The Holocaust in Czechoslovakia

Czechoslovakia was founded in 1918 after the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian state at the end of World War I. Despite its multinational population and tense relations with its neighbors, all of whom coveted its territory, Czechoslovakia remained a functioning parliamentary democracy until the Munich crisis of 1938. At the time, over 300,000 Jews lived in Czechoslovakia. They enjoyed the same rights as the non-Jewish Czech citizens.

After the Nazi seizure of power in 1933, Germany demanded the "return" of the ethnic German population of Czechoslovakia to the German Reich. In 1938, Hitler threatened to unleash a European war unless the Sudetenland, a border area of Czechoslovakia containing a majority ethnic German population, was ceded to Germany. In September 1938, the leaders of Britain, France, and Italy agreed to the German annexation of the Sudetenland in exchange for a pledge of peace from Hitler. In March 1939, however, Nazi Germany invaded and occupied the Czech provinces of Bohemia and Moravia, in violation of the previous agreement. The German authorities refashioned the two provinces as a German protectorate.

Jews there suffered the same fate as Jews in other German-occupied countries. They were banned from many professions and were excluded from economic, cultural and political life. They were also banished from public spaces, such as restaurants, cinemas and swimming pools. Their goods were stolen and Jewish-owned businesses were destroyed or taken over by non-Jews. In September of 1941, Jews were forced to wear the yellow star. In November 1941, the Germans ordered the creation of a camp-ghetto at Theresienstadt, 60 km north of Prague. Between 1941 and late 1944, 73,603 Jews from the Protectorate were deported there. Conditions there were very harsh. Of nearly 141,184 Jews to reside in Theresienstadt, the Germans deported 88,202 to the east, where most of them were killed. 33,456 died in Theresienstadt itself. 2,418 either escaped or were released by the Germans in 1945. Soviet troops liberated the camp-ghetto on May 9, 1945.