity. From high above, Göring stood in greeting as Hitler drove past in the official state car to be celebrated by the crowds following the annexation of Austria.

Rear view of the Detlev Rohwedder Building with remnants of the Berlin Wall in the foreground.





Federal Ministry of Finance today, seen from the corner of Wilhelmstrasse and Leipziger Strasse.

The two stone pillars in the iron fence separating the Court of Honour from the street contain monitors resembling modified cash machines. At the push of a button, passers-by can watch interviews with ministry staff who are asked their thoughts on what counts most: money, love, death, or freedom. This is part of an art project about people who work here and an attempt to open up the complex's enclosed structure. This ministry, the implication goes, is accessible even from outside its walls and is somehow human. But the button is rarely pressed. The building is evidently still not inviting.

Passers-by are confronted with a construction that makes them appear very small. Are they looking modern democracy in the face or is the shadow of the past darkening their gaze? Do viewers feel a

sense of affinity, proud in the knowledge that something proper can be salvaged from a dictatorship? Or do they respond with deep-seated scepticism because this building exemplifies the finite nature of political systems like almost no other? Or does a certain indifference set in? Without question, the sight of the Detlev Rohwedder Building does not make us better democrats. The fact, however, that we are no longer forced to avert our gaze is perhaps a good omen.

A similar sense of helplessness takes hold when reading the doctrinal title of the giant painting by Max Linger, located to the left of today's staff entrance, which translates as "The importance of peace for the cultural development of humanity, and the necessity of struggle to achieve this goal".

Fine, says the viewer, the language of GDR functionaries. And then the viewer looks again: Labourers and intelligentsia are depicted smiling at one another, shaking hands – a state in perfect harmony. That this was far from true is demonstrated, as a contrast to this rose-tinted portrayal of socialism, by a glass-covered photo of the same proportions, set into the ground just a few metres away. This later work shows people with pixelated faces, giving each other courage by linking arms. Their faces express hope, expectation and fear too. The green-blue picture depicts workers who participated in the uprising on 17 June 1953 and who had gathered on this corner.

A hundred metres away, on the left-hand side of Wilhelmstrasse, is “Die Welt” daily newspaper’s hot air balloon. In front of this are two East German Trabant cars, one striped like a tiger, the other with a leopard skin design, advertising a car rental company. The Berlin Wall Trail starts around the corner. The remaining strips of the inner wall demonstrate that the southern wing of the Ministry of Finance stood in no-man’s land during the GDR era.

What’s left of the Wall is a crumbled monument, behind which the Topography of Terror exhibition makes abruptly clear what this area was. The chill of the past seems to run down the former Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse, a place that, through the Gestapo head-

quarters, a Gestapo prison, and the Reich Security Main Office, served as the site for the most brutal of the Third Reich’s power bases. The echo of a time that one does not like to recall. We can repaint and remodel, swap systems and people, take comfort in the knowledge that evil is consigned to the past – and yet it still catches up with us.

There are two courtyards at the ministry that can be viewed from the outside. Here, the severe stone pattern is broken up by tulip beds creating a contrast of colour. The courtyard to the right of the main entrance is the site of a modern sculpture with steel tubes reaching out like arms, seemingly in constant danger of becoming entangled. A symbol for the history of the building that can and should cause us to stop and think? And then move onwards, while never forgetting the past.



One of the inner courtyards of the Detlev Rohwedder Building.

Chronicle of the Detlev Rohwedder Building

1933

Hermann Göring is appointed Reich Commissioner for Aviation on 2 February. On 27 April he becomes head of the newly-established Reich Aviation Ministry.

1934

December: Architect Ernst Sagebiel is contracted to construct a central office complex on the site of the Prussian war and transport ministries.

1935

February: Building work starts on the new Reich Aviation Ministry. The first 1,000 offices are ready for use on 12 October.

1936

The building is completed. It now includes reception rooms, 1,000 more offices and an air-raid shelter on the corner of Wilhelmstrasse and Leipziger Strasse.

1938

Göring calls an inter-ministerial conference on 12 November in what is now the ministry's Euro Hall to discuss the further persecution of the Jews following the Night of the Broken Glass.

1941

A relief of marching soldiers by Arno Waldschmidt is installed in the colonnade at the north entrance.

Luftwaffe officer Harro Schulze-Boysen and other members of his resistance group (including Arvid Harnack and Hans and Hilde Coppi) try to warn the Russian intelligence service about Hitler's plans to attack the Soviet Union.

1942

The Gestapo find out about the group led by Harro Schulze-Boysen and Arvid Harnack. Harro and Libertas Schulze-Boysen, Arvid Harnack and other group members are executed at Berlin's Plötzensee prison.

1945

The war comes to an end. While most of Berlin's water supply has been destroyed, the Reich Aviation Ministry has a well that is in working order.

In July, Soviet Military Administration order no. 17 determines that Berlin is to be the seat of Germany's new central administrative bodies and that the former Reich Aviation Ministry shall be renovated.

In September, the Soviet Military Administration moves into the partially renovated building, together with the administrative bodies responsible for agriculture, trade, utilities, industry, fuels, the postal service and transport.

1947

The German Economic Commission is established on 14 June and moves into the former Reich Aviation Ministry building.

1949

The GDR is founded on 7 October in the Great Hall.

Wilhelm Pieck is elected President of the GDR on 11 October in the Great Hall. He is the first and only person to hold this office. The Reich Aviation Ministry complex becomes the "House of Ministries".



Left: As part of the topping-out ceremony on 12 October 1935, a crown of foliage is raised in the courtyard of the Reich Aviation Ministry.
 Right: Walter Ulbricht announces that there are no plans to build a wall at a press conference on 15 June 1963.

The GDR Council of Ministers moves into the Abgeordnetenhaus, the lower house of the former Prussian parliament, a building integrated into the Reich Aviation Ministry complex.

1951

Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse is renamed Niederkirchnerstrasse.

All Nazi symbols inside and outside the building are removed during the renovation work, including the relief of marching soldiers by Arno Waldschmidt.

1953

The gap left by the relief of marching soldiers in the colonnade at the northern entrance is filled with a mural by Max Linger entitled “The importance of peace for the cultural development of humanity, and the necessity of struggle to achieve this goal”. The mural is unveiled on 3 January, Wilhelm Pieck’s birthday.

On 16 June, around 10,000 protesters gather to demonstrate on the corner of Leipziger Strasse and Wilhelmstrasse. The crowd demands the resignation of the government and free elections.

On 17 June, there are bloody clashes between the state police and demonstrators on Leipziger Strasse. The protests are crushed.

1961

At an international press conference on 15 June, Walter Ulbricht, chairman of the Council of State

of the GDR, announces: “No-one has any intention of building a wall.”

On 13 August the construction of the Berlin Wall begins. It runs right next to the House of Ministries. The building is integrated into the inner dividing wall.

The State Planning Commission moves into the Niederkirchnerstrasse end of the building, which will remain its headquarters until 1989.

1965

In the night of 28 June, Heinz Holzapfel, his wife and their nine-year-old son escape to West Berlin via the roof of the complex.

1972

Egon Bahr, West German Federal Minister without portfolio, and State Secretary Michael Kohl of the GDR sign the treaty concerning the basis of relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic on 21 December. The treaty governs relations between the two Germans. It includes provisions that set up permanent representations.

1990

Former State Secretary at the Federal Economics Ministry, Detlev Karsten Rohwedder, is appointed head of the Treuhandanstalt by the Council of Ministers of the GDR on 3 July.



Treuhandanstalt President Detlev Rohwedder at a press conference.

On 3 October, the five new Bundesländer join the Federal Republic, reuniting Germany after more than 40 years.

Alongside the Treuhandanstalt, the building is used by a number of other government bodies from November onwards. These include the Berlin offices of the Federal Court of Audit and the Federal Ministry of Finance, as well as the Berlin Regional Finance Office and IT centre.

1991

Detlev Karsten Rohwedder is murdered in his Düsseldorf home on 1 April. The Red Army Faction claims responsibility for the attack.

On 20 June, the Bundestag votes that Berlin should become Germany's capital. As part of the debate, the future of buildings dating back to Berlin's time as the Third Reich's capital is discussed.

1992

The former House of Ministries is renamed the Detlev Rohwedder Building.

1993

The joint committee representing the Federation and Berlin decides to demolish the complex and construct a new Economics Ministry building on the site. There are protests against this decision and demands are made for a conscious approach to the past.

1994

On 1 June, the decision is made not to demolish the Detlev Rohwedder Building. Instead it is to be renovated to serve as the headquarters of the Federal Ministry of Finance.

1996

The renovation process begins. The different historical 'layers' will largely be preserved and combined with modern elements. The resulting office complex must meet the latest technical requirements and yet still reflect all of the periods in the building's history.

1999

The Federal Ministry of Finance transfers from Bonn to Berlin. Finance Minister Hans Eichel moves into his office in the Detlev Rohwedder Building on 16 August.

2000

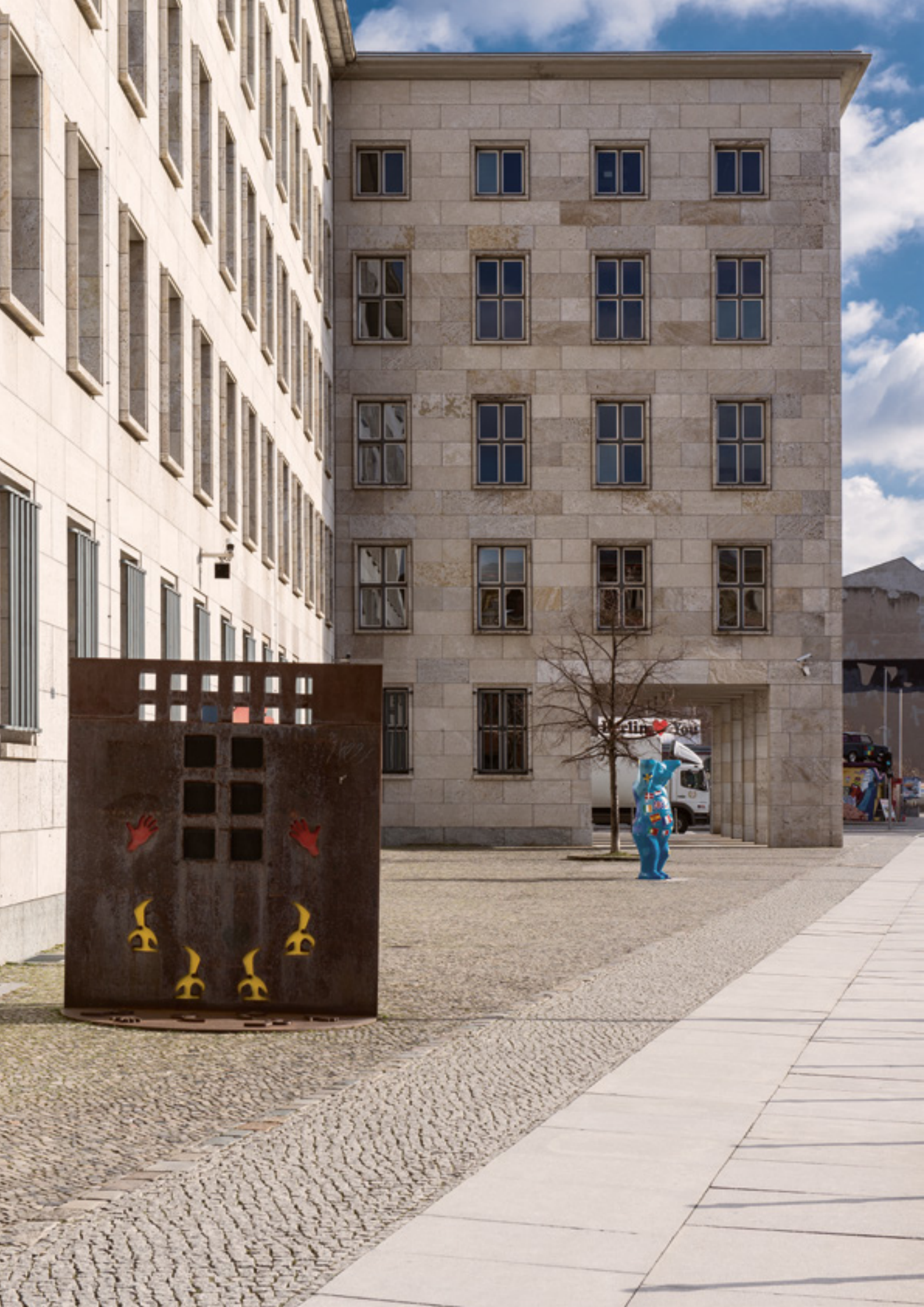
The Bundesrat moves into the former Prussian Herrenhaus at the northern end of the complex in Leipziger Strasse.

2011

On 26 August, the Great Hall is renamed the Matthias Erzberger Hall.

2013

On 16 June, the square at the intersection of Leipziger Strasse and Wilhelmstrasse is named "Square of the Uprising of 1953".



Further reading

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Dr Peter Zolling, born in Berlin in 1955, holds a doctorate in history. He was a radio and television journalist before moving on to be editor in charge of contemporary history for Germany's SPIEGEL news magazine. He now works as an author and journalist in Hamburg. Books: "Deutsche Geschichte von 1871 bis zur Gegenwart. Wie Deutschland wurde, was es ist." Munich, 2005. "Das Grundgesetz. Unsere Verfassung – Wie sie entstand und was sie ist." Munich, 2009. Roland Ernst contributed to the texts overseen by Peter Zolling for this publication.

Contributions to this work: "Inception", "The nerve centre of power", "Courage to resist: the Rote Kapelle", "The changing face of a colossus", "The government clashes with the people", "Isolation and separation", "New paths and a dead-end", "The euphoria of unity", "A tainted place" and "The Treuhandanstalt"

Prof Dr Falk Jaeger, born in 1950 in Ottweiler, studied architecture and art history in Braunschweig, Stuttgart and Tübingen. He subsequently lectured in architectural theory and criticism at Dresden's Technische Universität and now works as an author, architecture critic and architectural historian in Berlin. His work has been published in Germany's "FAZ" and "Tagesspiegel" newspapers and elsewhere. He has made numerous contributions to exhibitions, books and encyclopaedias on the subject of contemporary architecture and the history of architecture.

Contributions to this work: "Architecture under the Nazis", "Architecture after the war – a building is transformed" and "The architecture of reunification"

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